

# **AUSTRALIAN SLOVENIANS**

Thirty nine stories, from laborers, miners, builders, corers,  
teachers, business people, artists, and writers...

Compiled, written, and edited by

**Cilka Žagar**

# Australian Slovenians

3 *About the storytellers*

5 *Slovenia*

7 *Cilka Zagar's historical perspective*

10 *Paradise lost*

11 *Contributors to the book Slovenians in Australia*

20 *Joze Preseren*

26 *Barbara Susa*

29 *Jozica Marn-Gerden*

42 *Cvetko Falez*

95 *Josefine (Josie Fini) Bresnik*

98 *Frank (Franci) Bresnik*

112 *Joze Zagar*

130 *Cilka Zagar*

160 *Marko Zagar*

170 *Marjan Zagar*

179 *Nasha Zagar*

185 *Eliza Zagar*

186 *Albin Porsek*

193 *Karl Knap*

204 *Franciska Knap*

209 *Dominik Simoncic*

214 *Vladimir Strehar*

223 *Tone Svigelj*  
242 *Lidijana Svigelj*  
245 *Helena Leber*  
247 *Stanka Gregoric*  
251 *Anita Bertoncelj*  
270 *Vika Gajsek-Veda*  
271 *Miriam Klemen*  
280 *Bert Pribac*  
296 *Stefan Hribar*  
312 *Ivan Cimerman*  
323 *Mirko Cuderman*  
332 *Romana Favier Zorzut*  
344 *Stephanie Jakovec*  
353 *Jaka Chuk*  
363 *Emilija Dovgan-Debevec*  
367 *Josef Zohar*  
374 *Marjan Lauko*  
383 *Franc Visocnik*  
386 *John Bozic*  
391 *Andrej Globocnik*  
405 *Janez Gornik*

*Cilka Zagar as the writer/editor of this book is not responsible for the opinions expressed by the story tellers.*

*I wish to thank Jozica Gerden for her generous help, advice and support during the compiling of this book. I am also grateful to all the storytellers for their cooperation.*

*I thank Marko Zagar for technical assistance. I thank Marjan and Kathy Zagar for cover pictures.*

*Cilka Zagar*

## ***About The Story Tellers***

Thirty nine story tellers in this book, from labourers, miners, builders, carers, teachers, business people, artists, and writers, describe events from their individual perspectives. Each story adds to the mosaic that became a picture of who we are as Australian Slovenians.

Most story-tellers were marked by the events of WWII and our childhood experiences define us. Most of us have also been subjects of post war communist indoctrination. We have a saying; “What little Johnny learns big John believes.”

On our arrival to Australia in our twenties and thirties we were pushed to the bottom rung of Australian society ladder so we had to walk and talk fast to get ourselves to the top of the ladder. We had sibling rivalries, peer competitions and leadership battles as we fought for the recognition of our talents and skills. The relentless competitiveness sometimes made us obsessed with achievement and wealth; we wanted to impress the people that did not like us enough; we also wanted to prove that we were better than those we didn’t like. Sometimes we did more, to prove what we were capable of, than we did to satisfy our own needs.

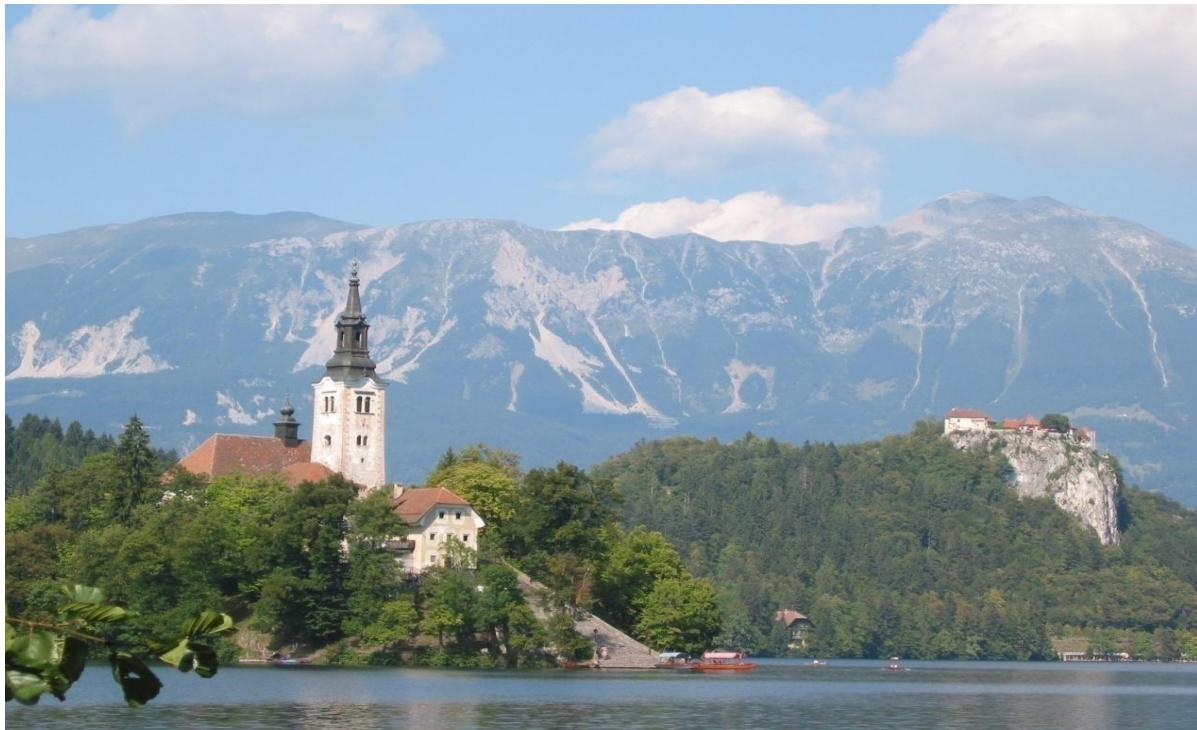
Our leaders often polarised us with constant lobbying for their noble causes but most of us were satisfied with simple comforts and good company. Being neutral though was often a lonely existence. Despite our differences we searched for each other so we could remember together our growing up in our homeland Slovenia.

The story tellers may not agree with each other but by reading these stories we may understand each other better. I certainly better understand how our diverse attitudes and views were formed. Sometimes we focused on each other’s flaws so much that we did not see how really wonderful we all are. After listening to their tales I liked the story tellers better. I hope you will too. Knowing one better really means liking one better. We are as different as the colours of the rainbow and as a rainbow wonderful in our diversity.

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, who never to himself has said: This is my own, my native land! Whose heart has never within him burned as home his footsteps he hath turned from wandering on a foreign strand.*

*Sir Walter Scott*

## ***Slovenia***



Slovenia, a Central European country, with the capital Ljubljana, is half the size of Tasmania and has a population of two million; it borders on Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. Slovenian territory decreased in size through the centuries from 70 000 square kilometres to 20 000. After both world wars the Western countries also chopped and annexed portions of Slovenia in order to stop the spread of communism. Many Slovenians now live in Austria and Italy as ethnic minorities.

The highest mountain, Triglav (2863m), is a part of the Julian Alps. Many rivers flow from the mountains down through the forests into the fertile valleys. The Slovenian Adriatic coast has a mild Mediterranean climate and wonderful beaches for holidaymakers. Tourism is a major source of income.

Slovenia is one of the oldest yet one of the youngest countries in Europe. The original Central European settlers, Veneti or Wendi, were the ancestors of Slovenians.

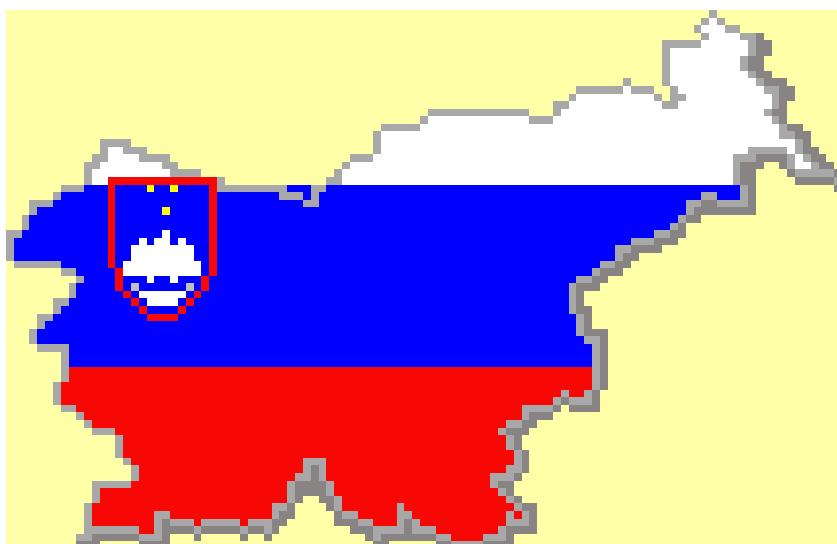
Carantania was Slovenian first independent state in the eighth century. Later Slovenian territory became a part of Germanic political formations. In 1918, Austrian-

Hungarian Empire disintegrated, and Slovenia became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatians and Slovenians which was renamed Yugoslavia in 1929. Slovenians were governed by foreign powers through centuries but they never surrendered their dream of independence which became realised in 1991; Slovenia joined the EU in 2004 and accepted the Euro currency from 1 January 2007. Slovenians are predominantly Roman Catholics. Education is considered very important and illiteracy is almost unknown. They write in Latin script and have one of the highest rates per capita of book sales. The Brižinski records written in Slovenian are Europe's oldest functional document in a still living language.

Slovenians can be found on every continent. It has been reported that about one quarter of Slovenians live outside Slovenian borders. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, most Slovenians immigrated to Americas. After WWII, many fled from the Communist regime and some started a new life in Australia, where about 30,000 Slovenians live in 2007.

Australian politician Al Grassby said about Slovenia in 1985: Slovenians over 1000 years of history were able to distinguish between language, culture and heritage and common citizenship. Like

the majestic Triglav  
Mountain Slovenian  
people have seen many  
empires come and go  
from Rome, Austria,  
Hungary and Third Reich  
but they preserved their  
heritage which shines as  
brightly today as the  
moon reflected in what I  
regard as a pearl of  
Europe, Bled. *Cilka Zagar*



## Cilka Zagar's Historical Perspective

Slovenians have always been the pawns in the struggle for domination by superpowers. Our own struggle was of little consequence. For centuries we were forced into submission and perhaps in the process we, as a people, lost some self-confidence.

Slovenian historian Bucar recently said: 'Slovenians have created their own history but it is other peoples who wrote about it; those for whom the very existence of Slovenia and Slovenians was an impediment to achievement of their imperial aims.'

Although Slovenia was always coveted by its neighbours; the rest of the world barely knows that we exist; let alone care about our fate.

Slovenians resisted Germanic oppression for centuries but that was also the time of perhaps unwilling but natural, mutual assimilation of Slovenian and Germanic cultures.

After WWI Slovenian leaders, happy to get rid of Germanic yoke, decided to join in the kingdom of Slovenians, Serbs and Croatians; which was later renamed Yugoslavia.

Many Slovenians regretted this decision; many felt that Yugoslavs dominated and oppressed Slovenians even more than Austrians did. The Germanic system felt more familiar to them than Yugoslav; it also seemed more progressive; older people talked about good old times under Franc Joseph and Maria Theresa.

It is interesting that even most Slovenians from Primorska region, who always rebelled against Italian oppression, were disappointed when they became a part of communist Yugoslavia.

Southern Yugoslav nations spent centuries under Turks and they also assimilated their culture with Turks. The only thing Slovenians and other Yugoslavs have in common is their Slavic origin.

After the WWI people told horror stories of Russian revolution. They heard of murders and starvation; the church also warned against Godless communism.

Hitler was reported as saying: The efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of the people and always concentrating it on the common enemy.

Slovenians like many other small nations had no leader that would unite them and focus their attention against the common enemy.

I am convinced that all Slovenians wished only the best for Slovenia. Although all Slovenians resisted the invader, they allowed themselves to be fractured by foreign

political, ideological, economic and regional interests. Their common enemy also succeeded in creating mutual hatred among these groups of Slovenians.

The principal goal of the legitimate Slovenian government was to survive the war. They considered it suicidal for a nation of one million people to openly oppose the mighty invaders.

The aim of communists was a revolutionary takeover; Stalin wanted to dominate the world as much as Hitler. Some Slovenians were terrorised into compliance by Hitler and some by Stalin although the wellbeing of Slovenians meant nothing to either dictator.

Slovenian communists, instructed by the Soviets, used the chaotic war situation for the communist revolution. They ordered that the only legitimate resistance group was under their leadership.

Communist leader Edvard Kardelj issued a public manifesto threatening to liquidate all who resisted the communist party leadership.

Communists killed thousands of prominent Slovenian civilians who were suspected of opposing communist leadership. The murders created the feeling of fear and insecurity. That was the reason some Slovenians later turned to Italian and German authorities for protection. They were in charge and there was nobody else to maintain law and order at the time.

At the end of the war Stalin bargained with Churchill for the spoils of the war; Slovenia and Slovenians being on the border between communism and capitalism, became the bargaining chips.

Yugoslav historians compared Slovenian Home guards with quislings in western European countries but no western nation faced two evils: communist bloody revolution and Nazism-fascism.

Yugoslav communists knew that only a small minority of Slovenians would support them in any democratic elections after the war; their only option was terror and dictatorship. By killing the opposition they scared the rest of the nation into compliance. So far nobody was punished for these crimes, nobody was even accused of them, nobody admitted them, nobody regretted them, nobody apologised for them. The wounds of the nation still fester to this day. One survivor of the massacre at the Kocevski Rog mass graveyard told me how in the last dying hours Home guards prayed for themselves and for those who knew not what they were doing.

Communists convinced the new generation of Slovenians that unity and brotherhood with other Yugoslav nations was essential. Unity made it easier for the regime to rule.

As the most progressive republic, Slovenia had to contribute heavily for the development of southern Yugoslav republics.

One Slovenian historian recently wrote that Slovenians would no longer exist if Hitler won the war but people live and die; friends become enemies and enemies become friends; systems change, beliefs evolve. Slovenians follow the changing winds of international politics as they try to find the best way to survive and prosper. Stalin and Hitler were only men with a given number of years. Since their death we have been friends and enemies with Russians and with Germans. We no longer blame Germany for producing Hitler or Russia for producing Stalin.

After the communist revolution Slovenia followed Russia in nationalisation of private property to please Stalin. Now they are privatising state property because they want to be acceptable to the United Europe.

Looking back it is easier to see right and wrong; who we should have obeyed and what we should have done and believed; however, when life and death decisions had to be made Slovenians had no hindsight; their leaders had to decide between good and evil according to their consciences. What can one choose when given a choice between two evils? When one is placed between a rock and a hard place? What should Slovenian leaders have decided during WWII when the pressures of the East and the West were upon them? Should they have gone with Godless Bolshevism or with barbaric Nazism? Should they have tried to save the nation or sacrifice it in the fight against evil? They had to decide which evil was the greater; what was possible, practical and convenient at that moment. Sometimes in saving lives they may have sacrificed principles.

With the hindsight how would I decide?

## ***Paradise lost***

According to the Bible, God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge but the serpent told them that eating this forbidden fruit would make them be like God. Adam and Eve ate the fruit and their eyes opened; they knew good and evil. God banished them and their descendants to the life outside the paradise. Ever since their descendants longed for the paradise lost.

Most migrants rebelled and reached for the forbidden and unattainable; now we are torn between what we left behind and what is in front of us; we long for home, for the paradise we escaped from.

Does the serpent live in every paradise? Is life only a desire to be like God? Do we all want to be God? Does a desire to create keep us alive?

Thomas Aquinas once said: There is no everlasting happiness on Earth; we long for the desired and then fear losing it.

I sometimes wonder what God's intentions and requirements really are for the paradise we call Slovenia. I believe however that it is essential for the success of Slovenian nation that we think well about ourselves and about each other. We have to look to a brilliant future and learn from the mistakes of the past.

Cilka Zagar



*Half to forget the wonderings and pain,  
Half to remember the days that have gone by,  
And dream and dream that I am home again.*

*Flecker*

### ***Slovenians in Australia by Cilka Zagar***

It has been reported that the great post WWII migration scheme brought 3.5 million migrants to Australia and this gave Australia a whole new look with 140 nationalities, 90 languages and 80 religions. Although Slovenians were always keenly conscious of their Slovenian identity they were not well known in Australia because they were hidden under the labels: Austrian, Italian and mostly Yugoslav until Slovenia became independent in 1991.

During the 1970s the multicultural policy provided for all Australians to have a voice and many migrants were encouraged to speak up. Slovenians began to publish their writings and speak on ethnic radios. We appreciated the freedom of expression.

Few non English speaking migrants came to Australia before the 1940s. After WWII Europeans became restless; many became displaced; many wanted to get away from destruction, poverty, broken relationships, family pressures, and political oppression. We wanted to be somewhere else, doing something else perhaps even with someone else. Most of us knew someone in America or someone receiving parcels from America. Most began searching for America which to this day remains the symbol of freedom, fairness, prosperity and justice. People sometimes complain that America is corrupt but the poor and oppressed from all over the world still dream of living in America.

Little did we know that we will help create a new America in a little known Australia. As a younger sister to America, Australia eventually became a home to young ambitious visionaries from every country in the world. Most were rejected at home but many became the corner stones of this new America.

In the communist countries we learned that in the 'rotten' West they use and abuse workers but despite this the West remained a beacon on the hill and people risked lives to escape communist oppression.

Most Slovenian political refugees during the 1940s moved to South America; during the 1950s and 60s many registered to migrate to Canada or America because these countries were better known and closer to home; but it became easier to go to Australia.

After the war Australia with six million people had to populate or perish. Australian economy rode on the sheep's back; they export ted wool and meat. Young skilled workers were needed to develop Australian resources.

Slovenians were among the first non English speaking migrants welcomed to Australia. Australian government subsidised the travel for most of us because Australia needed us.

Many migrants born during twenties and thirties had their education and training disrupted during WWII. Some Slovenians had to change their language to German or Italian during WWII. Necessity really became their mother of invention; it became their motivation and education. They learned how to succeed; they improvised and picked up knowledge as they progressed. Most started as labourers on the farms or in the factories but many of them became successful business people. When the Snowy Mountains scheme began many Slovenians spent some years doing the dangerous and hard work tunnelling underground but they earned good money and they saved and invested in their homes and businesses.

Some Slovenians never became fluent in English, some were never fluent in Slovenian but we sharpened our wits, developed our particular skills and improved

our education. We needed to redefine ourselves by our work, be it in building, mining, writing, art or politics.

Most of us felt indebted to our home country for bringing us up and educating us; we paid this back in a small way by sending money to our families at home and by supporting Slovenian charities.

Australians were bewildered by the influx of people they did not understand; they tried to 'civilise' us so we would be more like them. At the beginning the teachers even advised migrants to forget their customs and to speak English for the sake of their children. New Australians would do anything for the sake of their children. They came to Australia to give their children a better future. Some Slovenians struggled and spoke English at home but most insisted that their children speak Slovenian with them. They believed that their children would benefit from being bilingual. Children quickly learned English and became interpreters, negotiators, representatives and agents to their parents.

Assimilation is a natural process in a melting pot of cultures but Australians wanted to speed the process through the assimilation policy; they felt that the nation would function more smoothly if people spoke the same language, worshipped and celebrated in a common Australian tradition. We were all part of the process that kept on removing disadvantage, prejudice and discrimination with the aim of creating a fair harmonious multicultural Australia.

Australian ethnic mix became slightly fractured by the influx of people of new nationality, race or religion. Australians became uncertain and fearful because they did not know what to expect from the new-coming strangers; however, as soon as migrants accepted general Australian values and learned a bit of English there was little prejudice and discrimination. Gradually Australians even accepted many of our customs, our food and fashions.

Slovenians quickly proved ourselves as trustworthy, hard-working and capable; Australians readily accepted us as workers and friends. Most of us did not like being called Yugoslavs because most hated being called Yugoslavs at home.

Yugoslav embassy considered us dissidents; they intimidated us if we wanted to visit Slovenia. Some Slovenians obeyed and followed embassy's orders while many rebelled and demanded democratic freedoms. Some wanted to please both masters but predictably that pleased no one.

Australians did not want to know that we are Slovenians either; Yugoslavia was our country of origin and we had to wear the label: Yugoslav. We successfully shed this label when Slovenia became independent; we were finally allowed to present ourselves with pride in our origins.

The independence movement against the common Yugoslav enemy united Australian Slovenians in 1991; for a moment we forgot well entrenched animosities and rivalries and carried our flag for the good of Slovenia.

Slovenians grew up with acute awareness that as members of a small nation in a precarious position we have to prove ourselves every step of the way. We could never afford to take anything for granted. We became self-reliant in life's obstacle race and we almost welcomed the chance to prove ourselves again in the obstacle race of becoming successful Australians. We provided well for our families, we learnt to make do with little, we are experts at earning and saving but spending often seems like undoing our achievements. As soon as we stopped to climb up we become scared that we would fall behind. We had needs, wishes and plans to fulfil and we did it. We wanted our children to have a better future; we secured a better future for them but now we often feel that we cheated them by overcoming the challenges; maybe we took the wind from under our children's wings. Our children have greater opportunities; they do not have to push the boundaries because we removed the obstacles of their race. Maybe the necessity really is the driving force. Maybe our children are less driven than we were. Maybe we are a little sad to see them bored. Did we unintentionally rob them of a challenge?

Non English migrants needed a place where they could feel at home and teach their children the language and traditions of their home country; where they could celebrate, socialise and exchange news. Ethnic clubs blossomed in every Australian city during the 1960s and 70s.

Members of ethnic clubs usually had little in common apart from speaking the same language but despite our differences we forged relationships that lasted a lifetime. We learned to choose from what was available. In Slovenian clubs we found people we could love, admire, adore, hate, despise, envy, annoy and spite. One cannot feel this spectrum of emotions for a foreigner. We shared memories of places and people nobody else in Australia was even aware of. We enjoyed the same music and books and food.

Slovenians are really much like anybody else; they are more or less smart, more or less tolerant, more or less generous, more or less wealthy and educated; more or less brave. Our various characteristics are just more obvious because there are less of us. Despite our common characteristics, Slovenians are diverse, individualistic people. We socialise on the basis of our common nationality and not according to our interests or abilities.

The Catholic Church was always a great unifying force for Slovenians in Australia. Many found peace, hope, and refuge in troubled times through their Catholic faith.

Within the Catholic Church we celebrated births and marriages and mourned our dead as part of a greater picture of life itself.

Although most of us worship the same God and follow the teachings of Jesus, our understanding of God's plan and his requirements differ as much as our recipes for our common national cuisine; our beliefs range from totally literary strictly devoted to very casual; even some who don't believe in God come to church to hear Slovenian mass and see Slovenian faces. This diversity has also provided a strong dynamic for our social life.

What people believe seems more important than any universal truth. Our beliefs are as unpredictable as are our ways of presenting them, so most feel that it is best to keep our relationship with the Almighty private. It is less offensive to rave about celebrities or sport or beer or houses or music or weather.

Most of the first generation Australian Slovenians remained church going Catholics who do not try to force their beliefs on each other. The few who joined other Christian groups like Jehovah witnesses, Seven day Adventists or Born again Christians, are more determined to bring the light of their beliefs into the lives of others.

The teachings of Jesus through whatever practice offered comfort, wisdom and spiritual wellbeing to most Slovenians. Like Mirko Cuderman explains: Families that pray together stay together.

Most Slovenians were brought up with conflicting ideologies; we followed Christian values at home while at school we were indoctrinated by communist ideals. In communist Yugoslavia it wasn't healthy or safe to discuss either politics or religion. Politics had to be left to politicians; we were not to meddle in something that was none of our business; ordinary citizens' duty was to follow the flag our leaders carried.

In Australia we are free to promote one or the other party; we exchange views without fear or favour; however it is not considered polite to talk about politics or religion at social gatherings simply because people believe differently. We know that Australian political parties favour different sections of population but they are united on important national issues.

It was easier for Slovenians who arrived in Australia as families because family members supported each other. Many young single men however, missed out on a Slovenian partner because few single Slovenian women came to Australia. These men either married foreigners or remained single; they had no one to remember their home and childhood with. Most eventually got used to their solitary existence. Some became disillusioned because they did not find what they were looking for; a few

dulled their disenchantment with alcohol, some became grumpy, some even returned to Slovenia.

Although Slovenia became free and prosperous, returning to Slovenia is not an option for most of us because our children's home is in Australia and we want to provide new roots for them.

Most of our children married foreigners. They communicate in English with their partners and children but they practice Slovenian when communicating with their parents. This often causes resentment because their partners and children cannot be a part of that communication. Our children often resented parents speaking Slovenian when their friends and partners were present. They also felt that we were somehow ignorant and inferior because we could not speak English well or spell the words we spoke. We told them that Australians were as foreign to us as we were to them; we told them that Slovenians are one of the world's most literate people but they took little notice at the time.

At home we learned the alphabet and joined the letters to read and write in the first year of school. Spelling was not even a subject. In Australia this was not all right. ALL RIGHT has five sounds and eight letters. You have to write mysterious letters you don't even hear.

Double o in blood does not sound the same as in floor or the moon or the book. Oo in mood sounds as ou in could and in wood would too. H is silent in honest but not in horrible. Dear customer does not mean the same as dear petrol or the deer in the forest.

The new rules defy logic but rules are rules. Some wondered if Australians invented these rules to confuse or punish us.

English settlers were bewildered and amazed how we, seemingly illiterate new Australians, prospered despite our apparent ignorance.

Eventually Australians realised that OVERSEAS does things differently. They eat garlic and kranskis and pizza and salamis, dim Sims and spring rolls; they dance to foreign tunes, wear foreign fashions, ignore English rules of propriety; they hug and kiss and touch.

Eventually Australians extended their vocabulary to include pasta and pizza and kranski and Vienna schnitzel, franks and hamburgers, spices and scents, Chinese meals, Vietnamese restaurants, and Lebanese bread.

In twenty first century the fact that migrants speak many languages is no longer a sign of weakness. It no longer matters if one likes continental cuisine or Chinese

meals. Being different is no longer a deterrent to success; continental even became a mark of distinction.

We had our confidence crushed on arrival to Australia. We became instantly illiterate and distinguishable only by the manual tasks we were assigned to do but we soon sharpened our ingenuity, resourcefulness, determination and intelligence to overcome our linguistic weaknesses. Despite being less able to demonstrate our skills and knowledge with words, we remained determined to provide well for our families. We were good employees; many worked in building industry; some became excellent builders, some became miners, teachers, artists and politicians.

Gradually we re-established our personal and national identity. We know who we are and are proud of being as successful as we are in our national and individual endeavours. We gained acceptance and respect of the wider community. All Slovenians maintain their reputation as hard working, honest, fair and just people. We were also worthy ambassadors for Slovenia. We left a positive mark in every Australian city.

Being a member of a small country is a constant challenge; it made Slovenians even more determined to show personal merit in their achievements. They could not bank on historic or national achievements and trademarks, they were not connected to any powerful international organisation so they had to establish their personal reputations; often they had to prove themselves more capable than those who came recommended and had connections. Slovenians are not arrogant but glad to have the opportunity to demonstrate their intellect and strength.

Migrant children could not count on their relations smoothing their path in life; most never met a single relation until some went overseas. They too had to become self-reliant. They became public servants and tradespeople and teachers, a few became politicians; some even became rich. Most of them, however, are just ordinary Australians.

Like most other ethnic minorities Slovenians travel long distances to visit each other. It is well known that visitors in a Slovenian home are offered food and drink. Most of the time they are offered a bed as well. And offered again. And again. Wherever Slovenians may live they urge visitors to partake of the best they have. We are proud of our homes, our hospitality and cuisine. Maybe our hospitality is the reminder that we were ourselves once hungry or homeless; perhaps we hope that what we do for the stranger we really do for Jesus himself.

Our homes stand out beautiful, well designed, clean and paid off in full. Most Slovenians grow some fruit and vegetables; almost everyone has a grape vine.

Coming from the land we kept one finger in the soil; in our old age we returned to our traditional earthly roots so gardening provides a satisfying hobby for most.

Many Slovenians invested in a second home or bought shares in order to provide for their old age. Prudent, frugal and hard working we envisioned a better future in our retirement. Most were not aware that Australian government does not allow you to draw a pension if you can provide for yourself well enough. It seems a bit unfair that social security provides for those that do not provide for themselves but not for those that saved and invested. Very few Slovenians ever needed help from the government but most feel entitled to be a bit better off in their old age than those who never lifted a finger.

Slovenians at home are known as whingers but most of us find little to complain about in Australia. Most of us are enormously grateful for the opportunity to make a home in Australia; we appreciate the comfort and the freedom, the challenges and the fair go.

We learned and adopted the Australian saying: You can't have your cake and eat it. We like to return to Slovenia for holidays but our home is in Australia; we are a part of this young nation we helped to build. Most Slovenians in Australia developed and used their talents to the fullest and they became strong and confident Australians. Our children finally became proud of their heritage.

Like my friend Helene said: Australians are friendly and readily chat about the weather and about the place you came from but they quickly tire of people. Their instant friendship is not a lasting friendship. In Slovenia it takes longer before you can enter someone's home and life but when you have a friend you know that it is for keeps.

On a recent visit to Slovenia my son Marjan said to his father: I am so glad you insisted on me speaking Slovenian with you because now I can speak with all my relations; I can also understand bits of all Slavic languages.

### ***Joze Preseren***

‘Homeland is where it is good’ I learned this Latin saying in high school but I did not understand it at the time. Did not Slovenian poet Zupancic try to convince us of the opposite: Homeland is one, given to everyone?

I trusted the Slovenian poet more so I stayed home in Slovenia. That does not mean that I do not like to travel to other countries.

During my high school and university years from 1955-70, quite a few of my acquaintances quietly disappeared from our small world Slovenia and we later learned that they went over the border. At the beginning they escaped illegally, later also with passports. I felt sad for everyone that left because their places at home were taken by others, especially by immigrants from other republics of former Yugoslavia.

I could not understand how one could leave his mother, father, sisters, brothers and friends to start somewhere else alone from nothing. Was it a desire to see the world or just a wish for a better life, or looking for something else? Was it a struggle for survival or an escape from ideological oppression?

I completed my studies and became a professor of Slavic languages but I did not seek employment in education. I liked journalism and research. By chance they offered me work at Rodna Gruda, the monthly magazine for Slovenians abroad, which was published by SIM (Slovenska izseljenska Matica), at the time the only Slovenian organisation, authorised to have contacts with Slovenians outside our borders. I worked as an editor from 1965 to 2000. I always enjoyed my work and the decades passed too quickly.

SIM was a formal civil organization independent of the government although it could not exist without the financial help of the government. The members of SIM were returned emigrants, researchers of Slovenian migrations and cultural workers; among the members were also some diplomats and politicians.

We, the employees, received work programs and directions at the general meetings of SIM. The general directions for the program of work were very wide: foster contacts with Slovenian migrants and their families; encourage and stimulate the expressions of Slovenian culture and language in the new surroundings; encourage visits to Slovenia and inform about the events in Slovenia.

Politicians did not interfere with our work although we had to respect their restrictions. Co-operation was allowed only with migrants loyal to the political regime at home; this applied specially for the political migrants.

They told me that the magazine needed to be modernised and refreshed. Until then Rodna Gruda was mainly the voice of Slovenian emigrants who left before WWII; they expressed their homesickness and nostalgia in this monthly magazine.

My colleagues and I tried to bring the magazine closer to post WWII generation of migrants. We also made fresh initiatives: I was present when the idea of a modern summer school of Slovenian language was first established; I helped with the creation of a modern textbook Slovene by Direct Method; I helped to establish and became an editor of a modern magazine Slovenia Quarterly for the second generation of Slovenians abroad; we encouraged the establishment of Slovenian organizations wherever there was a larger group of Slovenians; we wrote about their lives and work and we published their stories.

Numerous ideas and plans kept me busy but I always had time to meet visitors who came home for holidays. They subscribed to our publications and many of them came to Slovenia to pay subscriptions in person, which gave me an opportunity to meet them and hear their story. I was always happy to listen to these stories and visitors were glad to tell them. Migrants like to tell why they left their home; they also like to tell about their lives in their chosen country. I noticed that although most of these people did not have much formal education, they were nonetheless intelligent and knowledgeable. Rich life experiences gave them a wider view of the world.



Joze Preseren with Australian Slovenians holidaying in Slovenia: Marija, Jozica and Jozef

One day a Slovenian from Alaska on an around the world trip came to my office with his Afro-American wife and said: It cost me 8000 dollars to come and pay my subscription.

During 1960s first brave groups of Australian Slovenians came for a visit. I welcomed quite a few of these chartered flights and so I met with them for the first time. After that SIM organised cultural group to perform for Slovenians in Australia. Slovenian Octet was among the first and their singing brought most Slovenians together in every Australian city. I heard that to one concert in Melbourne came 2000 enthusiastic Slovenians. Unfortunately I could not join these first groups but Rodna Gruda received many new subscribers after their tours.

I first came to Australia as a journalist with the group Ottavio Brajko in 1980. It was an exciting and interesting time for me and I met Slovenians in every Australian city.

In front of a Slovenian club in Eltham I took a photo of three friends who had memories of WWII: one was a partisan who later became a political prisoner in Goli

Otok, one was a Cetnik, a member of regular Yugoslav army, and the third was a home guard from Primorska. Although they were on opposing sides during the war they had no problems being friends.

The cameraman travelling with us had a photo of a Slovenian from his village. He went to his address; an Australian lady opened the door and identified the man as her husband; he came to the door but denied that he was who we were looking for. I will never know how that story ended.

During my stay in Melbourne I wished to visit a Slovenian religious centre in Kew, which was led by Fr. Bazilij Valentin. Fr Bazilij was also the editor of Slovenian magazine Misli. My Australian relation asked Fr Bazilij if he could bring me to visit him but Fr. Bazilij told him that he did not want to meet me. Since then he has become suspicious, even of my relation, who is a faithful church goer. I wasn't angry because I knew that this was all a misunderstanding.

I couldn't make contact with Fr Bazilij for a few more years. When I stopped receiving Misli I wrote to him suggesting that I send him Rodna Gruda in exchange for him sending me Misli. There was no answer. Someone sent me his editorial in which he acknowledged my letter but said that I should wait a bit longer.

During the days of our independence war in 1991 we had to cancel our scheduled meeting with Slovenian emigrants but in 1992 we had a really happy reunion in Dolenjske Toplice. This meeting started with the mass offered by the bishop of Ljubljana in the company of Slovenian emigrant priests; among them was Fr Bazilij from Australia. I met with him and he surprised me by saying that he would visit me in my office.

One afternoon he came with a bunch of Misli magazines. We had a very relaxed conversation; we did not dwell on the past because the present was too exciting at the time.

Fr Bazilij invited me to his place in Kew when I next visited Australia in 1993. He personally made coffee for me and even offered me accommodation. I am convinced that Fr Bazilij began to trust me and other visitors from Slovenia only since his own first visit to Slovenia after 50 years

As a journalist/writer I had close ties with Slovenian writers and journalists in Australia. As a result I helped to publish two books called Australsko-slovenski zbornik, which was a collection of articles and stories written by Slovenians in Australia. I learned much from this work. Later many more books of Slovenian Australians were published in Slovenia.

I am glad that I succeeded in finding a publisher for Cilka Zagar's novel Barbara which was the first novel of an Australian Slovenian published in Slovenia. Later I helped

with the publications of autobiographic works of Ivan Lapuh and Ivanka Škof; I helped with finding funding for the second edition of Ivan Kobal's book about Slovenians who worked as builders on the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

I am especially happy that I was able to help prepare for publication and publish the memoirs written by my good friend Marijan Persic. He writes about those fateful times during WWII and about events after the war. Unfortunately Marijan did not live to see the book being published. His writing taught me much about the war and about our people, who were not defeated, but had to emigrate to save their lives.

They had suffered greatly before they found a promised land in Australia. Compelling and revealing memories make this a very interesting and informative book.

After the collapse of communism, Slovenia went through the process of democratization and establishment of independent Slovenia.

Many prominent Slovenian migrants in different countries criticised and blamed SIM and us, the writers and editors of its publications, for cooperating with the former communist regime.

We defended ourselves but even our former friends seemed to disappear. The voice of our opponents was louder. Their accusations included that we caused divisions in their communities, sabotaged and broke up their organisations and established new organisations; they said that we exported politics and so caused disunity; we were held responsible for the mistakes and actions of Yugoslav embassies.

Very few people admitted that: Who works also makes mistakes. In the case of SIM we tried to balance the positives with the negatives. I am saying that we worked to the best of our ability within our restrictions.

About Australian Slovenians I wish to say that we did not establish there any organisations; we helped everybody who asked for help; we followed with enthusiasm the economic and spiritual growth of Slovenian communities in Australia; we never conspired against them or encouraged disunity or hatreds. That is the truth as I know it.

In 1993 after many controversies I spoke with a prominent Slovenian in Canberra about these accusations and he said: If I remember all that SIM Slovenska izseljenska Matica did for us, from the organising a tour of Lojze Slak and his singers to the visit in 1972 of Slovenian Octet and other groups, which SIM sent us, I cannot imagine where our associations would be without SIM, if they existed at all in Australia.. At least one recognition.

For me as a journalist it was very interesting to travel and meet Slovenians around the world. I had the opportunity to join the visiting cultural groups; that's how I

visited most of European countries, USA, Canada, Argentina, Brazil and Australia. I had unforgettable meetings with our people from Perth to Brisbane, numerous talks, great hospitality everywhere. I attended Slovenian masses; I have even taken part in the grape harvest in Renmark in South Australia with my relation Milan Preseren; I visited and photographed most of Slovenian Association homes in Australia. I had no time to be a tourist and could not see other Australian attractions but I am proud that I met thousands of Slovenians and heard as many different stories; it is impossible to record them all.

I was happy to hear success stories of Slovenian individuals and groups and I was sad when I heard of a few Slovenians who cut themselves away from Australian Slovenian community.

It became clearer and clearer to me why so many of our people chose Australia for their new homeland. I began to understand the old Latin saying: Homeland is where it is good. I would only add that it is good for people who can live with two homelands.

Jože Prešeren

## Barbara Susa



*Barbara Susa and Joze Preseren visiting Cilka Zagar in Ljubljana in 1996*

Maybe it sounds incredulous but it is true! I am homesick for Australia. This wild beauty became a second home to my friends; Helena, Ivo, Romana, Frank, Cilka, Jože and Pavla. Their families welcomed me into their lives and now I miss them so I keep returning. For the last 20 years. I also miss the heart-warming laughter of Australian birds, hopping kangaroos disturbed by the noise of the train I travel on; I miss hot Australian sun that warms the bones stiff from cold Slovenian winters. Friendship is like a precious jewel; there are always two rubbing off each other to shine in all its beauty

It all started by a chance in January 1986; this chance ended up with two people in love becoming lifelong partners. One foggy morning my boyfriend Tadej, who has now been my husband of many years, asked me to come along mountain climbing in Australia.

As a newly qualified professor of Slovenian language I made preparations. I visited SIM the organisation linking Slovenians abroad; they gave me a book of Australian migrant writings (1985). I got the idea and a wish to research the new world of Slovenian literary expressions born under the Southern Cross.

I enrolled in the postgraduate study into Australian Slovenian Literature. I presented the only copy of my study to the late librarian Milena Brgoč in Melbourne, who was faithfully collecting material about Slovenians in Australia.

I published my research material in many articles and in a book: Lipa šumi med evkalipti and Slovenska izseljenska književnost. (Linden murmurs among the eucalyptus, Slovenian Migrant Literature. (Linden is a Slovenian national tree).

This book was the result of much writing but the ties weaved during the years of writing mean much more to me. It is a joy for me when one of ours succeeds and publishes a book in Slovenia. I am proud of Pavla who was accepted into the circle of Slovenian writers in Slovenia.

I even dare to say that in a small way I helped to bring Australian Slovenian writers' recognition also to Slovenia.

I am happy that I encouraged a director of Cankarjev dom to invite Sonja Leber and David Chesworth, famous for their sound installation during Olympic games in Sydney to Ljubljana's month of Australian culture. It was nice to step into the old part of Ljubljana (Šuštarški most) embraced by 5000 human voices; it was nice to listen to David's group.

Connecting Slovenia to second and third generation of Slovenian migrants is the key to preservation of cultural and business ties.

The wealth and organisation of Slovenian Associations, this work of generous and capable Slovenians in Australia must not be destroyed. Veterans of Slovenian organisation are passing away; it is up to the young ones to take the burdens and the pleasures of their heritage.

Australian Slovenian community in 1986 was in the full bloom like a woman in her forties; now I believe it is time that this woman gets grandchildren.

And what remains until the end? Friendships and mature love. The kind that reaches to the grave.

You will be forever in my heart: Irena Birsa, Angelique Van de Laak, and Noela Favier. Melbourne and Ljubljana. Sun and Snow.

I like extraordinary stories; Paula Gruden's story is like that. Paula is a person who only sleeps for a short time. Maybe four hours a night. Even that seems a waste of time to her specially if there are no dreams.

I see Paula with white hair reaching to her shoulders, with her long manicured fingernails, with a cigarette for decoration, leaning over a book or over her writing. One and the other following like high and low tide. Reading, reading, thinking, writing. In between there are housework, gardening, maybe feeding a stray cat, greetings for a neighbour and again thinking, meditating about the universe, about humanity and love for everything; including a man. Paula was born on 14.2.1921 in Ljubljana. She spent the war on forced labour in Germany. Disappointed with the

regime of her liberated country she left for Trieste. In 1948 she arrived to Australia. She only visited Slovenia once.

Paula helped establish Slovenian Australian literary society and the magazine Free Dialogues. She helped many Slovenians to write and express themselves for the first time since they arrived to Australia.

Paula is a member of Slovenian Literary Society in Slovenia. She writes in Slovenian and Australian publications. She published her poems in the books: Courting the spirits (1994) and Love under the jacaranda (2002)

I wish all the best for your every day, Paula.

## Jožica Marn Gerden



There are many facets to my very active life. I come from a large, loving family and I enjoyed many friendships in Slovenia. Perhaps I became an active community worker in Australia because here I found myself isolated and alone; I needed to create a new identity, friendships and support groups. I always enjoyed creative work; maybe I saved myself by painting pictures, writing stories, working with ceramics and restoration. Continuous study gave me ever greater understanding of self and others and life itself. I am keenly aware of Slovenian destiny and would like to rewrite its history as it really was. Primarily I was and am a mother of four, a wife and a homemaker.

I was born in a turbulent spring of 1947 in Jezero near Trebnje in Slovenia as one of eight children to a subsistent farmer's family. Although the war finished and we were supposed to be liberated, I vividly remember the poverty, destruction and desolation that were part of my childhood. My parents had no income while expenses were enormous with eight children at school from the youngest starting primary to the older ones at university. We had to find our own ways to survive and progress. I finished Technical school of Economics which was equivalent to finishing high school but the study prepared us well for bookkeeping, accountancy and clerical work. I worked as a Forestry company accountant in Mokronog from 1967 till 1969.

One snowy winter afternoon I met my future husband Igor Gerden, an Australian Slovenian who came home on holidays; within a year we got married in Trebnje and we went back to Australia, thinking it would be just for two years. What an adventure, I thought. I will learn better English and see the world! Two years will soon pass...

In September 1969, newly married and pregnant, I left home and went with Igor on the ship Marconi for Australia. I was quite happy in Slovenia at the time but I fell in love and so left the country, which I never stopped loving as my first homeland. I was going to an unknown end of the world. The farewell was sad and the trip was unpleasant; I was sea sick most of the time and stayed in the cabin while my husband found some friends and played chess with them.

I often lay on my bed looking at the ceiling, crying and thinking: This was supposed to be my extended honeymoon and I feel so unhappy. I wished I could stop the ship and turn it back. Where am I going, why am I leaving my homeland, and my dear family that I love so much and already miss?

After  
four  
weeks  
we  
were



*This photo of my family is from my daughter Sibila's wedding*

greeted with a great dust storm above Australian shores. The land in Fremantle was grey brown and barren. The trip to Mildura was very long and boring. Our home was much worse than I expected, just a fruit pickers hut with no air conditioner and as hot as an oven. Not a single tree near the home and not a single flower in the garden.

Igor told me that I was lucky because a retired couple from Medzimurje lived next door. I went to see the old couple but they spoke a strange dialect that I found very hard to understand.

One day Igor brought me a bunch of colourful poppies that Australian neighbour gave him for me. The next day the woman greeted me in the shop but I could only say hello and thank you for the flowers. Oh how I wished I could have a longer conversation with another woman; I needed and wished to have a special friend of my age. All the neighbours were very friendly and supportive and I am forever grateful to them for it. Soon I realized that my husband Igor is not Igor in Australia, everybody calls him Charles. He told me that he officially changed his name to

Charles, as people were calling him “Ajgo” instead of Igor. Well, since then he’s my prince Charles.

Another neighbour told Charles to take me to a doctor for a pregnancy check up. Charles spoke to the doctor, doctor’s face seemed worried and my husband as an interpreter later explained that I had to watch my diet because I was gaining too much weight. I wondered how that was possible since I hardly ate anything, because the food seemed tasteless; I existed on fruit and water mainly.

The house was hot, but it wasn’t worth installing a fan or air-conditioning because we were already building a new house for ourselves. But I was suffocating because of heat and pregnancy as I was growing enormous. Charles worked from five in the morning until ten at night. I felt painfully alone. The world seemed to stop still. When I was six months pregnant my doctor told me the good news: You are going to have twins! In early April , after a long and difficult labour, I held one pink and one blue bundle in my arms. Charles came with a bunch of petunias from the neighbour’s garden; he was happy that babies were fine but he had to return to work. A lady next to me had a little girl and her room was full of flowers and visitors and cards. How I wanted to show my babies to my parents but I had no one to share my pride with! When I returned from the hospital, I noticed that mice and rats were visiting from the fruit block. I stuffed the gaps under the doors and kept watch over my babies. I was relieved and happy when we moved into our new house a few months later.

Unfortunately we had no furniture and again it wasn’t worth buying any, because we were going to put the house on the market and return to Slovenia. Charles promised that we will return in two years time and I kept reminding him of his promise.

I stopped breastfeeding my twins at three months and expected to return to normal life but all of a sudden morning sickness told me that I was again expecting.

When I came to hospital to deliver the baby the nurse told me that my doctor is away and hospital doctor will come in the morning. My neighbour came to be with me but as “she wasn’t my mother or my husband” she was not allowed to see and comfort me. Nobody came to see me for twelve long hours. The nurse came in the morning as I was screaming with labour pains. A doctor came to cut the cord. I had another daughter which looked very tired.(who looked tired? The daughter?)

Back home I was alone again. Charles was busy building a new block of flats. Family expected a dinner; I fed and bathed the twins and the new baby; I did loads of washing and there was so much more work to do. Suddenly I felt very cold and weak; I was shaking uncontrollably when a neighbour came over and ordered me to bed.

It has been two years since I arrived to Australia and it was time to return home.

I noticed that an attractive young mum I met and befriended in the hospital had moved next door. We soon became good friends and she often took me with the babies for a picnic. This wonderful friend gave me the will and the strength to carry on. Her visits were something I always looked forward to and still do. She was/is a beautiful person and I so wanted to be like her. I started enjoying Australian life and my babies.

After a few months I discovered that I was pregnant again. Charles was proud but I was weary. How will I cope with four children under the age of three years?

My fourth baby boy was born on New Year's Day and my doctor arranged for a painless delivery.

My four babies hardly ever went to sleep at the same time so I was exhausted most of the time. I became more and more homesick. I hadn't heard anyone speak Slovenian for five years. Finally we packed our trunks, rented a house and returned home.

My home was not as homely as I'd imagined. We were a family of six and there was no room in my home so we stayed with Charles' family. Living with mother-in-law didn't work out as she has never accepted me and accused me of impossible crimes. I couldn't cope anymore, so I decided to move out, go back to work and put children in childcare. The morning I was ready to move, I was stunned to see that all four children were ill, they all had mumps.

I realised that my plans were wrong. I asked my husband that our family return to Australia as soon as possible.

My mama was sad but she said once again: Whatever is in God's plan, you have to accept it!

Disappointed we returned after one year to Australia for good.

### ***My work in Australia as a volunteer***

In Australia I never had a regular job. I helped my husband in his business but my main job was bringing up four children and providing a happy home for my family. When my children started school I went with them. I taught home economics in Primary school and assisted class teachers with reading groups. Children learned to read English with me and I practiced my conversational English with them.

I tried hard to re-establish myself in Australian society and become a good Australian. I chose to work as a volunteer in many community organisations. I worked for the blind, for the elderly migrants and for the sick. In 1985 I established a local volunteer

Multicultural Women's Association and was the president for five years and then spent another five years as a treasurer.

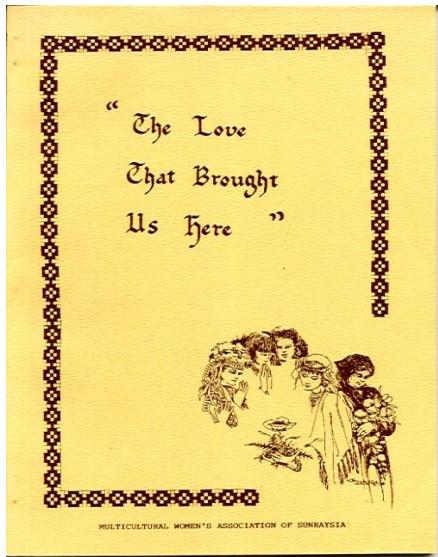
This organisation offered help and moral support to women of many nationalities who settled in Australia. We ran a weekly Drop-in-centre, where we organised

English lessons, art and craft courses, health seminars and meetings, where we discussed any problems we encountered, organised excursions and helped women to obtain driving licences.

I edited and published a multicultural 3-monthly newspaper Rainbow for five years; I was also a producer/presenter of a radio program for MCWA. Our organisation later developed into a branch of United Nation Association of Sunraysia, where men also could become members. Our work was presented on SBS TV film series Country Women in 1997.

I collected/compiled/edited and published migrant women's stories about their arrival to Australia. I added an extensive survey on migrant women in a book titled 'The Love That Brought Us Here'.

I was amongst first recruits to be named bi-lingual consultant with the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA). I was also a foundation member of Australian Non-English Speaking Women Background Association (ANESBWA).



I studied Sociology and Fine Arts at La Trobe University by correspondence. Occasionally I worked with older Yugoslav migrants as interpreter and translator for health and social



Streams of tears is my painting representing my loneliness and homesickness.

services and other government purposes.

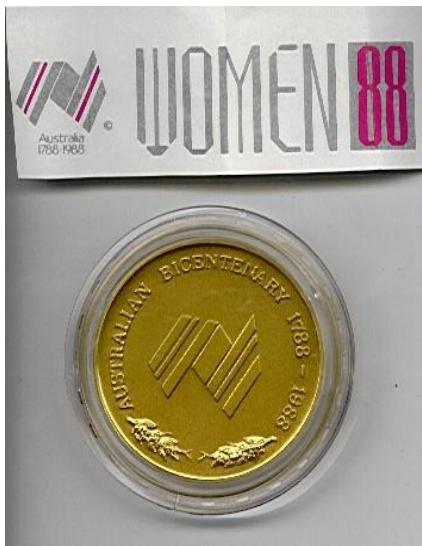
I worked as a volunteer producer/presenter of Slovenian community radio program from 1985–2000 on 3MA and FM Station in Mildura.

I was a treasurer of the Yugoslav club in Mildura for 3 years and also for 10 years a member of Ethnic Community Council of Sunraysia. I organised and helped with many cultural celebrations and have hosted many visiting Slovenian artists.

I always loved and enjoyed art and craft and restored many old church statues in Melbourne and Mildura. I exhibited my art work, oil paintings and aquarelle, and also received an award, a second prize for painting 'Flowers in aquarelles' in Adelaide.

I wrote, presented and published many articles in Slovenian magazines and newspapers on various issues.

I was a board member for Loddon Malley Regional Council for Adults, Community and Further Education in Bendigo, and member management committee for the local adult educational council - Mildura And District Educational Council »MADEC«.



In 1988 I was nominated for Bi-centennial Australian Women of the Year and received one of the 200 medals WOMEN 88.

During the first five years I knew no other Slovenians so I soon befriended my neighbours as my new adopted family; they helped me to learn the language and the new way of life in Australia. This first contact was very precious to me, as I was terribly homesick for my own family, friends and my homeland for many years.

Later I found some Slovenian grapevine and citrus growers. We never had an official Slovenian club in Mildura, but we often met in each other houses,

celebrating birthdays and had singing lessons. I presented Slovenian radio program for 15 years and also kept being in touch with all local Slovenians. We often organised Slovenian mass and concerts for our Slovenian community by visiting choirs and artists and also for the multicultural community. We felt rejuvenated after every successful performance. I was happy to receive a medal of the blessed Slomsek from the bishop Kramberger from Maribor while attending a 50<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Slovenian Franciscan fathers in Australia.

I prepared Slovenian "SLOVENSKI ČAS" part of the Yugoslav radio program from 1985 until in 1990, when we changed the radio station and got an independent Slovenian timeslot. I prepared and presented radio program for fifteen years as a volunteer.

### ***Slovenian community in Australia***

Although I am far from Slovenia and from Australian Slovenian centres I keenly followed the events in Slovenia; I was especially enthusiastic about the Slovenian independence movement. During these exciting and traumatic times I needed a creative outlet for all my new emotions. I started painting. I was painting politics.

I was in contact with Slovenian religious centre in Melbourne and especially with late Fr. Bazilij who was the soul of Slovenian life in Australia. I started to cooperate with Slovenian National council in Melbourne and Slovenian World congress which promoted/supported the independence movement and democratisation process in Slovenia. I wrote numerous letters to Australian authorities lobbying for Slovenian independence.

I served as a member and secretary of Slovenian National council and as a secretary of the Australian Slovenian Conference, (a branch of Slovenian World Congress in

Ljubljana) since 1997 until today. At the same time I am a management committee member of the Slovenian World Congress and was also elected as a vice president of SSK for 3 years, responsible for overseas countries. Slovenian world congress is the only organisation that includes all Slovenian emigrants around the world. It is wonderful to be in regular contact with prominent Slovenians all over the world.

I am concerned about the lack of national awareness and pride among Slovenians. I believe we should first rewrite our history which is at present grossly misrepresented. Foreign historians wrote that we settled in Slovenian territory during 6-7th century while we have evidence even from pre Roman times that Slovenia was always in the heart of Europe and never a part of the Balkan Peninsula. We are proud of our history and culture and it is our duty to acknowledge it and present it to the world with pride. It is now time to correct the mistakes and injustices of the past. We did not join Europe, we were the heart of Europe from the beginning.

I have translated from Slovenian into English and from English into Slovenian many articles and studies about our Veneti history. My speciality is research into Silesia's Sorbs or Wends, the carriers of the culture of Urn culture (the way of burial of ashes)

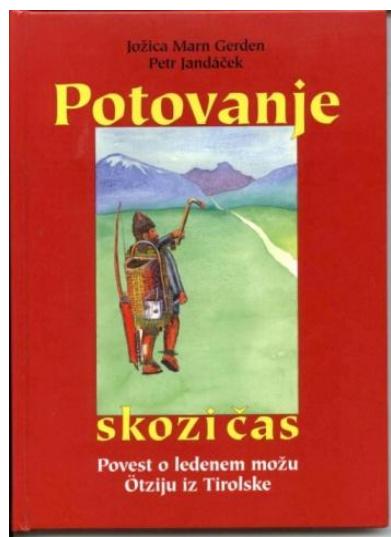
which developed throughout middle Europe many millenniums ago. Ancestors of my Sunraysia Wendish friends migrated to Australia from Silesia and Upper and Lower Lusatia. I admire their descendants who are still very proud of their old Slavic culture and actively search for their roots.

In 2001 I participated in the international conference of Venetologist in Ljubljana with a study Veneti in Australia; and later in 2002 I presented a study Prvobitnost Venetov srednje Evrope - Veneti as Indigenous people in Central Europe.

I've translated Petr Jandacek cartoon story about Ötzi the iceman and expended the story with

Slovenian legends that brings Ötzi into Slovenian place and history.

Therefore, I am a co-author with Petr Jandacek of the children story book POTOVANJE SKOZI ČAS – Travelling through time - a story about Ötzi the Iceman, who was of Venetic origin, therefore he is our earliest known ancestor. The book was published by Založba Jutro, Ljubljana, 2004.



I am the editor of the internet debating site VENETI-WENDS WINDISCHE – SLOVENIA:  
<http://forums.delphiforums.com/VENETI> .

## MILDURA, CAPITAL OF SUNRAYSIA, VICTORIA



Mildura is the main town in the North West Victoria about 550 km from

Priest Stanko Kastelic harvesting at Tonc Family

Melbourne; it has population of about 40 000. Mildura lies on the border of NSW, Victoria and South Australia. It lies on the longest Australian river Murray, which is irrigating citrus and grapevine fields and is a bloodline of Sunraysia.

In nearby Wentworth is a junction of two of the biggest Australian rivers Darling and Murray.

The word Mildura means in Aboriginal language red soil - sore eyes. Along the river grows Mallee bush.



Slovenian Club Mildura – this time at home of Golobič family

Sunraysia has the greatest number of sunny days a year. In Sunraysia there are large vineyards known for their high quality wine and dry fruit: raisins and sultanas.

Where there are vineyards there will surely be Slovenians. Many of our people are successful wine producers. During the harvest Slovenians 'tourists' often come for seasonal employment.

Strict Australian laws prohibit seasonal work for tourists but Slovenian students still often come asking for work.

### ***SLOVENIANS IN MILDURA***

11 Slovenian and some half Slovenian families live in Mildura: Marica Abramović, Marija Horvat, Lojze Golobič, Charles (Igor) and Jožica Gerden, Pepca and Janez Plut,

Franc and Danica Štrubelj, Agata and Franc Tonc, Tilka and Lojze Žagar, Edi Žalec and Marija, Pavla and Stane Osolnik. Counting our descendants there would be around 70 Slovenians. We haven't got a Slovenian club but we still find a way of coming together for cultural and religious celebrations and for visiting performers that are usually enjoyed by the wider community as well.

Years ago we had an excellent Slovenian choir with a lead soprano singer Agatha Tonc. Unfortunately some of our singers moved into the city. Sadly some passed away and our choir misses them greatly.



Above: Palm Sunday in Mildura 1998 with Father Janez Tretjak. After the mass we had an Annual general meeting of Australian Slovenian conference with participants from other cities around Australia.

#### PASTORAL CARE FOR SLOVENIANS IN MILDURA

Ever since I came to Australia I missed going to a regular Slovenian mass; I was especially homesick for those celebrations and festivities at Christmas, New Year and Easter. I missed Mary's May celebrations and All Soul's day. The seasons, the language and the traditions of celebrations are so different here and it was very difficult for me to get used to it. It is hard to imagine white Christmas at the temperature of 47C next to the plastic Christmas tree.

I once asked Fr Bazilij to visit us on his way to Berri but he did not answer. He must have heard that I was participating in Yugoslav radio program and he assumed that Mildura Slovenians were favouring Yugoslav regime. When father Janez Tretjak OFM

came to Australia, I asked him to look after Mildura Slovenians and he enthusiastically accepted the invitation. Since then he comes regularly from Adelaide.

Among many highly esteemed guests in my home were Cardinal Alojzij Ambrožič from Canada, bishop Kvas, arch-bishop Alojzij Uran, Bishop Metod Pirih, bishop Franc Kramberger, provincial Michael Vovk and Stane Zore, various Franciscan priests among them father Bazilij, Tone Gorjup, Niko Žvokelj, Metod Ogorevc, Ciril Božič, Pater Valerijan Jenko, Filip Rupnik, Štefan Krampač, Stanko Kastelic, Jesuit Milan Bizant etc. We also had several visits with a full bus of Slovenian pensioners touring Sunraysia.

Despite the extra work I always enjoyed the visits which often ended with happy Slovenian singing.

Father Janez Tretjak OFM is faithfully visiting Mildura twice a year and also when bringing guests from Slovenia. For every visit we prepare the mass in Sacred Heart church; beforehand we have a choir practice. After the mass we meet at one or the other of Slovenian families; women prepare a festivity to celebrate so we all feel spiritually and physically rejuvenated.

#### SLOVENIAN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN MILDURA

Among the most successful guest performances were the visit of quartet Big Ben from Slovenia, the visit of a choir Jakob Gallus-Petelin from Celovec and the visit of Tržaški octet under Danilo Čadež, singers Stajerskih 7 etc. Concerts were well attended by our local multicultural community of Sunraysia Our city specially remembers and appreciates our singing bishop Alojzij Uran.

## *Cvetko Falez*



*Cvetka in Cvetko in 1936*

I treasure memories of growing up. Those first impressions of the world and the people are the source of great happiness for me. The land and the people of my youth formed my character; those early acquired attitudes guide my actions; they make it possible for me to make sacrifices for my homeland and my people. The love for the homeland and my people is also the source of pain because I had to leave all that behind when I came to Australia.

I was one of the twins born in Leskovec near Krško on 14 April 1931. My sister was named Cvetka and my name is Cvetko. Cvetka came to Australia with her family and unfortunately died at the age of 35. We grew up in a happy and prosperous family. Our father was a public

servant, hard working and strict. Mother was thrilled with her first-borns. She always showed off by dressing us in similar clothes.

Mum was kind but also strict. She was deeply religious and believed that her children would only grow up into good and honest human beings with strict catholic upbringing. No nonsense was tolerated and sometimes it was necessary to use a switch. She was a total believer in the old Slovenian proverb: "Šiba novo mašo poje". Translated it would say: the switch sings a new mass. It means that a switch helps one to become a priest; priest's first mass is always sung.

In my mother's family there were three girls and four boys of whom two became priests; the other two were total roughs; black sheep in the family. In fact mum always hoped I would become a priest. I was sorry I disappointed her.

On father's side of the family were twelve children, six boys and six girls. All the boys married but the girls all remained single. Three of them became nuns. Two of them died very young, afflicted by tuberculoses but the rest of them reached a great age. They were also very religious going to mass practically every day. Their parents were farmers, also religious ; their grandfather was known to have prayed the rosary wherever he was walking or guiding his stock. He was also known to have made a pilgrimage to Maria Zeel which was some 200 km away, mostly walking barefoot.

Something of that certainly rubbed off on me, although I am convinced that I have a strong mind and I was not influenced by others. I was noticeably good in school at religious lessons. For the first Holy Communion I was the only one in class awarded an exceptionally pretty holly depiction of Jesus, different from the rest of the class.

The period before the Second World War in Slovenia was full of cultural activities. The youth were engaged in singing and drama; they were performing on stage most weekends. Young people belonged to various groups and they wore their distinctive uniforms. They often paraded at masses especially on feast days. Young people were also very active in sport.

When I was three years old my family moved from Leskovec to an old castle near Kostanjevica na Krki, an ex Benedictine monastery that was abandoned since Kaiser Franz Josef closed many monasteries in Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in late 17th Century. The castle was not on top of a hill like most castles in Slovenia but in a small circular valley sheltered by hills around it. Kostanjevica is an island, encircled by river Krka. On slopes around the castle wine growers produce their famous cviček. The mountains Gorjanci are covered with forests. Every hill seems to have a church from which one could see the mosaic of fields around the villages.

My father managed the government nursery that supplied fruit trees and grape-vines to the farmers all over Slovenia. It was a government initiative to make the farmers self sufficient with all the produce and fruit was considered a vital part of the staple diet. The nursery employed local young men and women that often spoiled my sister and me. The main attraction was the orchard and especially the peach trees that produced enormous, beautiful, red peaches in summer.

The castle was a three story building constructed as a huge circle. In the courtyard was a linden tree and a bench around it. The cellar at that time did not hold as much attraction for me as it would today, but I remember an endless line of carts with horses and oxen that brought the grapes to the cellar in autumn. Inside the walls was a huge abandoned church and endless corridors. The castle housed families and offices. It was burned down by the partisans during the Second World War but it was gradually restored and is now a famous art gallery and a tourist attraction.

Near a castle was a stream with warm water which was a paradise for about fifteen of us children living in the castle. The water must have passed a volcanic crater where it warmed up and it never froze over. We often made fires and played games on the river bank; we also caught fish and barbequed them. On 5th of December for 'Miklavžev večer' St Nicholas eve, a huge contingent of angels and devils with St Nicholas arrived at the castle. We believed that the angels came from heaven, and the devil from hell. St. Nicholas' visits are imprinted in my memory with awe, pleasure, fear, prayer and excitement.

'Pustni torek', a Shrove Tuesday masquerade was another exciting time for children during snow covered winters. Beautifully decorated masks entered the courtyard and were rewarded by adults. We spent hours and hours on the toboggan slope; up and down, and up and down, and backside over head until we got really cold and with frost bitten fingers could stand it no longer. In summer we played in lush flowery grass paddocks.

Before I started school mum taught me a poem which I recited at a Mother's Day celebration and for it received my first packet of lollies. I had to repeat the poem for everyone that would listen and on every occasion that presented itself. I became a real celebrity.

My parents came from near Maribor. On rare occasions we returned to their home 150 km away to see our grandparents; the trips were unforgettable and we began to long to travel to those distant places.

Trappistine monastery in Reichenburg was a castle where mum's brother Pepi was preparing for priesthood. We loved to visit him because people there spoiled us with big plates of fried eggs and delicious chocolate. We had to hire a horse drawn cart from one of the farmers for the visit. One morning we were all ready and dressed very early in the morning expecting the horse drawn carriage to pick us up. We saw it coming but even though we called out the lady travelled on without taking any notice. We were so miserable that the sadness remained in my memory to this day.

When my sister Cvetka and I started school in Kostanjevica my father bought a farm in his birth place in Orehova vas. My childhood ended because on the farm there was so much to do. This was the time before the agricultural revolution reached Slovenian farmers. Everything had to be done by hand from planting the crops to making hay, to trashing the wheat, digging up the potatoes, picking the beans, apples and grapes. The tasks were endless. Tractors and other farm machinery came after I left home.

I had to graze cows on narrow grass lanes between the fields. Sometimes there would be three cows abreast held together with a chain around their necks; if I had

four of them they would be two and two held together at the horns with a rope. All kind of crops were planted in the fields along the lane but the maize seemed most tempting to my cows. The cow knew that it will get a strong whack over the snout but still snapped at the succulent produce for which my father strongly reprimanded me. The maize once cut at the top did not recover.

In summer we often went to pilgrim churches on hill tops; there were merry-go-rounds, amusement gadgets, stands loaded with sweets and toys. Mum prepared delicious foods for the occasion. Koline, the yearly killing of the pig or pigs was a feast for the family because we prepared delicacies from the pig's meat.

At the beginning of WWII I was in year three of primary school. Our new German teacher yelled at us endlessly as he tried to turn us into instant Germans. One boy and his sister spoke German and were translating the teacher's German orders for the whole school. He wanted to implement a military regime with marching and standing to attention. In time we spoke some sentences and sang German songs but had no idea what they meant.

After Germans invaded Slovenia Slovenian language and all cultural activities were forbidden. I was eagerly awaiting German defeat and prosperous old times to return. Local boys joined partisans; at least some of them hoped that they were fighting the Germans and for a free Slovenia. In our region there was no other resistance; one had to either join the partisans or join the German military. Among the partisans were also my Uncle Victor and Cousin Ivan. Groups of these boys would come during the night to warm up and for a feed, even though at a big risk to those that extended them hospitality. During the next three years partisan activities became more sinister. The visiting boys brought news of the revolution and red bolshevism. The crude newspapers that they left only talked of Russian friendship and of the rotten old system that we were to be freed from. Nothing of good old days that I remembered was to return. The new revolution was to bring a completely new order.

For many the new order meant death. People were disappearing and no one knew who was safe. On one of the outings to Pohorje a group of pilgrims sensed a horrible smell; they had no idea what caused it; only now it was revealed that in 1945 after the WWII Slovenia was the largest killing field in Europe. At the time we were walking past one of these gruesome places. Is it possible that in my very own backyard there were thousands of people killed often by our own compatriots?

I was only fourteen years old then and not yet fully aware of the criminal involvement of the Yugoslav and Slovenian communist party; however I developed a dislike and even a hatred of communism.

The years during and after the war were traumatic but they also left unforgettably pleasant memories. Teenage years are naturally sprinkled with wonderful discoveries; I learned about the birds and the bees and the romantic side of life. Grazing cows was no longer boring because I was day dreaming of better things and more exciting times. Our fields in Dravska dolina provided a picturesque setting for a young day dreamer. Pohorje Mountain and a lower range Haloze and Slovenske gorice encircled our valley. I began to dream about places beyond the mountain ranges; I began to dream of things beyond the next mountain range, of a place without communism.

Communist regime did not allow us to travel across the border so perhaps the forbidden fruit on the other side became even more tempting. If you were caught crossing the border you could face many years in prison or you could even be shot by a trigger happy guard. At the age of eighteen I escaped to Austria. I was sad because I did not know if and when I would be able to return. I did not want to leave my home but I felt compelled to escape from communism. The world was in front of me but it was unknown and uncertain. Armed with a few addresses of Slovenians abroad I began searching for people that also carried my dreams and the love for Slovenia. I was sad leaving my home; I was very happy in Slovenia even though the communist regime depressed me enormously. At that time many young people were disappearing; one of them was my uncle. Somehow I was misled in believing that the West was eager to change the government of Yugoslavia. I was keen to join the forces that would liberate my country. At that stage I did not yet envisage an independent Slovenia. In an Austrian examination camp I was coached by a very sympathetic young man on how to join a group of fighters that were devoted to this purpose. This was the reason for my escape. I was warned by someone else to beware of such plots, because the communist agents were trying to coach young people into a trap. I still went looking for the given connection. Somehow I did not find the address which probably saved my life. Eventually I realised that I was lucky to have missed the appointment. Even though I still longed to join a group that would give me a reason for leaving home I had to realise that there was no such organization. My fate was sealed and there was no way back. The communist regime was firmly entrenched and no one in the world was thinking of dislodging it. I was contemplating my future. All the bridges to my beloved home were destroyed. When would our country become like the democratic West or free Australia? I did not know that it would take sixty years or my whole lifetime.

I stayed in Austria with a kind aunt of our parish priest Jakob Vraber where I read a weekly newspaper 'Naš Tednik' printed in Celovec. That put me in touch with people who felt and thought as I did. The paper often published articles by people who fled Communism, who were persecuted, people who longed for a free and prosperous

Slovenia. I learned that there was a camp near Beljak, where they stayed. I found the camp but it was deserted. On the walls were posters inviting people to emigrate to USA, Canada, Argentina and also Australia. USA was my target, but I would have to wait five years and have a sponsor to be accepted. What would I do in the mean time? Argentina and Canada had a waiting period of two years. Australia was the last on my mind but I still filled out the application. It had no waiting period. Two months later I had a health check in Salzburg and from there I went to Aurich in Germany to a ship Castelbianco in Bremenhaven; I was on the way to Australia. On the boat I finally found about ten Slovenians: Milan Beribak from Maribor is the only person I am still in contact with.

The journey to Melbourne lasted 30 days. The train trip from Melbourne to Bonegilla seemed to last an eternity. We felt bewildered by the strangeness of the place we arrived at. It was Christmas but we barely noticed it.

After Christmas most were sent to their destinations. The friends I met on the ship left and I was on my own. I was picked up by a farmer and his wife. We drove for some time into a strange land and I had no idea where I was taken. We arrived at a farm, where I had to share a room with a Serb, Michael. Our work was herding and milking cows, something I was familiar with although I have never milked a cow before. Fortunately we used a machine. Total isolation from my people, the monotony and a strange environment were depressing. Michael and the farmer were my sole companions; I only saw the farmer's wife at meal times.

There were a couple of suitcases on the shelves opposite my bed and I was told that they belonged to two Slovenians that worked there before me and left the farm without permission. This made me think. Why would anyone leave everything behind? My first month on the farm was coming to an end and there was still no pay. Eventually I was handed the pay for four weeks, which was 16 Guinness. Since we worked seven days a week, milking cows from morning till one o'clock and in the afternoon and evenings for three hours it seemed very little. I became annoyed and did not want to do everything I was told. When I once refused to do something Michael slapped my face. The farmer offered me some tea; I refused it but he forced me to say thank you. After this incident I decided to secretly leave the farm. When Michael left the room in the morning I jumped up, took my belongings and ran on to the road where I caught the morning school bus. I travelled back to Bonegilla, where I told the authorities how I was treated. They normally did not accept people returning to the camp but they accepted me. I asked for permission to go to Canberra where father Bachinskas, that I travelled with to Australia, has gone.

The trip to Canberra by train lasted most of the day and when everybody left I looked through the window and saw a sign saying Canberra. I thought it was the April's fool

joke, because it was the first of April 1951; there was no sign of a city. The place seemed deserted. I caught the only bus that went somewhere. It was Sunday afternoon so I travelled around and around until I was told to disembark. I had the address of Father Bachinskas who found me a job and my lodging in a hostel for men called Eastlake near the Government Printing Office where I was to start working. After some weeks I received an offer from Father Bachinskas to buy his bicycle. I had no money so I was paying it off over several weeks.

The mail to Europe in those days took four to six weeks. Everyday we used to check the mail-board near the hostel office. On Sundays Father Bachinskas had a mass at St. Teresa's Church in Causeway. I was again an altar boy like I was on the boat to Australia. In May, Public servant's hostel, Havelock House, was opened. People from Bonegilla were brought to work there and Father Bachinskas asked me to escort them to mass. They were migrant women; one of them was Ada Velan who later became my wife. Ada told me about two Slovenians who were sent to work on the railways. One of them, Ivan Urh, kept in touch with Ada's friend Vera Kos and he was coming to Canberra. I was eagerly awaiting his arrival.

A few months after meeting Ada we looked at a small not very expensive motorbike, Java. We decided to buy it but I did not have enough money for the deposit let alone 240 pounds it cost. Ada graciously agreed to lend me 40 Pounds. I am not sure that this was such a good idea, for she still claims that I owe her this money although I think I repaid it many times over. I had a motorbike licence in Austria but I hardly knew how to ride it. After a few weeks I went to Marulan, the other side of Goulburn where Drago Gračner, my school-mate who travelled to Australia with Ada was supposed to be. When I got there the tent camp was deserted and I was told that he departed for Sydney. I could not locate Drago for more than ten years.

My next job was cleaning the yard in Mulwala House, a public servants' hostel in Reid. I was hoping to get a position in the kitchen, so I would be employed about the same hours as Ada. All the Bonegilla ladies working at the Havelock House were eventually sacked and sent to Sydney because they were not union members. Ada told them, that she had friends in Canberra and did not want to go to Sydney. She was then given a waitress position at Hotel Canberra. The unnecessary transfer of the girls to Sydney showed the utmost stupidity of the union official who only had to ask the girls to pay the membership and the matter would have been settled.

The unions at that time were very powerful and everyone had to be a member. The agreement with the government allowed only a basic wage that was the same for everyone in the same employment and was rather low. I started to look for additional work and finally found a builder, Karl Schreiner, who had a yard at the top of



The Wedding at the Cathedral in Manuka

Lonsdale Street; his firm was the only firm working on Saturdays and he was employing labourers for two Pounds a day on Saturdays. Schreiner, a big and laud man, pointed at individuals and said: you, and you and you. In a little while he came out again and accepted a few more workers. Most of the time he employed us all, unless he remembered from before, that someone was rather awkward and lazy. I kept going to Schreiner on Saturdays for more than a year. Eventually I became a kitchen man in Havelock House.

George Haynod, a friend I met at the hostel, rented a house in Queanbeyan and brought his family from Cowra. Ada and I sometimes paid them a visit and picked up some advice. Soon we were convinced by George that we should buy a block of land in Queanbeyan and build a house. The motorbike was paid off and the land was only 200 pounds so we became the proud owners of a patch of bush outside Queanbeyan with nothing on it. In Queanbeyan we found Kavčič, a Slovenian family and visited them; they told us about Stanko Pevc, who was working in the dining room at the Naval Station at Harman. I found him while he was clearing tables in the seamen's mess. We soon became good friends and I visited him often. Ada worked in Canberra Hotel and I was working in the kitchen at Havelock House when we married on

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1952. The Taxi picked me up and then stopped at Hotel Canberra for Ada. Taxi driver said: "If you only have one car you should at least sit in the front and the bride should sit at the back; that was to keep us separated until we were wed. The wedding at the Manuka cathedral was performed by father Bachinskas. My best man was Stanko Pevc and Ada's bridesmaid was Lina, her workmate. My room at Havelock House served as kitchen and dining room for the wedding reception. Ada cooked the soup the day before and baked a couple of chickens in the morning; she added the trimmings later on a portable cooker. The cooks from Havelock House surprised us with a cake. This very nice and simple marriage lasted up til now which is 55 years and God willing will last forever.

We started building the house and it turned out to be a mistake. Ada was pregnant and had to stop working; we had to find accommodation which was very hard to get. My wages were small and what I earned was spent on the new house, leaving us no money for bare necessities. Soon we were not welcome where we rented the room because the baby was on the way. After Cvetko's birth Ada just did not want to return from the hospital to the same place. The only alternative accommodation we could find was an empty garage in Queanbeyan that had nothing but a wooden stove in the corner and an outside tap. The Tulta-door did not fit properly and the air inside was colder than outside. Behind the garage was another empty room and when winter came it was cold and getting colder. Never again were we so poor and never did I see anybody else in such a desperate plight as we were for Christmas 1952 and onwards in 1953. I had to look for more acceptable accommodation. Stanko helped us out with a two hundred dollars loan that tied us over a few months. I eventually found a room in Westlake in a wooden cottage that was just as cold as the garage in Queanbeyan. Those houses were originally built in Canberra for workers and have been demolished later for the embassy area. One of them was owned by Jack Smith, an old Australian tight as a shoe-string. He would not allow the radiator to be used and we had no money for wood in the kitchen stove that would not have warmed the baby in the bedroom anyway. Again we were in search for better accommodation. Almost by the end of winter we got a room from Ada's Polish friend Anna Musik in O'Connor. This change was worth more than a thousand dollars in the bank that we did not have anyway.

One Saturday at Schreiner's I saw a man that was in charge of a group that he took to a building site. I soon suspected that he could be Ivan Urh. I asked him where he was from. He replied with a question: 'Do you know where Ljubljana is?' I then replied: 'We can then speak Slovenian.' He did not seem as excited as I was but we did become lifelong friends.

About that time I had an unpleasant experience at Schreiner's. Most of the people that were employed there were from Eastern Europe and they spoke either a broken mixture of Slav languages or German, since all of them arrived through Germany or Austria. I vaguely remember a small lad of rather dark complexion who later on turned out to be a Slovenian, Lojze Risa. I did not come to know him at the time but years later he accused me in the Slovenian club that I did not want to speak Slovenian when we were at Schreiners. That was quite unfair because I was looking for Slovenians all the time. He simply did not appear to be Slovenian and he did not introduce himself. I must admit that I preferred to speak German which I spoke well rather than a Slav mixture that did not represent anybody. Months later Ada and I found Ludvig Kerec and his wife with two adolescent daughters and they were the only other Slovenians in Canberra and Queanbeyan I was able to locate.

With another child on the way and only on a motorbike Ada and I could not travel far. When John was born Ada nursed him between her and me and I had Cvetko sitting on the petrol tank in front of me. After a considerable time, with much sweat and toil, we have built a concrete deck over the garage in Queanbeyan. It was many months on the market and was finally sold pretty cheaply. Only then were we able to buy a Holden, model 1949 that cost us 790 pounds. I think that it was very expensive for a second-hand car, but cars then were very hard to get. For a new car it was necessary to wait for many months and even years. All in all we were finally able to travel more comfortably and especially much safer.

My restless spirit eventually landed me a job as a labourer with Jennings. Here I met several German carpenters that the firm recruited mainly in Bavaria because of the shortage of tradesman in Australia. I befriended several of them as they also lived isolated in hostels and I could easily converse with them. When they formed an association and later build a club-house I was keen to learn how it is done. I was very conscious that there were not enough Slovenians in Canberra to form an association but should the numbers eventually increase I wanted to know how to go about it.

We lived for about one year at Ainslie in a shed with Frank Ortner, who was also one of the German carpenters. After a wait of three years we finally received a government house to rent. The world and the life changed for us. We felt grateful; with new furniture bought on a deposit and with our own car we just felt on top of the world and finally Australia became our home. The children were quickly growing up. Cvetko went to St Brigid primary school; John followed soon after; Barbara and Vivien were born about that time to complete our family. Young families these days move into new houses fitted out with all the luxuries and comforts that we could not even dream about. Many modern appliances were not even available at that time and they would have been beyond our reach anyway.

Eventually we received Slovenian monthly magazine 'Misli' and our horizons widened. We learned more about Slovenian life in Australia. Misli were published in Sydney by two Franciscan Fathers that came from Lemont, USA. We did not meet the first two Fathers, who soon returned to America, but we heard more about Father Pivko who arrived later from China, where he worked as a missionary. After a few years he left the order and was replaced by Father Bernard Ambrožič also from United States. In Misli we read about Rev. Father Dr. Ivan Mikula who was stationed in Perth. He was expected to move to Sydney and attend to spiritual needs of Slovenians spread all over Eastern Australia.

One Saturday Ada and I went to a dance in Queanbeyan organized by the German Club. We were rather isolated but enjoyed the European atmosphere. During the evening we observed two couples that seemed familiar but we were too shy to approach them. They were Ana and Ferdo Strehar and Marija and Ivan Urbas who came for the dance from Cooma and we met sometimes later. We also met Father Mikula. He was always ready to seek out people that he could invite to his masses. At the dance he was looking for Austrians, since he was a Slovenian from Austria himself, or for any other Catholic that he could make contact with.

Father Mikula soon became our regular guest when in Canberra. When he arrived his first job was writing invitations for the mass that he would have in a day or two. He obtained the addresses from Father Bernard who used them for mailing Misli. He also collected addresses of anyone he met. When I came from work he asked me to take him around Canberra by car from one address to the other. Sometimes we would find people at home and we would be invited in but many times we had to leave the invitations in the letter-box. This is how I met most of the Slovenians in Canberra. Often we delivered letters at night. Originally Father Mikula came every month but later on he ventured out on longer trips, even up to Queensland, which made his visits less frequent. He organised a visit by Father Bernard Ambrožič from Sydney who came to celebrate his Golden ordination jubilee; I was Dr Mikula's main assistant. It was at St Patrick's in Braddon and at the time the biggest Slovenian gathering in Canberra.



The visit with Dr Mikula at Family Bresnik

Father Mikula introduced us to families Bresnik and Habor who were the parents of Jožica Bresnik. Frank Bresnik impressed us mostly with his impeccable writing and also with his painting skills. Frank is a big man and has a strong voice. He could be heard singing and praying out loud until sister Francka Žižek told him to pray in tune with others. He was employed as a waiter at Rex Motel in Dixon and as a

hobby he was an amateur photographer in the shopping centres around Canberra. Frank was a well organised artistic person; he had a colourful display of drinks in his liquor cabinet at home. It seemed odd that even after several visits he would not offer us any of them. Eventually we realised that the drinks were probably coloured water arranged in a rainbow of colours. A year or so after we met Bresniks they moved to a house in Campbell. On a visit with Urh we noticed that the family spoke German what was rather a surprise if not a shock. Bresniks eventually moved to a corner shop in Queanbeyan. This was a difficult financial decision for them so I advanced them a couple hundred dollars for our future purchases in their shop.

After my arrival in Canberra I contacted Mohorjeva družba in Celovec for the yearly issue of books with a Calender that they published. I offered to distribute them to Slovenians in the district. This gave me another opportunity to approach and meet Slovenians.

In Sydney, a new newspaper "Žar", was published by Ljanko Urbančič and Vlado Menart on behalf of a Slovenian organization. Ljanko and Vlado held positions of authority with the Snowy Mountains scheme; as a condition on which they employed Slovenian workers they demanded from Slovenian workers a donation of 10 Pounds for a future Slovenian organization. This contribution turned out to be for Žar. Some people greatly objected to this and called it exploitation, but this is always the case, when people have to contribute for anything.

At much the same time a political split developed in Slovenian Club Sydney between the supporters and opponents of the Communist regime in Slovenia. Eventually we heard that a new Club Triglav emerged. The arguing made Slovenians all over Australia apprehensive about all club activities.

While employed by Joe Larko Pty. Ltd in 1957 I injured my back and had to be operated on. I was declared unfit for work and was paid a weekly compensation, which was pretty low. After some months the insurance firm stopped paying me compensation. I had to do something else to feed the family. My only option was to start a gang of concreters that I could supervise but not work physically. Having an income stopped me getting compensation from the insurance company even though I had to put up with an injury for years. This was a blessing in disguise because I

became a builder. With Joe Larko P/L I worked my way up to a position of a foreman and I was able to obtain a building licence; I began building houses and that greatly improved things for us.

About that time a big Ford station wagon stopped on our drive. Father

0



The first visit in Slovenia in June 1962

Bernard Ambrožič and a new Franciscan friar were in the heavy loaded wagon. The newly arrived priest was Father Bazilij Valentin. He just came from Lemont, USA and was on his way to Melbourne to start a new Slovenian centre in Kew. In fact he was the initiator of the Slovenian centre in Kew with the church, the hall and the old people's home of Sister Romana. Fortunately we had some chickens in the yard and Ada made them a quick dinner. They had to leave just as quickly as they arrived.

In 1961 after I built and sold a few houses I began thinking of a holiday in Slovenia. My two sisters at home convinced me, that I had nothing to fear from the communists. Ada became pregnant so we had to postpone the visit for one year. We found out about the new ocean-liner called Canberra that was on its maiden voyage around the world. It was to depart from Southampton for Australia and return from Sydney on the 20 of May in 1962 and then travel past Wellington in New Zealand, to Honolulu and Los Angeles, through Panama Canal past Curacao and on to Southampton. This seemed a perfect schedule even though it was a little early for us. Ada was not enthusiastic about the travel but I booked the voyage just the same. I was able to arrange the transport for our new station wagon Holden, which would only cost as much as a passenger's ticket. Taking the car on the ship was the only way with a little baby. The children could travel for half fare and the baby would be free of charge. We were eagerly awaiting the arrival of our fourth child. Vivien finally arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1962 and was christened by Father Mikula just a week before our departure for Slovenia. The trip was a delightful experience even though Ada is still complaining about it. We were all still reasonably young so my reunion with the family was a real pleasure.

On the return trip in 1963 my sister Maria obtained a Yugoslav passport to accompany us to Italy. I did not suspect that her intention was not to return to Slovenia. When I learned about it I decided to leave her temporarily with our cousin Stefan Falez in Rome. We did not find him home but fortunately I knew the Migration Officer at the Australian Embassy in Rome, Mr Brian Martin and his family. They were

kind enough to take Maria in, at five in the morning, when we hurried on to catch the ship in Naples. Marija eventually made it to Hotel Bled, owned by Vinko Levstik in Rome, where she stayed until Mr Martin was able to arrange her passage to Australia. He often boasted that Marija was the 'fastest' migrant ever going to Australia, only made possible by him.



Again together in Australia in 1965

On our return to Australia I began building again on my own; money was tight but things were improving until bankruptcy ceased to be a daily worry. After a few years the government in Canberra begun to release the land in packages which made the blocks a little cheaper. I was afraid to go it on my own and I discussed the purchase with Rudi Kaltner. We agreed to buy a parcel of six blocks and share them. After talking to the solicitor, he suggested to make a partnership as every other option would be considerably more difficult. Transferring the land was against the law until the land was developed. So I became a partner in a building firm even though I was building before on my own for nearly ten years.

Sister Marija arrived in Canberra a few months after our return. Soon after sister Cvetka arrived with her four children and mum and dad arrived in early 1964.

A constant trickle of Slovenians to Canberra increased the size of the Slovenian community. Because Slovenians were good tradesmen many of them became employed in the building industry; several of them worked for our firm F & K Builders Pty Ltd. By then Slovenians gathered regularly for the monthly Slovenian masses read by Father Valerij Jenko, who was the new priest from USA in Sydney. I knew all Slovenians that came to mass but not those that stayed away.

One day in June of 1964 two strangers Vlado Skerbinšek and Miha Hočevor (now called Hovar) came up our driveway in Ainslie. They handed me a letter and explained that they are inviting people to a meeting to establish a Slovenian Association. I was flabbergasted because I was still convinced that we were too few to start an organization. Besides, I was hurt because I was not informed and included in the venture. I have so far put a lot of time into gathering, informing and organising Slovenians in Canberra and here I was approached by some people that did not even exist, as far as I was concerned. The meeting was called for the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1964 in the Methodist Hall in Barton. Until then we met as a community several times in the catholic school or catholic hall and church and now a completely new location was found, one we had nothing to do with. Still I, my friends and relatives attended the meeting. I think that at the meeting the main table was occupied by Miha Hovar, Vlado Skerbinšek and someone else. How many people were present I do not know but Miha Hovar states there were 36 of us.

Even though minutes and records of the Association's activities were kept in the cupboards in the Club for over 30 years they were taken to the rubbish tip by late Miro Penca while he was president in the early eighties. This came to my notice when I asked Mrs Maria Valenci to look up some records, when she was president in 1998. She replied with a question: "What records? Miro Penca loaded them up on his pickup when he was president." Why? Who knows why he did it and if the Committee was in agreement with him? Was anyone jealous of the exceptionally

good record and performance that the Slovenian Association of Canberra had or was someone ashamed of the role he played during our rivalries?

People that started the Slovenian Association in Canberra were Vlado Skerbinšek, Miha Hočev, Adolf Rot, Ivan Kink, Ivan Telič, and possibly a few more. They regularly gathered for drinks in the hostel and discussed the formation of a club and evidently decided on the motion. Unfortunately I can shed no light on their activities as most of them were not known to me at the time.

On the day of the meeting Vlado Skerbinšek was confirmed as chairman of the meeting, but could not run it; in fact very few people knew how a meeting should be run. After some fruitless talk I moved that we form an association. When this was agreed to I again moved that a committee be elected. Skerbinšek, Ivan Urh and I, were proposed for the position of president. Vlado Skerbinšek was elected with Urh and me receiving the same number of votes. Again I proposed that Ivan Urh be vice president and Franc Bresnik be the secretary. Someone then recommended me for the treasurer's position. I do not recall the rest of the committee, except to say that Frank Hribar, Janez Tadina, Miha Hovar and Ivan Kink were members. We immediately decided to meet in a few days for the first committee meeting at Hribar's residence in Campbell.

The first meeting made no progress. We argued about everything and could not agree on anything. After proposing many motions I told the president that he has to have the motions discussed and either accept or reject them. He would not accept my advice. After a confrontation president Skerbinšek said that he is the president, like Tito, who makes the proposals and we must accept them. That was naturally too much to accept and a lot of arguing and even yelling took place. The president left the meeting. I immediately moved that Ivan Urh takes over the presidency and that we convene another meeting. I think that the next meeting was again held at Hribar's home and after that we tried to rotate them between committee members. We soon agreed on the basics of how to run the club. We discussed who would do what work and the amount charged for membership and how to collect it and how to organize the functions that were coming up. St. Nicholas function, the New Years dance and masked ball for Shrove Tuesday were our immediate concern. We also talked about the name and the registration as well as the constitution for the association. The meetings gave us a lot of work and also a lot of pleasure. Often we sat till the early hours of the morning being in no hurry to go home. Some wives were not too happy about this and Mrs Bresnik was the first one to insist that we hold the meetings at their home or in the little office next to their shop in Queanbeyan.

With December approaching I took on the organization of a traditional St. Nicholas. I got permission to use a classroom at St Patrick's school in Braddon; I was a close

friend with parish priest Father Favier whom I often contacted for the use of the church for mass when Slovenian priests visited. There were not many children available at the time and I still know them all. It was Tabo and Nelka Kopič, Ingrid Urh, Andrej and Alenka Lavrenčič, Jožmarie, Franki and Michael Bresnik and Cvetki, Johny, Barbara and Vivien Falež. Those that were learning an instrument were asked to play it. Those that could not play were asked to learn a poem for Miklavž. The children dressed up as angels or devils with great enthusiasm and I acted as Miklavž. I have no doubt that most of you will think that that was no special feat, but everything had to be made, including the vestments for angels, devils and especially Miklavž with a mitre. Most of such performances are organised by several people that cooperate and join in. At that time I was on my own.

The organization of the New Year dance was again mainly in my hands, except the hire of the Tennis Hall in Manuka. It would be much easier if we shared the work. I had to hire the tables and chairs that had to be transported from Fyshwick. I took on the purchase of beer, wine and spirits from a pub in Queanbeyan where I also hired the glasses. I even arranged the paper table cloth for the tables and the flowers on the tables. The flowering peaches were still blooming white and red and I decided to stain some of them blue, so the flowers would represent the Slovenian flag on the tables. Ada still laughs at my painting of flowers. I asked the ladies for help in the kitchen and for food, which included bread, sausages, cabbage and strudel. Many other little things had to be taken care of. I was the fool who did it all. Frank Bresnik brought the lottery prices and somebody organised the musicians.

The evening started well enough but some time before midnight an argument started between young men. The argument changed to a fight and Miha Valenciimmerged with a bloody face. His rival in love was a little stocky fellow who wanted to break up the dance, as often happens in Slovenia. I was concerned for our reputation. Liqueur licence was hard to get and if we wanted to continue with our activities we had to remain respectable. The majority of guests understood the consequences and eventually we were able to calm the situation. The licence expired at twelve o'clock and half an hour later everything had to be still and everyone gone home. This was not easy as many were in high spirits and intoxicated from alcohol and enthusiasm. We decided to lock up and return in the morning to clean up. Only a few of us turned up. Those that have been absent for the preparation were also missing for cleaning. One of the men complained because I collected the full bottles to return them for credit. He insisted that at a dance in Sydney they shared everything that was left over. I was concerned about the bank-balance; I also tried to avoid any opportunity for gossip that someone took more than they should. Such rumours were going around other Slovenian clubs.

With a few hundred dollars in the club's account I was eager to convince as many Slovenians as possible to join the Association. The Committee decided on an entry fee of ten pounds and a yearly membership fee of the same amount. I approached as many Slovenians as possible to join. Those working for our firm had no chance to escape, especially when they collected their pay. In the first year we gathered approximately fifty to sixty members some of them being of other nationalities. Most of them were again those working for our firm, Rudi Kaltner being one of the first.

To boost our income we regularly organized dances for New Year, for Shrovetide, Easter Monday, Mothers Day, Annual Dance and Vine harvest. We also prepared children's concerts for Mother's Day and St Nicholas Day. We held one or two picnics a year. These activities went on for over six years before the club was completed; it took many hours and much energy of many people, especially while we had no premises and everything had to be arranged in rented halls or other clubs. I wish to express my gratitude to everyone that helped and sacrificed many hours in voluntary work. It would be impossible for me to recount how many hours and telephone calls and how many car trips it took to organise all these events. We did not all contribute equally. It might not be appropriate to say that my family contributed the most but then no one else has ever said it and even if it seems boastful it should be recorded for history's sake. Unfortunately some members hardly lifted a finger.

The organization was successfully run by Ivan Urh for two years while I was eagerly collecting the money. We banked proximately 1,500 pounds yearly. After the change of currency this was over six thousand dollars in the bank. These days it seems very little but weekly wage then was below one hundred dollars. Toward the end of 1967 Ivan Urh did not wish to continue as president and I was elected in his position.

At the beginning the committee kept in touch with members by an information sheet. It took almost four years for the first club bulletin to emerge. Frank Bresnik, as the secretary of the Association, seemed the most appropriate person to take on the position of the editor. He insisted that the bulletin be named 'Pavliha', named after a Slovenian humorous paper. Pavliha was perhaps appropriate for the content it produced even though I was never satisfied with the name. I must explain that Frank's Slovenian was not the best, nor was mine for that matter. Eventually I started to edit some articles until I became responsible for the bulletin. When we received the first sketches of the proposed club-house from the architect; the design was to portray Triglav the highest mountain in Slovenia. Frank produced a magnificent logo that we used for the heading of the new Clubs-bulletin. At the same time I was able to persuade the committee to name the bulletin Triglav. The bulletin was typed on a stencil and then copied by hand on a friend's machine that took me many hours. The modern copying machines were not available then.

We tried to make the organisation legal and incorporated. Our solicitor Fred Barker who also became a member gave me all the legal advice and instructions. We needed a set of rules that would be acceptable to the members and to the authorities. Since I was acquainted with the German Club's rules that were written in German and English I proposed to the committee that we translate them and adopt them. Once this was accepted I was given the privilege to translate them with the help of Olga Telič.

Eventually the rules were printed by Simon's Špacapan's printing firm in Melbourne. Frank Bresnik designed a nice front cover and eventually we were given a certificate that we were registered as the Slovenian Australian Association of Canberra Incorporated and so became a legal body that could trade, borrow money and apply for a building block.

During my presidency the rules had to be accepted by the membership at a half-yearly general meeting that was held in the German club Harmony at Narrabundah. The rules had a clause that the Association must not be political or religious and we all agreed on. The main objections came from Ivan Urbas, with the claim that we are aligning ourselves too closely to Germans by adopting the German Constitution. But the German club constitution was adopted from another ethnic club in the first place. Urbas further insisted that the Association should not allow membership to the clergy and that they should not be present at meetings of the Association. This was interesting because Father Mikula was present. Urbas had considerable support. I strongly objected and claimed that every Slovenian should be welcome otherwise we would have difficulty building the club-house and we would also have difficulty in keeping it functional after its completion. I concluded that I had no interest in an Association that would exclude Slovenians for their religious beliefs and that I have no further interest in building a club-house that would oppress its own members. After a hectic argument I resigned as president and later submitted my reasons in writing. The presidency was temporally taken over by Ivan Urbas.

At the next yearly general meeting Ivan Urh again took on the presidency. As the building of the club was on the horizon a building committee was formed and I was elected president of it. The responsibility of this body, which was still part of the general committee, was to obtain a block of land, prepare the plans and arrange everything necessary for the building to commence. With Ivan Urh leading the Association I was hopeful that the ideological dispute with Urbas could be minimised. My personal endeavours were to contact individual firms and subcontractors to supply us with materials at a reduced price or carry out contracting at a low price or even next to no charge when we commence building. As an active builder I was able to negotiate with Builders Supply Co-Operative for all the building materials at a

reduced price. Stegbar Windows offered a friendly price for all the windows and doors. P. C. Items and Tiles Company gave us a very good deal on tiles. In fact all the firms and subcontractors that F & K Builders used or traded with were very kind and willing to help with attractive prices.

The Committee decided to contact every known Slovenian in Canberra and Queanbeyan to become a member. The two Sečko brothers became members only a short time before. In pairs we visited other Slovenian families that were potential members. Frank Čulek and I visited most of our people. At the same time we asked them how much in money or voluntary labour would they be prepared to contribute when we commence building the club? All the pledges were recorded. Generally we were successful and received good cooperation. When we visited Bert Pribac, who moved from Melbourne only a year or so earlier, we could not convince him to become a member. At the next committee meeting Frank Sečko told us to leave it to him. Indeed he was successful in a reasonably short time. Frank Sečko was a Lutheran and Pribac has changed from a catholic to a protestant only a few years ago so I believe that Frank's success was based on this common ground.

We continued with dances and cultural activities. I arranged the dances at different venues from O'Donnell Youth Centre to the Albert Hall and German Club. Someone else arranged a couple of dances at the Croatian Clubs in Deakin and O'Connor while I was absent. In 1970 Frank Sečko became the president and someone in the Croatian club called him a communist and it sparked a confrontation. I was not present but later I had to mediate by mail. Frank Sečko was apparently already known to the Croatians as a Yugoslav Communist.

Arranging the musicians for dances became my responsibility. Preparing and cleaning of halls after the dances were supposed to be done by all committee members but few turned up. My family, Lojze Risa, Miha Valenci and Franc Čulek were faithful helpers. We also had to print and distribute entry tickets; we expected every committee member to sell at least ten tickets. Some sold them all, some sold a few, and a few returned them all, indicating that they were not even coming themselves. This was distressing to me, since I usually distributed thirty, forty and even fifty tickets and sometimes donated them so people would come.

By this time we were looking for an architect for the club. We approached a Slovenian draftsman but he demanded a fee of six hundred dollars which was not acceptable. Eventually I found a young Ukrainian architect that was prepared to draw the basic plans for 200 dollars. His first sketches were enthusiastically acceptable by everyone.

The Department of Capitol Territory was the authority that granted the lease for the land but the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was responsible for

allotting the land; they would determine if we were eligible and if we could fulfil their requirements. My argument to them was that most of our members are good tradesmen employed in the building industry and would do everything on voluntary bases.

Once the plans were drawn and approved by the club committee and by the membership the plans were ready to be submitted to NCDC for a preliminary perusal. Only after a provisional approval was I able to commence negotiating for a building site. No other person offered to be involved. I was at NCDC doorstep every few days with a new request or a new proposal.

The first building site was offered in Jamison at Belconnen that was at the time still undeveloped. I rejected it, because I wished to obtain a site in the centre of the city. I was asking for a site that is the City-Park today, so no wonder I was brushed off. I should explain that at that time the Association only had about 12,000 dollars and about one hundred members. With these resources we could hardly develop a prominent site in the centre of the city. I had to moderate my demands. The next offer was at the top of Narrabundah, at that time in a never land. Hindmarsh was only commenced. The following offer was at Mawson shopping centre. This site was certainly not suitable for the plans we had prepared. The block of land was in a row of clubs. Next offer was again in Narrabundah in the vicinity of the German club. This site would have certainly been rejected by people who objected to be close to Germans. Finally a site was available in Woden, the site that I immediately considered acceptable. Not that it was so obvious then. Just a few weeks earlier seven people drowned only a couple hundred meters away. The roads were still under construction and during a downpour several cars were washed away by the flood. The site was under water for a few days and I was not sure that the members would accept it. Yet the site for the club had several positive aspects. It was situated next to a sport oval and a parking area, very close to the proposed district town centre. It was nearly in the geographic centre of Canberra, with a direct route to Queanbeyan. It was a corner block that would perfectly suit the club design. For all these reasons I was happy for having rejected all the previous offers. My choice must have been good for no one ever complained about it.

Around July 1970 I submitted the plans for final approval and filled out the request for a building permit with all other required forms.

More or less straight after that Ada, the two girls and I departed for Slovenia for a three months holiday. I did not want the building project to be held up so I handed a folder to Frank Sečko, the then president, with copies of the plans, specification and all other relevant information and papers. He was himself a partner in ACT Builders Pty. Ltd. involved with many large projects, like government schools and similar. I

asked Frank to commence building as soon as the plans were approved by the Department.

When we returned after three month nothing was done. Frank explained that the Department asked for the engineering calculations and because they did not exist, he had to go to his engineer to have them made. His engineer did not only make new calculations but he also designed a completely new steel structure. I asked Frank why he did not follow my instructions from the folder that I left him. He did not even remember the folder. It took a couple more months and a few telephone calls until the plans were approved and we were ready for building.

My sons Florian and John were my right hand from the first day after we begun building the clubhouse. They helped me with setting out the building and Joe Patafta dug out the trenches with his backhoe free of charge. The site had considerable amount of fill and the trenches had to go right through the fill to natural ground. In some places this was as deep as two meters but in some places it was just normal depth. Jože Penca helped us cleaning the trenches and several members helped with concreting. It was ready for the bricklayers early in December 1970.

In January 1971, Lojz Kavaš set the first bricks; he lifted one corner to give as an indication what it would look like. The corners were sloping inwards considerably and we had no indication how it would work or even look. The rest of bricklaying had to wait for the erection of timber frames and the erection of the steel construction that was done by a Slovenian steel manufacturer from Victoria. He has done a magnificent job at a reasonable price. He deserves our thanks.

The drainage was done by Miro Benčič, an Istrian, free of charge. For this he later received an honorary membership. A few of us helped with minor tasks, but laying the pipes was all done by Miro.

At the time Canberra enjoyed full employment and many hours of overtime were available. Especially on Saturdays people were able to work for their bosses for nearly double the pay. Everyone needs a rest so asking people to come and work on the club on Sundays, was not easy. Still, week after week I was on the phone asking and pleading with bricklayers and others to help. A few people came on Saturdays and my sons and I were always with them, Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year. During the week I was often preparing and arranging club matters leaving my partner Rudi to run our firm. The only compensation I could offer Rudi was a free honorary membership of the Slovenian Association. I have been later often criticized for offering an honorary membership to foreigners.

It was difficult to get bricklayers; making timber frames and placing joints to the flat roofs and setting up windows and door frames was done with relative ease while the bricklaying proceeded.

The roof was the most demanding work; we were very lucky that Miha Hovar and Adolf Rot undertook to cover the roof with ceiling panels, insulation and metal sheets. It took Adolf and Miha over a fortnight to complete the work and I was there at their side, helping where I could, every day. Franc Sabotič with his gang of concreters made the floor. A few doors had to be hanged to bring the building to a lock up stage. After concrete was cured we commenced with the parquetry.

At the yearly general meeting and the election of the new committee I became the president again, mainly in recognition for my efforts in building the clubhouse. Most members were very cooperative and helpful. At this meeting we decided to levy a minimum contribution on every Slovenian in Canberra, who wanted to become a member. Every male member would be asked to contribute forty hours of work or donate one hundred dollars. Slovenian females and all members of other nationalities were exempt from this levy. We sent a letter to all Slovenians informing them about this decision; we also asked them to let the Association know of any difficulties so they could be excused from the obligation. Many already contributed much more than the basic levy.

Soon after the letters were sent out the Committee received an angry two page letter from Bert Pribac. He wrote that the committee had no right to make such demands since it received the block of land free of charge. He wrote that this would prevent other Slovenians to become Foundation members if they come to Canberra later. This was illogical since Foundation members are always those that help to establish an Association. In conclusion Bert Pribac resigned from the Association and kept away for several years.

The building advanced but the money was running out. We banked with the Scottish-New Zealand Bank where we were promised a loan at the appropriate time. The time has now arrived and the manager told me that he cannot assist us. This was a mean trick for we banked with the bank for over five years and I was a customer for many years myself. I closed my account and moved to the National Bank in Woden. The Association did likewise; we immediately applied for a loan of 40,000 dollars. The manager tried to increase the number of bank customers and wanted individual members to sign guaranties for the loan. A few of us signed.

Most of the carpentry, the kitchen and the bar were finished by members. Tiling in the bathrooms and plumbing was done by sub-contractors that worked for F. & K. Builders. Frank Bresnik's contribution was a mural Bled. Frank deserved and received a lot of recognition for his contribution. I loaned him a folder of an album that had a

beautiful picture of Bled on it; I am still waiting to put my record back into that folder.

Marjan Koren and Roman Divjak did an enormous job of fitting the lights and other utensils primarily in the kitchen and the bar; electrical wiring was done earlier by Janez Penca and Nick Direw. Janez Černe looked after sound installations and special lighting. With so many Slovenian painters in Canberra one would have thought it would be easy but Polde Bajt and Tony Grlj did it nearly single-handed. I still wonder why some people have so much to give while others stand idly looking on and perhaps even criticise.

Around the time of the general meeting in 1971 Frank Bresnik returned from his trip to Slovenia. He announced that the ensemble Lojze Slak will come to Australia in the following year. This gave us great pleasure, since the club would be completed and we could make it a memorable occasion. He insisted that we call a meeting of the Slovenian clubs in Australia to discuss the tour and the preparation for it. I saw no difficulty with that and the Club and the Committee also approved of it. In October 1971 the representatives of Slovenian associations arrived in Canberra for the meeting in our uncompleted clubhouse. Slovenian Association Sydney was represented by Dušan Lajovic and Mr. Ovijač; Melbourne was represented by Marjan Peršič and Mr. Česnik; Adelaide was represented by its president, whose name I do not know. Canberra was represented by Ivan Urh, Frank Bresnik and I. As we sat down for the meeting Lojze Košorok came with a friend uninvited and said that they represented Club Triglav from Sydney.

I was confirmed as chairman; we had two major items on the agenda. The first was the formation of a Federation of Slovenian Associations of Australia (Zveza slovenskih društev v Avstraliji -ZSDA) and the visit of Ensemble Slak. We were all in favour of a Slovenian Federation and I was elected president. Marjan Peršič said that Club Triglav is not a legitimate Association; since it is wholly owned and affiliated to a Pty. Ltd. Company that is owned by shareholders, who control the elections of the Triglav committee. The president, vice-president, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer and vice-treasurer, in fact the majority of the committee is not elected but named by the Company. The question of Club Triglav was discussed at length and finally left to the new secretary of ZSDA, Marjan Peršič to enquire into the matter and report back at the following meeting. Marjan Peršič reported after several weeks that Triglav is not a legitimate Slovenian Association and was therefore not eligible to become a member of ZSDA.

At the meeting Frank Bresnik produced a letter informing us that Slovenska izseljenska Matica (Slovenian Emigrant Society) will bring the Ensemble Slak to Australia. With them would also be Matej Bor, who was a prominent Slovenian

communist. Ivan Urh was sitting next to Frank and he noticed that the letter was addressed to: President Franc Bresnik. Frank was not the president.

Matica was established by ex-members of UDBA - Yugoslav interior police. Yugoslavia at the time strictly controlled its borders and only the most trusted communists were permitted to have contacts with emigrants and people outside the borders. After the war Tito said that anyone who escaped was a criminal. Matica now had to neutralise the escapees; they tried to bribe us with music and dance, "potica in klobase". We escaped their stick so they now offered us a carrot. All the presidents of Matica through the years, as far as I know, were UDBA members. For this reasons it was not logical to cooperate with them.

Father Bazilij Valentin from Melbourne warned us that Matica will try to infiltrate the Slovenian community in Australia. We realised that we would have to accept Matica's representatives if we wanted the performance of the Ensemble but we wanted Matica to stay in the background. We did not want to become a political football so the meeting decided that I as the president of the Federation convey this to the visitors at the airport in Sydney upon their arrival.

Bresnik was given the role of a coordinator. The guests were to travel around Australia by plane and a charge account for the tickets would be opened with Qantas. All the moneys received for their performances were to be paid into the "Slak Account" at the National Bank of Australia with co-signatories Bresnik and Falež. This money was to be used for the expenses incurred and the remaining funds were to go to the Ensemble at the conclusion of the tour. Qantas had a special deal that made every 16<sup>th</sup> ticket free of charge. There were 14 people in the entourage. Frank and I were 15 and 16 and so would travel with the visitors at no extra cost. All this was discussed and agreed on.

The time before Christmas was an opportunity for the Slovenian Club in Canberra to raise funds by hosting Christmas parties for other organizations. We still had to finish the landscaping and cleaning, putting up curtains and laying floor coverings. The kitchen was to be in the capable hands of Marija and Vinko Osolnik. The liquor licence was held by Frank Bresnik. The opening was fast approaching and the pressure on me was tremendous for I was never before in hospitality business. Buying tables and chairs, pots and pans, plates and cutlery, glasses and hundred and one thing, including the drinks for the bar was a big order. The liquor licence left it all to me.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1971 we opened the doors; all those who helped bring the project to completion were present; the solicitor, the architect, the bank manager and a few public servants mixed with the tradesmen and our own faithful and helpful workers. In a short speech I thanked and congratulated everybody for their generous

help and tremendous achievement. We all enjoyed a generous banquet, lot of drinks and pleasant company.

The Association employed a barmaid from ten in the morning till six in the evening. From six to early hours in the mornings the committee members took over the bar as volunteers and the doors seldom closed before midnight. Business was pretty hectic and at the beginning the club was open seven days a week with a dance every Saturday and Sunday. Those that could not work in the bar were asked to be at the door to oversee the visitors. We were young and happy in each other's company so most people were willing to pitch in.

Besides general management of the club my big duty was the security of the club. I was often thrown out of bed by the security men calling me to come and lock up a door or two that was left open. I did that for several years. The club had a mortgage but our debt did not include the purchase of freezers and beer installation, the furniture, the kitchen equipment and the bar supplies, that was all purchased with an overdraft. We were all happy including the bank that the trade went so well.

Slak Ensemble arrived in February. The club rented the main auditorium in Civic for the concert; advertisements were placed in the Canberra Times and on television. Tickets were sold. I called a meeting to discuss last minute concerns. We decided to billet the guests among club members and I accepted the president and the secretary of Matica.

Janez Penca who was a friend of Embassy's secretary asked about the tickets for the Yugoslav Embassy personnel. We decided to reserve a row of seats in the front of the theatre for them but they would have to purchase the tickets like everybody else. If Matica wanted to have them as guests they could refund them the money. The tickets were stored in a desk draw in the office for when they wanted to buy them.

I felt that as the president I had to welcome the Ensemble so I travelled to Sydney. Members of Club Triglav already arranged a large room for the reception. I made a short welcoming speech and added that ZSDA accepts Matica as our guests but we wished to focus on the Ensemble Slak. The president of Matica said in reply that Matica came for a visit and brought the Ensemble as a gift to Australian Slovenians. I expected Lojze Slak to reply but he retreated. We boarded the bus for Canberra where I asked Lojze Slak to plant a linden tree in front of the club. Almost immediately the whole entourage with a few club members led by Frank Bresnik boarded the bus and left for the Yugoslav Embassy. I was asked to join them but I declined. The musicians were very well received in the hired hall in Civic. In the third row were the people from the Embassy. I deposited the proceeds from the concert in the special bank account.

The following morning we all departed for Adelaide. The club was a wooden hall as often seen in Australia at that time. It was the first Slovenian building erected only a few months before the Club in Canberra. It was built with the legacy of a deceased Slovenian that left everything to the Adelaide Association. The club was filled to the brim and the people were hanging out the doors. People were jubilant and dancing went on late into the night. After the concert I was handed a check and promptly banked it while still in Adelaide.

The following morning we left for Geelong. Bresnik was in a joyous mood dominating the scene, quite happily responding to the title of president. I was chatting with some local people without being recognised either as the president of the Federation or the president of the Slovenian Club in Canberra. The people's main concern was the music and the musicians, who quickly made friends with the local girls.

In Melbourne the story was much the same. Ivo Leber was running the show and he brightened the visit with a few parties. The group stayed in Melbourne several days and we made excursions to different locations. On the way to Philip Island I was sitting on my own in the bus when Janez, one of the singers, joined me and said: "You seem a little lonesome." I said: "Yes." He continued: "So am I. They are all communists and we have nothing in common." Janez left the Ensemble some years later and I was able to find him near Škofja Loka, when I was in Slovenia in 1991 and we recalled the ups and downs of that visit.

We went on to Tasmania for one day only. There were only a couple of dozens of Slovenians. From Sydney I decided to return home. I was isolated and could not take it anymore. The group continued to Brisbane and Mt. Isa. Mirko Cuderman, then president in Brisbane, told me that they approached him straight after arrival saying that there can only be streamers but no Slovenian flag. They knew that our Clubs, except Triglav, refused to have a communist star on the Slovenian flag.

When I returned to Canberra I checked on the tickets intended for the Embassy staff. There were neither tickets nor money in the drawer. At the following committee meeting I raised the question about them and eventually it was revealed that Janez Penca, who was the secretary of the Association, handed them to Embassy people free of charge. The committee in Canberra, at that time was stacked with Yugoslav sympathisers and no one was prepared to reprimand Penca for acting against the committee's decision.

The Slak tour was to end with a concert and a dance in the Canberra club. The club was fully booked and decorated for the occasion. Next day, on Sunday was a mass in the church close by and people were talking that the Slak's boys would sing for the occasion. Everyone was happy with the arrangements and eager for the guests to return. The bus pulled up pretty late and the guests already gathered for the dance.

The president of Matica came straight to me and said angrily: "Ensemble Slak won't play tonight and they won't sing in the church tomorrow either." My reply was: "Why, what is wrong?" He continued: "We want the money to-night, that you collected from the concerts." I replied: "You can't have it because I banked it as the committee decided." Some money was paid to Bresnik and he should have banked it as well, but he didn't as I have seen from the statements. I tried to find a compromise, for it would have really been a fiasco if we had to send the people home. I said. "If Bresnik is prepared to go to the bank on Monday and relieve me from my responsibilities I am prepared to let him manage the account." This then was sufficient and the musicians did not boycott the dance, however they did not sing in the church. Matica's people did not come to stay at our home for the last two days, as they did when they arrived, but rather lodged with Frank Sečko who was more in tune with their politics. First thing on Monday I contacted the bank and told the manager that I wish to transfer my responsibilities for the account to Frank Bresnik. I asked him to get a written statement from Frank that he accepts the responsibility and all the obligations regarding the account.

After a successful and pleasant last night the Ensemble departed and things went back to normal. The club was well patronised and the billiard tables were fully occupied most of the time. Among the regular players were a few people from the Yugoslav Embassy with their friends. Ludvik Kerec once remarked: "With these people constantly in our club, the Croatians might throw a bomb at us." I approached Ladko Lazič who was one of the visitors and explained that the law only allows two visits per year to non-members. A few days later Lazič filled in an application form and paid the prescribed fee. I was later told that Lazič was a member of UDBA, attached to the Embassy to investigate and control the Croatians, who were apparently bombing Yugoslav venues. Co-signatories on the application form for membership were from club members Angel Jurišević and Milan Stanič. The application was accepted in the bar of the club and discussed at the monthly general meeting. Nobody objected to Lazič's membership so the secretary Janez Penca informed Lazič that he has been accepted as a member.

During the following weeks people voiced objections to Lazič's membership. They complained that Lazič was a representative of the communist regime we escaped from and that Lazič was in a position to grant or refuse visas to Slovenians when they applied to go home on holidays; Slovenian members of the club felt obliged to act subserviently and speak Serbo-Croatian with Lazič. Most Slovenians resented the fact that they would have



The Compose Mr Ivan Urh and official guest Senator Lajovic

to be dominated in Australia and in the club they built with their volunteer labour. I explained that the next monthly meeting could reverse the decision, if the members so desired. That is what happened. The majority voted against Lazič's membership. The club was doing well holding dances every weekend. Individuals often organised parties that included other nationalities with a mixed and joyous patronage. Among new members was a Slovenian teacher, Alex Tuma that commenced a Slovenian class for children.

Towards the middle of the year, the Association decided to have an official opening of the club with a ball which was an overwhelming success. Alex Tuma trained a choir from members of the club for the occasion. Father Bernard Ambrožič blessed the club. Ludvig Klakočer from Sydney came with his choir Škrjančki. Melbourne Ensemble, Drava entertained us. A young lady from Melbourne, Magda Mesarič, was the hostess. Our youth at that stage were still too young for this important occasion. The club was full to the bream with some 340 guests present. Among them were a few local dignitaries and representatives from all Slovenian organizations

The club's choir opened the festivities with the Slovenian and Australian anthem. My speech was well received and everyone performed magnificently. I can safely say, that the function was the best ever held in the Canberra club.

The account with Qantas for the tickets for Ensemble Slak was not paid and the reminders kept coming for months. With Bresnik's guarantee that he accepts the responsibility for the account the club kept forwarding the bills to him. Nothing happened until the club placed the matter into solicitor's hands. I do not know how Matica and Bresnik settled the account.

The atmosphere in the club generally was pleasant and cordial, even though two factions were clearly emerging: one was friendly towards communist Yugoslav regime and the other hated it.

I wrote to Vinag in Maribor to order Slovenian vines. It took several months before the vines arrived and the quality was exceptionally good. In the despatch were several boxes of selected archive vines that we did not really appreciate enough initially. The club sold a bottle for 7.00 dollars and that might have been a little steep at the time. When we realised how good it was it sold like hot cakes and all too soon it was all gone. I again ordered the same wine but added that we would like to have the bottles marked Slovenian wine; not Yugoslav. The next shipment was nowhere as good as the first.

Roughly at that time the then Minister of Justice, Senator Murphy made a political attack on ASIO (Australian Secret Intelligence Agency) and some Croatian Organizations. This became a big political affair. Senator Murphy was a member of

the Labour Party that did not control the Senate. For this reason the Senate began to investigate Senator Murphy and the whole affair around ASIO.

On the day before a general meeting Mrs. Rafka Kobal approached me and complained that because the club was not friendly towards Yugoslav Embassy they made her wait for hours at the Embassy and then said that if they cannot patronise the club, they will not issue visas to Slovenia for Club members. I asked Mrs. Kobal to come to the meeting and tell us all about it. Rafka Kobal repeated her complaints to the meeting and again blamed the Association for Embassy's actions. I was pretty upset, because the Embassy interfered in Club's affairs; they tried to blackmail us into letting them control our rules and activities. I proposed to submit a report to the "Senate Select Committee for the rights of migrants" and lodge our complaint for the treatment we were receiving from the Embassy. The members approved and I made the complaint first in writing and later on at one of the sittings of the Committee. Needles to say, that it was all in vain; nothing actually changed.

Shortly before the next annual general meeting the Yugoslav ambassador invited a small group of prominent members of the Slovenia Association, friendly to the Embassy, for drinks. Among the invited were Franc Sečko, Franc Bresnik, Janez Penca, Angel Juriševič and others. I only know about this meeting because the story was recounted among members in the club. The ambassador apparently welcomed them and urged them to take control and make the Association cooperate with the Yugoslav embassy and the Yugoslav regime. Frank Bresnik also addressed the meeting and urged them to dismiss the present committee at the next general meeting.

On the day of the meeting of the Association almost everyone was in attendance. I addressed the meeting and said that others had a meeting at the Yugoslav embassy only a few days ago, but we came together to our club to choose our leaders. I spoke about my work and countless services I was able to offer over the years. In return for my efforts I only received criticism and condemnation from pro Yugoslav members. I declared my intention to stand for president with the proviso, that I select my own committee, because it was impossible to work in an atmosphere of criticism and innuendo. At the same time I invited Franc Sečko to stand against me with the same conditions. After the count of the votes Sečko received 24 votes and I received 59. I expected that the huge difference in the votes would be decisive enough to stop the division but the rumours and innuendos went on.

In the following months Jože Žagar told me that his friend in Slovenia, Franc Kunaver, was singing in a quartet, Savski val. They were very eager to come to Australia. We soon decided to sponsor them. It took several months and a lot of good will. On the last day, when they were all packed, ready to come, they still had no visas and

tickets. In fact they only received them in Vienna on the way to the airport. With the four singers came also a musical trio and an entertainer-comedian. I contacted all Slovenian organizations with an offer for a concert. Jože Žagar, Jaka Kapelj and I loaded the whole group with our wives into three cars and drove to Lightning Ridge, Brisbane, Sydney and Wollongong.

All the clubs, except Club Triglav accepted the offer. Triglav members always cooperated closely with Wollongong and all of them came to the Wollongong concert. As soon as we arrived I was confronted by a group of Triglav members, most prominent among them being Jože Čuješ. The performers went to the stage as we became embroiled in politics. I mentioned that communism was threatening the whole world including Slovenia. Čuješ then asked: "What about the Pope?" I replied that I wasn't aware that the Pope had armies. Eventually I retreated and kept to myself while the performers socialised. It was generally agreed that all the door-takings go to the performers, but Triglav and Wollongong club would have none of that. They gave what they thought was right.

After the tour that lasted a couple of weeks we returned to Canberra and the group continued to Adelaide and Melbourne on their own. When they returned I hoped that the income would be sufficient to cover the costs. I guaranteed them an income of ten thousand dollars to cover their costs and we had to cover the costs in Australia. We just made it and we were all happy to say to them: "Good bye." That was not the end of the problems for the guests from Slovenia. Their leader, Franci Kunaver, told me that they were ostracised and lost opportunities to perform back home.

The ideological differences were becoming more obvious at the meetings of the Canberra Association. I was strongly opposing any association with the communist regime back home and the Yugoslav Embassy; I always received a strong backing from the majority of the members. Our stand was considered treason by Yugoslav regime and it was strongly opposed by those wanting cooperation with Matica.

Matica gained big influence with its monthly "Rodna gruda" magazine. It was generally reported that Matica urged their supporters to take over the leadership of the associations or failing that they form parallel associations. I was strongly criticized by my opponents for inviting to one of the meetings of the Association people who were not of Slovenian origin but have greatly contributed to the club, sometimes much more than some of our own people. Only three or four came but that was enough for them to accuse me of fraud, and these accusations dragged on forever. It seemed quite just to my opponents to have people from other Yugoslav nationalities participate as full members, among them Drago Rudman and Milan Stanič.

The following year my wife Ada and I prepared to go overseas when Polde Bajt took on the presidency. Because of my opposition to Yugoslav influence in the club I was afraid to go to Slovenia. We decided instead on a world trip to visit Slovenian communities in Argentina, USA and Canada, returning through Europe and Hong Kong.

The Slovenian community in Argentina consists predominantly of people who escaped when communists assumed power after the war. After Slovenian independence these people became known in Slovenia as the "Argentinean miracle". They are a well run community; they have a well organised Slovenian education system and the children of third and fourth generation still speak fluent Slovenian, know Slovenian history and culture. They have religious centres, singing and drama groups. They published many Slovenian books; they dispatch several newspapers to Slovenians all over the world. I was receiving their paper *Svobodna Slovenia – Liberated Slovenia* and it convinced me that it would be worth paying them a visit.

Just as we settled into the hotel in Buenos Aires we were told that president Peron died. Everything from restaurants to shops closed down. Fortunately we had the address of professor Baraga who showed us the main phases of Slovenian life in Buenos Aires before we were able to catch the first flight to the USA.

Ada and I stopped at Cleveland in Ohio and Lemont in Illinois that also have significant Slovenian communities. We dropped in at Disneyland and other world known places like, San Francisco, Washington, New York, Vancouver and Toronto. Once in Europe we stopped in Koroška from where I contacted my relatives and friends in Slovenia. My uncle Albert came from Radmirje and my school-friend Slavko Godec with his wife came from Hotinja vas. This was very pleasant but it was nothing like going home. In fact this was the real taste of my 21 years long ostracism for opposing the regime.

When we returned to Canberra the club was in a state of euphoria. A singing group *Minores* hosted by Australian Franciscans arrived from Slovenia. This group of young friars was very popular and they visited all Slovenian organizations in Australia. Their performance in Canberra was the last before their return to Slovenia. We were able to take them on a tour of our farm we still had between Bredbo and Jerangle and show them how the rabbits plagued Australia. To exterminate them we went shooting at night with a spotlight; they never saw anything like that before. Their performance in Canberra was very well received. I received a big tribute from one of the performers with these words: "I must compliment you on your behaviour. I did not hear from you one negative word about others, even though others had a lot to say about you." Rumours and innuendo were rampant by now. I was accused of

associating with fascists and Nazis because I visited Argentinean Slovenians who were predominantly anti-communists.

Stanko Ozimič became very active in the Sloveenian Club for several years and he commenced the Slovenian school that was abandoned by Alex Tuma soon after the Official opening of the Club. Ozimic was very successful with teaching children Slovenian songs. He is still very well remembered by his students. He also became the Public Relation Officer of the Association. He approached me one day and told me that someone from Australian Foreign Affairs asked him if the Association would host the Slovenian Octet that would be brought to Australia by Qantas on its inaugural flight to Belgrade. I said: "Certainly Stan, the Federation of Slovenian Associations so far hosted three groups, Ensemble Slak, Savski Val and Minores and is perfectly willing and able to undertake the task." Stanko advised his contact at the Foreign Affairs and the gentlemen promised he would contact him again soon. After nearly a week Stanko rang the gentleman but he said: "I am sorry but the matter was taken out of my hands.

Bert Pribac then came to the club with a two page long letter signed by him and Franc Bresnik. They claimed that they have been approached to host the Slovenian Octet on a tour of Australia. This was a bit much to take from a person that resigned from the club and refused to make any kind of contribution either by money or labour; a person who strongly criticized the club and kept away for over four years while other tours have taken place; this person was now offering the Association something that was rightfully ours.

To me it was obvious that the Yugoslav Embassy gave Pribac and Bresnik the right to meddle in the tour of the Slovenian Octet. Slovenian Octet and Slovenian songs are our heritage and should not be exploited by Yugoslav politics. We immediately called a meeting of the Association and it was decided to write to the Foreign Affairs and to Slovenian Associations in Australia asking them to support us in boycotting Pribac and Bresnik being the coordinators. Foreign Affairs did not respond and neither did the Slovenian Associations. It was devastating to see that the Canberra Association was let down by all Slovenian organizations. Even Father Bazilij Valentin in Melbourne, who at the time of Slak's tour strongly objected to communist political infiltration, accepted the imposed conditions from Pribac and Bresnik. The concert was held in the Canberra theatre without the participation of the Slovenian Association.

We were devastated but not beaten. The Slovenian Octet is one of the most accomplished Slovenian Ensembles recognised the world over. We were ostracised because we would not dance to the tunes of the Yugoslav communist regime. The interference of Yugoslav Embassy was unjustified also because the Octet was coming

to Australia at the expense of the Australian tax-payers. Qantas was after all an Australian government owned airline, and not the property of Yugoslavia. Our committee decided to welcome the Octet by a letter that the secretary handed to them at the airport. In it we expressed our sorrow that we were denied the opportunity to welcome them in our club and told them that we would be happy to meet them should they give us the opportunity? They came to the club, unfortunately unannounced, when none of the leading members was present.

The atmosphere in the club worsened. The general patronage fell; the dances were not attended or held every weekend anymore. That affected the income. At times individuals were heckled or not spoken to. On one occasion a group, led by Franc Sečko, came from another club rather late noisy and excited. They seemed intoxicated. The then president Polde Bajt who was working in the bar was collecting the empty glasses. Franc Sečko grabbed Polde by the neck. The tray with the glasses fell to the floor and the glasses broke. The incident was discussed at the committee meeting and Franc was sent a letter of reprimand with a bill of about ten dollars for the glasses.

The rumours attributed to Franc Bresnik began to circulate in the club that the letter club's secretary handed to the Octet at the airport was humiliating and denigrating the Octet. The committee wrote to Bresnik asking him to produce the letter. He did not. Instead of paying for the glasses Sečko verbally abused me and my mother with common Yugoslav swear words in the presence of other members. After several months Bresnik and Sečko were invited to a general meeting to clear the matter. The meeting was very noisy and abusive. Bresnik did not produce the 'our so called poisoned letter' nor would Sečko pay for the broken glasses. They were both offensive attacking the committee and they were expelled from the club by the majority of the members.

Bert Pribac immediately came to their defence. He gave the Club an ultimatum to reverse the decision on Bresnik's and Sečko's expulsion or they would establish a rival Slovenian club. The committee decided to ignore him. Within a few weeks we heard that a new organization called 'Karantanija' was formed and promptly held a dance in some community hall. The Yugoslav ambassador was the honorary guest and most of his staff was present.

After the Australian election in 1975 the Labour government offered an opportunity to ethnic communities in 1976 to have radio programmes in our own languages. Marjan Kovač who was the Vice-president of the Ethnic Community Council of ACT, informed me of the possibility on 2XX. This was a small AM station that was once a student radio but was now taken over by extreme leftist groups including homosexuals and lesbians. The government paid the station 20.00 dollars for every

half an hour of ethnic broadcasting on air. I soon brokered a deal with 2XX to start broadcasting every Thursday night at seven but I then found that Pribac already had his foot in the door. We would have to alternate with Karantanija and our programs would be fortnightly. For the first program I asked the then Slovenian Senator Misha Lajovic to open our half-hour, which was prepared on tape.

From day one our club was attacked by Karantanija's speakers. In reply we ridiculed their unsubstantiated statements. This squabbling was naturally not permitted. Karantanija complained to the station, saying that we were attacking them, whereas the opposite was true. Our arguments went on for months and required a lot of translating. We proved that it was Karantanija that made the attacks on our Association by branding us fascists and reactionaries. Because we committed no offence we continued broadcasting and so did Karantanija.

All the groups that had their broadcasts on radio formed an organization called Ethnic Community Broadcasting Council and I was elected president. It was difficult to defend myself and the Association from all the accusations that Pribac made. One of their complaints was that people who helped to build the club were banned for life, which was not true. The rules of the Association state that anyone, expelled from the Association could reapply in twelve months. Whether they chose to ignore this option is hard to say, but it seems that they wanted to force the Association to admit that it was in the wrong. The club was equally hard-headed and the confrontation continued. Other members of Karantanija also attacked the Association on radio but Albin Grmek and Alojz Kavaš were expelled for their excesses. I lead the Ethnic Community Council for three years but because of Pribac's constant hostility and attacks I eventually abandoned the position.

General meetings of the Association were battlegrounds where people showed their real characters. Most of the ugly slander was done behind the scenes but at the meetings people exposed themselves and have shown their capabilities and their real values. I have a few tapes of the meetings and I must say that it is depressing and reviling to listen to them. One such meeting was soon after I returned from the trip to Argentina and America. Slovenian Association of Melbourne had a festivity for the completion of their club-house. Our Association was also invited and members joined the bus trip to Melbourne. I think that the Club even subsidised the fare. Just before our departure I completed the bulletin Triglav that had a couple of contentious articles. One of them was about Slovenians in Argentina, about their successful community life and devotion to Slovenia. The other article discussed Arch-bishop of Ljubljana, Mns. Gregorij Rožman who is wrongly considered by the communists to have been a traitor to Slovenia during the war. The trip to Melbourne was pleasant without any confrontation. I might mention that members who were considered as

the opposition were dubiously absent even though, I think, Franc Bresnik was present. It might warrant saying that this was at the time of Polde's Bajt's presidency.

After our return a lot of activity took place and I soon found out, that the president was asked to call a general meeting because members were critical of the committee, which was supposedly dominated by me and that I have published the bulletin Triglav without the supervision of the Committee and that Zveza slovenskih društev (ZSDA) of which I was president was somehow to blame. The group that demanded a meeting had to be at least fifteen members strong, according to the Club rules. The fifteen signatures were obtained and the meeting was called. The meeting started noisily and everyone was full of anticipation. It would be difficult to recollect everything that happened but it is important to stress that the people that signed the petition signed a rather vague complaint. Namely that the Committee was complaining about the Committee. Even that seems a more specific complaint than what was formulated in the petition.

Since I was the person directly attacked I took on the confrontation with the people that signed the petition; among them were many Committee members. I have put the question to them: "How can a group of people that was in the Committee complain about itself? If I was too influential why has the Committee not stopped me, since they had the majority on it?" The second fault with the petition was that it was poorly drafted and people were asked to sign it without really knowing what the reasons for the meeting were. After a brutal and offensive argument for several hours I finally formulated the complaints that have become obvious from the arguments and should have been included on the petition. I state them from memory:

The influence on the president Polde Bajt by Falež is unacceptable;

The writing in Triglav should be supervised and not left to Falež;

The Slovenian Association of Canberra should withdraw from ZSDA.

The three matters were discussed and none of them was carried. The Club went back to its usual activities but was naturally left with many bruises. Some members sunk very low by attacking and name calling, especially me. As already said the main battles were fought incognito and anonymously.

From here on I intentionally stayed in the background, even though I actively defended the Association or any of the presidents if they were under attack. When I was on the Committee I usually filled one of the less important positions. The following years were a constant battle to retain members in the Slovenian Association. Karantanija made a continuous effort to lure the members from the Association and every general meeting was a battle for supremacy. The battle was

also fought in the Novo doba, a Yugoslav weekly with a Slovenian page. Several years later Pribac commented: "Čuješ from Sydney, Peršič from Melbourne and I in Canberra joined forces against Falež". Beside these were also others: Lojz Košorok, Jože Žohar from Sydney, Ivanka Škof from Melbourne and Franc Sečko, Albin Grmek, Ivan Urbas and Alojz Kavaš of Canberra. I also had faithful supporters for without them my fight against them would have come to an end much earlier. Whatever position I held I usually answered to the attacks in writing. They came from all these people that I have mentioned above. I got involved when exceptional circumstances developed, no matter what.

The meetings even though hotly contested always elected presidents and Committees that I or rather our side supported. I think that the president following Polde Bajt was Miha Hovar. I am battling with my memories but you must understand that without minutes or rather Club's record remembering is difficult. Some time into Miha's presidency an argument started between Erik Fras and Franc Čulek on one side and Miha Hovar on the other. During this argument Franc and Erik took Miha, the President, under arms and forced him outside the front door of the Club. This in fact was the first time Čulek really came to notoriety and showed his real character. Actually this statement is not totally correct. When Arch-bishop of Ljubljana Most Rev. dr. Šuštar was visiting in early 1980's, at a dinner in his honour the electrical fuses disappeared when the dinner was half cooked and Čulek just vanished. Čulek was blamed but nothing could be proved. Going back to the story the Association could not tolerate the removal of the president as it would have set a precedent and presidents could be replaced by anybody who was stronger and violent enough. To resolve the matter the Association called a general meeting.

The meeting decided that the trustees, Ivan Urh, Andrej Madon and I would listen to the people involved individually and then decide on the matter. The trustees consequently asked the three participants in the matter to leave the meeting so that they could be called in separately. Miha Hovar was prepared to leave the meeting but Franc Čulek and Erik Fras would not hear of it. They kept on screaming and yelling and no real solution was found. The trustees decided that there is no question that Čulek and Fras were at fault, what is plainly demonstrated by their behaviour even now. That was how far we were able to go. With all the controversy in the Club I think that we could not have pursued the matter any further.

I am not certain but I think that the next president was Marjan Kovač. He was probably the only president that caused a riot at someone else's club. He attended the opening the new Club Triglav in Sydney that Matica helped to finance. Marjan invited me to join them going to Club Triglav for the occasion. I was surprised that

Marjan would organize such a visit to Triglav and I declined the invitation. Planšarji, an entertaining ensemble was visiting Australia.

In the following days after the visit in Sydney our Club was buzzing. Those that went to Sydney were complaining that Marjan Kovač totally discredited our Association in Sydney and therefore had to be removed as president. I was naturally eager to talk to Marjan to find out what happened. Marjan was quite pleased with himself and told me that like all the other representatives he went on the stage and handed over a token present in front of all the communist dignitaries from Slovenia. He then told them that we in Canberra are very proud because we have built our Club without any assistance, especially from communists and that we fly a Slovenian flag without the red star. As he was still speaking a group of Triglav men grabbed him from behind and dragged him from the stage. At the general meeting in Canberra Marjan's explanation was accepted and he continued as president.

The next president was Zinka Černe. Zinka complained that there were too many members of my family on the committee. There was an argument about her wages that did not affect me personally at all. She did not confront me, as is often the case, but had a lot to say to others. I might say that when one or another group dominates the committee, this can lead to problems, and it happened before. Penca's involvement was complained about and Kavaš's family also caused such difficulties. This is due to the fact that people are not keen to join the committee if they object to its composition. We come to catch 22. When there are too many people of one family on the committee the others won't join it and at the same time you have to accept people who are available even if they are from the same family if others won't participate. The argument with Zinka made me decide not to argue about financial matters as I have so far argued too often about politics. It convinced me that I must resign and distance myself from the Club which I did to some degree.

During Zinka Černe's presidency she negotiated with Bert Pribac and Karantania committee to readmit members from Karantania to the Slovenian Club in turn to disband Karantania.

Not everything that happened in the Club was to my liking but I tried to ignore it. We patronised the Club, not as much as in the years before but certainly more than the people that continuously complained about one thing or another and often most particularly about me. Rumours and innuendo continued and I tried to ignore them, even though they usually attacked my character and honesty. Again and again I and my relatives that at one time or another worked for the Club were slandered with theft. I might explain that it was all about voluntary work and no one from our family, except Barbara, who was employed as a waitress for a year or so, ever worked for wages. It might seem petty but I wish to state that I never took a free drink in the bar

even though I worked in the club voluntary for many hundreds if not thousands of hours. Even more, on dance nights I paid an entry fee to the dance and then worked nearly all night till early hours in the morning. No one but I was as silly as that.

During my respite from the Club I welcomed alternative interests that were much more exiting than the obnoxious arguments in the Club. I went back to school and completed my high School Certificate. On the merits of it I was offered a position at the Australian National University. My main subjects were political Science, Italian and Russian language. Over the three years I studied American, British, Russian, German, Italian and Israel's political and social systems and also did a correspondence course with the Macquarie University in Slovenian literature and language, which was above the normal requirements for a Bachelors degree.

In meantime political articles in Nova revija with a call for independent Slovenia propelled political activities that eventuated in the arrests of Janez Janša, Jože Borštner, David Tasič and Franc Zavrl by the Yugoslav army in 1987. Their arrest and persecution sparked a flurry of activities and excitement also in Australia. In Canberra I was able to convince friends that we need to take action and call a meeting which was reasonably well attended. The meeting established the "Committee for the Protection of Human Rights in Slovenia" (CfPoHRiS). Marjan Kovač, Erik Fras, Vivien Zontsich, Alojz Kavaš and I were elected to the Committee and I became its President. We decided to organize a protest in front of the Federal Parliament in Canberra and present a petition to both Australian Houses of Parliament by friendly politicians and senators. At the same time we called a general meeting in the Slovenian Australian Association of Canberra. We were delighted with the good attendance and the meeting decided that the Club would donate 10,000 dollars for the defence of the four persecuted journalists in Slovenia. While the signatures for the petition were collected we also wrote to all Slovenian organizations in Australia and also other ethnic clubs in Canberra asking for their support.

After the speeches in front of Parliament and the presentation of signatures to Members and Senators of Parliament we all marched to the Yugoslav Embassy. Our writing to every Australian politician bore results. The Department of Foreign Affairs invited the Committee of CfPoHRiS to discuss the plight of the persecuted and the situation in Slovenia. They promised to send a note to Belgrade and soon after they also informed us that the four arrested will be released.

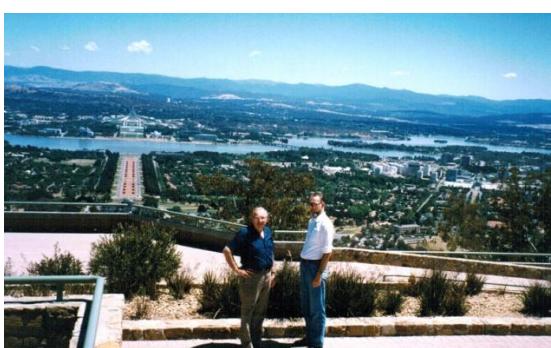
It might be worth recording that nobody from other Slovenian organizations across Australia was present except Ljanko Urbančič with his American wife from Sydney. Eventually I spoke to the president of the Slovenian Club in Albury who told me that the President of the "Council of Slovenian Associations of Victoria", Mr Peter Mandel specifically advised them not to participate in our efforts. Not one organization from

all over Australia replied to our written pleas. Only Father Bazilij Velentin from Melbourne supported us in his monthly 'Misli'. We were able to get some signatures for the release of prisoners in Ljubljana from individual friends only otherwise there was no response from all those who became great supporters of Slovenian independence only a few months later.

In the same year a referendum for the independence of Slovenia from Yugoslavia was called. CfPoHRiS again supported independence with a large public notice in the Canberra Times and a money donation of over 5,000 dollars. A public collection among supporters also netted several thousand dollars. CfPoHRiS later became Slovenian National Council of ACT (SNCACT) and eventually joined the Australian Slovenian Conference (ASK). The referendum in Slovenia was a great success with 93% of the voters supporting independence.

Around that time Stanka Gregorič started to publish a monthly "Slovensko pismo" that brought the latest news on political developments in Slovenia. A new organization called "The Committee for the establishment of the Slovenian World Congress" urged Slovenians all over the world to establish committees that would become members of the Congress which was to be formed on the principals of the Jewish World Congress. In Sydney Fredi Brežnik and Stanka Gregorič organized a conference of leading members of Slovenian organizations in Australia. CfPoHRiS of Canberra was also invited. I proposed Marjan Kovač to be the President, Stanka Gregorič became the secretary and I became the treasurer.

In the following months we received sensational news involving Matica. It was revealed that the organization was connected to UDBA (political police) by the internet. Those of us that were always convinced of this cooperation were delighted, but Kavaš, the then president of the Canberra Club was somehow disappointed. One day he called me and invited members of the CfPoHRiS to the Club. I was shocked to find a long table full of people. Several of them were from Club Triglav, a couple from Sydney Club, one from Melbourne and a couple, man and wife from Ljubljana that represented Matica. Present among them was also Boris Cizelj, the then Ambassador of the Yugoslav Embassy. I immediately told them that I was not prepared to talk under the dominance of Yugoslav Embassy. Boris Cizelj responded and said that he was not present as the ambassador and that he would like to talk as an equal among Slovenians. This was acceptable and I was eager to hear what was on the table.



It soon became obvious that the Couple from Ljubljana were sent to apologise for Matica who was found out. Kavaš gave a speech explaining how disappointed he was to hear of Matica's involvement with UDBA, because

he always trusted and believed in Matica. There were all kind of comments regarding this and other events concerning Matica which did not cause any fundamental change of attitudes. John Černe recorded this meeting on a video tape that is also in my possession. Boris Cizelj invited me to an unofficial visit to the Embassy to discuss our attitudes.

In Slovenia in the meantime the democratization proceeded. A coalition of new democratic parties named Demos was established. This enabled the election of a democratic government with the President of the Christian Democrats Lojze Peterle becoming the new Premier.

This commenced a flurry of political visits from Slovenia. During the following weeks a group of ladies from Slovenia rode from Melbourne to Sydney on push-bicycles. The ladies, Ada and I were invited to lunch by Boris Cizelj that we attended. Very soon after professor Jože Pučnik, a prominent Slovenian dissident and the President of Demos visited Canberra. Again Boris Cizelj and his wife hosted him and other guests at their residence. Invited was also the President of the Australian Slovenian Conference Marjan Kovač as well as the President of the Slovenian Association Alojz Kavaš and I with Ada as the President of the Slovenian National Council of ACT.

ASK members travelled to Slovenia shortly before the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1991. I was again able to go to Slovenia after 21 years and was overwhelmed. The highlight was the pronouncement of Slovenian independence and the tragic attack of the Yugoslav army on Slovenia.



Prime Minister Peterle in the Slovenian Club

President of DEMOS Dr Pučnik visiting Canberra

when he was very sick before his death. At his funeral I decided to speak and I specifically mentioned his positive attitude to reconciliation. Bert Pribac was not in Australia for some time after independence but



Minister Janša in the Slovenian Club

generally we greet each other without great enthusiasm.

I had no political quarrel with Čulek at the time and I saw no reason to approach him. Ivan Urbas was the only person who would not accept my hand when I wished him a Happy Easter in 1992. Unfortunately he went to his grave without accepting reconciliation. I might say that no one ever offered any kind of reconciliatory gesture towards me.

After independence the atmosphere in the Club was bearable even though some people still carry a grudge. The first musical group on a visit from Slovenia was Big Ben from Nova Gorica. The tour in Victoria and South Australia was managed by Ivo Leber and he asked me to take the tour over in Canberra, NSW and Queensland. We travelled by bus and it was a marvellous trip. The musicians were full of enthusiasm and joy and it is a pleasure to remember every moment of it. Members of the group were also Giani Rijavec and Vlado Čadež. We became such good friends that they insisted that I visit them when in Slovenia. Vlado's father was nobody else but the famous tenor Danilo Čadež that was in Canberra with the Slovenian Octet some 15 years ago. He was eager to meet me and was my host when I was given a lavish reception in Goriška brda. He told me that he was anxious to meet me. When in Canberra he was told such stories that he was convinced that I must resemble the devil himself. We became good friends and we still keep in touch.

The second tour I organised was the choir Jakob Petelin Galus from Celovec in Austria. This was a large group of some 45 Slovenian singers. I hired a bus with a driver and we visited all Slovenian Organizations starting in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide through Broken Hill and Lightning Ridge and Sydney. Because of their limited time we were unfortunately not able to visit Brisbane. They were all delightful people full of enthusiasm and gratefulness. Even Ada joined us some of the way and was delighted which is not often the case. All the groups were by now coming to Australia at their own expense, more like tourists and they looked after their own expenses.

A tremendous bunch of singers were Tržaški Oktet from around Trieste that was led by Danilo Čadež. I was delighted to invite Danilo and his wife Franka to Australia and they gladly accepted. I can even claim that they enjoyed the visit very much. The group was not very large and this time I drove a mini-bus for them. Our friendship extended to overseas cooperation and they became the host for Prvi rej when the Canberra dancers visited Slovenia and Slovenians in Italy and Austria.

In mid 1990's in Canberra a group of young dancers prospered under the expert guidance of Ljuba Vrtovec-Pribac. Her expertise in making Slovenian national costumes propelled the dancers to great perfection and I was able to attain financial support from "Društvo Slovencev po svetu in domovini" to sponsor them on a tour of

Slovenia. The organization attracts funds from the Slovenian government. The dancers were also promoted by choir Galus on the Austrian side of the border. It was a great success and they earned a lot of praise. The dancers themselves had tremendous joy and satisfaction and it is unfortunate that they lost interest and broke up. Again I have to recall an ugly incident that actually brought about the demise of Prvi rej dancing group. Most of the national dresses were made by Ljuba Vrtovec-Pribac and the girl dancers. The materials for the Costumes were bought with the money they earned with performances. After they returned from Slovenia a large wardrobe was made by Miha Hovar in the room above the Bowling Alleys, where the costumes were stored under lock and key. Zvonko Bezjak, Lojz Risa and Frank Čulek were accused of breaking into the cupboard and removing the costumes on the pretence that they have to protect them. Simona Osolnik tried and tried to have them returned and even approached the police, who would not get involved and said that it was a civil matter. I do not know what the full story is but I do understand that the costumes were returned. No doubt that the saga around the costumes contributed to the demise of the dancing group.

One of the last tours I was involved in was Oktet Suha also from Austrian side of Koroška. They brought with them an enormous amount of enthusiasm. They promote original Slovenian folksongs especially from Koroška and are a great joy to listen to. Each year they organize Suha Festivals that brings together groups from Koroška, Slovenia and all Europe. I have been to a few of them and they are unforgettable. When in Australia they brought a lot of joy and pleasure to all that met them and listened to them. What a shame that there is not more enthusiasm for this type of cooperation among us here. I found that it becomes really difficult to convince the Clubs to promote and accept groups that cultivate Slovenian culture. The clubs these days only seem interested to make a lot of money with the hire of their premises; they forget that soon they will have them empty or serving strangers.

The latest incident that really brought me to my limits was the so called selling of the club. When Jože Hebar was still president in late 2006 he told me: "The Club barely missed being sold." Had that statement been true it would have been a sensation among Slovenians, not only in Canberra but everywhere in Australia and it would have meant that I, Cvetko Falež wanted to sell the Club on my own, without regard for the Association and their members and anyone else for that matter. No wonder that people were angry after they heard these rumours. What is the truth?

To get the full picture we have to go back some ten years. The Club at the time has not been in the best financial position for some time. The committee was canvassing for loans. It received a loan from Franc Erpič and Tonka Pavlin of around 30,000 dollars. But that did not save the Club from a heavy burden of wages. Some people

simply could not understand that with a poor income the club could not afford to be open seven days a week. This amounted to approximately three full wages for the bar staff plus a cleaner that had a very light load. These expenses plus insurance, rates, electricity and other running costs were just unsustainable. Most of the time the Club was next to empty and only late in the afternoon there would be a few clients, hardly ever more than three to five people. Even for the weekends there were only few people around, except if there was a function run by a visiting group.

All this simply did not convince some people that the Club with this meagre income could not stay open for seven days a week. Two of the most determined supporters for continuous trading were Milan Šprohar and Alojz Kavaš. Kavaš himself even did unpaid work for some weeks in the bar to promote his conviction. But all these did not make much difference.

I was again president at the time, my son John was the treasurer and Barbara was the secretary. Our domination in the Committee was again criticised, however there was no volunteers for the positions. The Association was constantly looking for ways to reduce the trading hours and reduce the costs. At one of the general meetings in 1997 Florian junior was asked to examine what options were available to the club to overcome the difficulties. During this trying period a lot of useless talk emerged among the members. Justin Hodnik and his wife Danica who were running the kitchen were constantly present. Their son worked in the Bowling Club across the road. They often spread the rumour that the Bowling Club had the intention of purchasing our Club. After a certain period I asked Justin to ask them how much they are prepared to pay for it. Later the Association received a formal letter offering 190,000 dollars. As soon as we read the letter at the committee meeting I said: "This is an insult to all of us since an average house costs as much and more". I also asked the Committee to stop the talk about selling.

After a few months a Real Estate Agent named John (surname unknown) came to the club and talked to individual members and finally also to me. He talked of some scheme he had with another club in Tuggeranong where they built some townhouses around the club that still kept operating. I told him that all such talk was useless without the members' approval and I told him to come to the general meeting. Before the meeting a letter was sent out to all members when I mentioned the agent and told them of a proposal that he wished to present to them. I also told them that no one could sell the Club without the approval of the committee, the general meeting of members and the ACT Government, that gave the land to the Association free of charge. I also pointed out that the club rules actually forbade the selling of the Club-house.

At one of the previous committee meetings the employment of the cleaner Milka Penca was discussed. It was general knowledge that Milka Penca actually worked for Canberra Casinos and that her daughter Majda was in doing the job. Her work was minimal because of poor patronage and she only came to work on some days. It was then decided that the club cannot afford her and that her employment would have to be terminated. Alojz Kavaš was a member of the committee and voted for the motion. It was my duty to inform Mrs. Penca of the decision of the committee which I did over the phone the following day.

Before the General Meeting some people, mainly Alojs Kavaš, spread the false rumour that Falež was selling the Club. The meeting was well patronised and in a state of excitement. Present were also both Penca's girls who have not attended any previous meetings and they were highly emotional. The meeting started with yelling and accusations and again the loudest was Kavaš. He immediately accused me that I was selling the Club and that Milka Penca did not have to be sacked for she was with the Club for all this years. Majda and Kathy were yelling at the top of their voices and demanded the reinstatement of their mother. Florian junior's proposals, how to save the club, were not read or discussed and the real estate agent vanished, most likely because of the unfriendly atmosphere of the meeting. The financial affairs came up several times and people were talking about loans to the club. If I remember rightly Celestino Benčić asked what would happen to the money if he would lend it to the Club in case the Club went bankrupt. It seems that he wanted to know if the club would become his property. This brought on a bit of a laugh at the meeting but it was simply not possible to discuss anything sensible.

I was under constant attack and so was John, the treasurer, with a claim by Čulek that he was responsible for some discrepancy or even steeling. John himself still cannot work out what Čulek was on about. Eventually Čulek said to John that he would immediately pay the Club 5,000 dollars if John resigned from the position of treasurer. John immediately accepted the challenge but Čulek till today did not pay the 5,000 dollars. Once John resigned Barbara also told the meeting that she is resigning and so did I. The three of us then left the meeting. This finished our direct involvement in the club affairs. It might be of interest to the reader that Milka Penca was sacked anyway only a few months later.

After a few weeks, when the group Pogladič was visiting Australia, Lojz Kavaš was boasting to everybody that all Falež's were thrown from the club. No, he did not tell anybody that because he wanted to become the president of the Club he made our position unbearable, by spreading lies that Falež was selling the club, and that precisely his lies were the reason for our resignations.

Florian junior stayed involved which also ended with a tragic episode. At that time I was in Europe and I cannot speak as a witness but only what I heard. Apparently Florian was speaking at an annual meeting when Zvonko Bezjak hit him. He stumbled and fell. Florian claims that he was not hurt and that the hit looked worse than it was. The meeting continued with an election of office bearers and Zvonko Bezjak instead of being reprimanded was elected secretary.

From then on Florian junior never again passed the threshold of the club. He says that he did not expect anything better from Zvonko Bezjak but he cannot accept that the committee did not reprimand Zvonko but accepted him as one of their own. Florian says that with such people he has nothing in common and has therefore refrained from visiting the club. This has put all members of our family in a confronting position. Even though we miss the club and would like to have a place in what we have built but we cannot abandon Florian isolated in his hurt.

During the last years while Jože Hebar was President I approached him and his wife Maria several times and explained that we would all like to patronise the club but we cannot do it unless Florian junior receives some kind of satisfaction. I was asking for a letter of apology where by the club would acknowledge its mistake for not acting against Zvonko Bezjak. Several times I was promised that they would see what could be done and finally I was told that there is no chance. Frank Čulek and his friends are strongly opposed to any reconciliatory action and they have the majority of the committee on their side. Zvonko Bezjak since then had a disagreement with everyone in the Club and stopped patronising it. This then puts us totally outside the Slovenian Association against our will.

I did not see Čulek for several years and finally I met him at the funeral of Toni Grlj. I was able to ask him, what I have done to him, that he is so hostile and avoiding me. He began accusing me of having some kind of political agenda which he has finally woken up to. He was accusing me that I was using him against Bresnik, which is absolutely new to me. I have no disagreement or confrontation with Frank Bresnik.

Čulek then reminded me of the solicitor's indictment, that is still in his drawer. Only then did I remember that I asked the solicitor to serve him an indictment if he does not stop spreading lies that I was stealing from the Club. He also accused me of wanting to sell the Club and no explanation of mine would convince him otherwise. We both had a lot to say to each other. My main complaint to him was that people spread rumours and never ask themselves who started them and whether they are true or not. He seemed to agree but remains hostile. The Yugoslav embassy or any other pretence for arguments has by now become irrelevant. What is happening now? Why is the hatred continuing? Is there no end to this anger and distrust?

Last year, in 2006, I was asked by the three Jausnik's sons to give them Slovenian lessons and a few others joined in. I asked the president Jože Hebar if I could do it in the Club. He immediately agreed and asked Jože Žužek to open up the club for me each Wednesday night. One night I was approached by Čulek. He asked me if I was qualified to teach Slovenian. He also informed me that I have to have a written permission from the committee and that I would have to pay for the use of the classroom. When I talked to President Hebar about it he simply laughed and said: "Forget Čulek. He is crazy." I did not stop teaching and I was questioned by Čulek several times. Finally I wrote to the committee giving them my qualifications and explaining the President's approval.

In the July issue of *Misli* 2007 Čulek reported on the activities of the Club. He mentioned that the Club had a general meeting at which there was a sufficient number of members present. The Constitution of the Association requires a quorum of 15 members. I wonder if there were only 15 present or if there was one or two more. I believe that the attendance was poor because Čulek also appealed to everyone to return, to again give life to the Association. He did not invite me and my relatives. Čulek also reported that they got rid of the entire lot of 'Freeloaders'. It would be interesting to know who those 'Freeloaders' are? Is everyone that does not patronise the club a "Freeloader?" In the same article Čulek writes: "Our Club in Canberra is breathing calmly and quietly to the pride of all Slovenians; it is not sold and it will never be sold (there were already two failed attempts). Čulek continued the rumours about 'so called selling of the club' what I have explained and it should not be necessary to go over it again. I might add that Čulek's appeal for increased patronage did not succeed either.

Because Australia had cordial diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia Australian politicians were not interested in the fact that I am Slovenian or anticomunist. They told me to forget the past and the reasons why I came to Australia. I was here to embrace Australian values and work quietly to achieve Australian goals. But Yugoslav

ambassadors always knew which of our people would feel honoured to be invited to the embassy for a friendly drink, a chat, etc.



In the company of friends

I often asked myself why would people seek to be friends with the Yugoslav embassy; didn't we escape from communism? I realise now that the embassy had power and for some of our people being popular with the ambassador meant more than their principles. Some felt slightly guilty disobeying the orders of the masters that brainwashed them through schooling. Most of them were homesick and became friendly with the embassy because Yugoslav embassy held the key, the visa, to their homeland Slovenia. I risked all this for the same reasons as I told you at the beginning of this story.

Josefine (Jozica, Josie & Fini ) Bresnik.



I am here photographed with Mother Therese at the opening of the convent in Queanbeyan. I have been a volunteer helper with many community organisations as well as teaching Catholic Scripture in our public school.

I was born in Belgrade on 22 September 1936 as the middle of three daughters in Habor family. Mum was Slovenian but my father was of German origins living in Belgrade. During WWII my father was told to either join the army or go to work in Germany. He chose to work in Germany with the intention to send for us when he arranged accommodation. We already bought train tickets to join him when he returned because he broke two fingers and was sent home on sick leave. As we already gave up our flat in Belgrade we travelled to our Grandma

who lived in Loka near Zidani Most in Slovenia.

Dad later got a job making partitions in Brezice castle which was taken over by the Germans for the Employment offices. By the end of the war dad was advised to send the family to Austria but mum would not go without him. Germany lost the war and the new regime told us on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May to be ready at the Post Office at midday for a hearing. They placed us for first two nights with other families into a Textile factory in Trbovlje. Later we were taken to Tezno army barracks; we slept on floors like sardines. From there we were taken to Strzisce in the middle of the night; we got a small piece of bread and half a mug of watered down bean soup for the day. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of August mothers with children under four and children up to 14 years of age were transported in cattle wagons during the night to a castle in Ptuj where we were given better food. We were starved and emaciated; my 9 month old brother died during the trip. In September 1945 my Father was told that we were free to stay in Yugoslavia or go to Austria; he chose Austria as his Mother was sent there from Backa in 1944. We joined Dad in Strzisce; all the young children died in Ptuj except

one; we were herded into the wagons and sent to Klagenfurt where we had our first good meal of potato Paprikas before we were sent to Graz Refuge camp which was a 3 story boy's school. Eight families slept in one class room but we all had beds.

Dad found a job in a British factory. The following year my sister Anne Marie was born. During the summer holidays Mum was put in Hospital to gain strength and weight as she was pregnant. Olga was 13 and I was 9 years old when we were sent for a holiday to the country. I was happy with a family which had a baby and I was allowed to look after him while they worked on their farm and in a small grocery shop. My sister was placed with a farming family and learned to milk the cows.

Mum gave birth to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Brother but sadly he also died at two and a half month. In 1946 dad's distant cousin, offered him a job in a workshop making Zithers Violins and Guitars; these instruments needed French polish which my dad was trained to do being a cabinet maker. Olga also learned to work with him on the musical instruments till we migrated to Australia.

After five years my parents realised that there was no future for us in Europe. We were displaced persons. Before WWI my grandparents immigrated to America for a short time and we now hoped that our American relations would help us enter America. They did not, so my parents decided to immigrate to Australia.

My sister Olga was 18, I was 14 and Anne Marie was 4 when we arrived in Australia in 1950. Australian government subsidised our travel so Dad had to go to work where they ordered him. They gave him a job in Steel works in Wollongong; he did not like the job; he had to work on Christmas Day scrubbing the boilers with iron brushes; he was sad away from his family who was in a Camp in Parkes. We heard that a man that arrived with us changed his job to be with his family. Dad also applied for and got the bricklaying job but unfortunately he lifted the wheelbarrow the wrong way, strained his heart muscle and was off work with no pay for two months. He asked the Employment Office to sent him back to Austria or give him a job working with wood. They sent him to Canberra to be a carpenter where he continued to work as such until he retired.

I married Frank Bresnik at the age of nineteen. It was a double wedding because my sister Olga married her Frank on the same day. The first year we rented a room from Mr/s Vesic in Kingston ACT and later we received first a Government Flat in Civic and later a house in Campbell which we eventually bought.

We have three children. Our daughter Josephine was born in 1957, our son Frank was born in 1958 and Michael in 1960. They also all married at the age of nineteen like their mother. We had nine grandchildren but Josephine's oldest son died of cancer

when he was nearly sixteen. Frank and I are very proud and happy with our family. They are all talented, hardworking and kind people.



## ***Frank (Franci) Bresnik***



I was born on 6. 5.1930 as one of three children in Spodnji Porcic, a village of fourteen farming families, parish Sveta Trojica in Slovenske gorice. My surname was Breznik but it was misspelled when I crossed the border and renamed by English FSS to BRESNIK.

We have been considered fairly well off, because we owned over 20 hectares of cultivated land. We produced everything we needed: leather, wood, wheat, fruit, nuts, grapes, vegetables; we produced wine, plum brandy, apple cider and vinegar. We had two servants, a lady helping in the house and a man doing the work on the fields and with the cattle.

My parents were very religious and my father's brother Reverent Father Janko Nepomuk Breznik, was a priest. Every Sunday evening we would all kneel on the wooden floor and pray holy Rosary. Our servants joined us and we all sang hymns. Singing gave me much joy all my life.

We had a shoemaker and a tailor and a dressmaker come to stay with us every two years to make clothes and shoes for the family.

Our lives were severely disrupted by WWII. Germans considered us for deportation because we were religious, our father had tuberculosis and we owned land.

I was a very active youth participating in choir and drama groups. I became Hitler Youth and that might have saved our family from being deported. One day I came home from the army training wearing German uniform; I saw trucks and German soldiers in and around our house. Mum and grandmother were kneeling in front of the little corner altar praying in front of the statue of Virgin Mary. I stepped into the room where the commanding officer was sitting and I saluted: Heil Hitler. I was a tall and confident youth. The officer asked who I was and I said that I am the son of this family. He asked me a few more questions and then gave the order for soldiers to leave.

My older brother went into hiding and he spent war years helping a widow with jobs on the fields.

I was too young to be taken into the army but I had a regular training with Hitler youth in the town of Sv.Trojica. Germans suffered huge losses everywhere. They began recruiting young boys. My father was afraid that Nazis would promote me into a higher position and more active service when I was fourteen. One day I received a letter inviting me to training in Strzisce Youth Camp. My father came with me and on the way we stopped for coffee. He said: son promise me that you will come back home with me instead of going to train in this Camp. You can say back home that you have been there. I promise to buy you any pair of shoes you choose if you come home with me. A good pair of shoes meant more in those days, than a new bicycle today.

All our priests escaped to Ljubljana or Zagreb to be safe from Germans, so we had an Austrian priest every few weeks. After mass we would hear the news bulletins of what was happening elsewhere in Europe. We heard about gas chambers and extermination camps. We also heard that Germans killed twenty to fifty Slovenian civilians for one German soldier killed by Slovenian resistance movement. We all became afraid of Germans and hoped for someone to liberate us. I no longer enjoyed being in the Hitler Youth but I did not dare leave because Germans might have

retaliated against our family. In 1944 we first heard of Slovenian resistant forces called Partisans. There were also Cetniki soldiers of regular Yugoslav army fighting against Germans.

Germans robbed our parish pilgrimage church Holy Trinity which had three towers with seven large bronze bells; Germans melted the bells for cannons. These bells were tolling in a beautiful harmony over the hills

and valleys in the morning, at lunch and in the evening. They were missed very much.

During WWII I attended German School. After the war I was attending High School in Maribor. We have been given notice that the first and second class has to be with less subjects completed in one year. After the High School I was accepted into the Commerce Academy and progressed fast.



In 1947 my father died of tuberculosis. Communist nationalised most of our property and took some of our cattle. I never liked Nazis or communists. They were both bad for Slovenians. Communists nationalised private enterprise, they closed private shops and created village co-ops. They offered me a job in a little co-op shop in St Jurij.

In September 1949 I was called into the army; I decided that I will not serve in the army so I escaped.

At the time I was active in a drama group in Sv.Jurij; we performed plays and concerts. In a play Rastrganci we needed someone with a gun who would pretend to shoot me, the main actor. We lived close to Austrian border and the border guard had a gun; we asked him to play the part of the shooter. After the play my friend Stanko and I planned to escape to Austria. This guard was later quoted as saying that he should have shot me dead during the play.

That night Stanko and I were hiding under the bushes on top of the hill looking over the border to Austria when we heard someone coming on a bike. It was Stanko's girlfriend. She came to warn us that the coming night there would be a 'death guard' which means that border guards would shoot anything that moved without warning.

I returned to work the next day and Stanko arranged with the farmer on the border to let us stay in his stable until the opportunity came for us to go over. The next night we were hiding in the stable. I looked out and saw border guards talking outside with the farmer. Stanko and I escaped through the back opening and walked over to Austria. The creek was the natural border and I attempted to jump over but I fell into the water. Border guards were shooting after us well into Austrian territory. We reported to the Austrian border patrol and after questioning they escorted us to the refugee camp in Strasburg. Stanko soon left to live with his aunt. He also found a job on the farm for me. A driver who transported farm produce later helped me find a job in the shop close to the border because I spoke German and Slovenian. Many Slovenians came to buy things they couldn't get in Slovenia. I really enjoyed my work and my company there.

When I went to Leibniz to a dentist I noticed the advertisement that migrants are wanted for America, Venezuela and Australia. I applied and was accepted, but they told me that only Venezuela or Australia would take me at that time. I chose Australia.

On 12July1950 I arrived to Fremantle in a Norwegian army vessel SKAUGUM converted into the passenger ship. Korean war started then and authorities were afraid that communists will attack us because our ship carried many Jews and anti communist political migrants. We should have sailed to Sydney but we stopped in

Fremantle; from there we travelled to town Northern where we were put into an old army camp.

Two weeks later I hitchhiked to Perth. I did not understand any English so I smiled a lot. I had the address of Dr. Koce who was a manager of a factory. As I wandered the streets of Perth looking for Dr. Koce a heavy hand of the policeman tapped me on the shoulder. I was terrified because I was convinced that he was going to arrest me because I left the refugee camp without telling anyone. The policeman seemed friendly but I could not tell him anything so I smiled. He saw a piece of paper I was twisting in my hand; he read the address and waived to me to follow him to the bus station. He also slipped two shillings into my hand and told the driver where to take me. The bus driver stopped at the entrance of the factory although the bus never stopped there. I went in and a middle-aged man in a suit asked me if he could help me. I gave him the piece of paper and he told me that he was Dr. Koce. He arranged for me to work in a lemonade factory as a bottle washer. I was later promoted to the bottle machine and soon I was mixing soft drinks. I met another Slovenian Franc Zajc who worked as a waiter. I always liked to work with people so the job was attractive to me. I told the hotel owner that my family was also in a hotel business so she gave me a job. After a few weeks the food waiter was sick so I took over. That's where I learned the difference between ham and lamb although both sounded the same to me.

I always loved music; I found a teacher who was willing to teach me to play a Hawaiian guitar. Other Slovenians made fun of me and my music. One day I had a call from professor Pusenjak who was teaching German and Italian at Perth University. He was also a director and producer of WA Operatic Society. He was preparing to stage European operettas like: Bless the Bride and Gypsy Baron. He heard somewhere that I can sing so he invited me on the set of the choir. I listened to Straus music in the operetta Gipsy Baron and suddenly tears came to my eyes and I felt very homesick.



We prepared Janko Gregorc's operetta "Melody of Hearts". I was happy and very honoured and privileged to be a part of the first Slovenian operetta staged in Australia. Dr. Koce and I were invited to join the committee of The Operatic Society of WA. This was a very happy and exciting time for me.

A year later I took a holiday and a Croatian barman Joe Popic talked me into buying two tickets for us to go by train to Melbourne. On arrival Joe found a room. When I woke up in the morning Popic disappeared. He returned the next day and told me that he found a spoon and fork waiter's casual job for us. This was in a high class Hotel Menzies. Later Joe found a job in Murunda Lake Hotel near Healesville in Victoria. That was heaven on earth for waiters. We earned as much in tips as we did in wages. The manager was a Serb Miroslav Jankovic. We earned lots of money and one day I asked Joe to pay me back the money I paid for his ticket to Melbourne. He came with a bag of sixpences and threepences saying: That should do. I started to count and it was even more than I paid. Since the hotel was closed Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday I had time for painting.

A Muslim kitchen hand asked me to go halves in two lottery tickets with him. We won eight hundred pounds on one, and sixty pounds on the other. I could have bought half a house for that at the time. I felt very rich. The Muslim man was so pleased that he told me a secret of his success: he prayed to Allah on the kitchen floor five times every day.

Summer season finished so I booked a plane to Sydney. I felt rich and really wanted to experience the plane flight for the first time. Unfortunately the plane could not take my large paintings and I had to pack and send them by train.

Dr Jez advertised in Slovenian monthly news bulletin Misli, that he was willing to help Slovenian migrants with translations and to find work and accommodation. I came to him in a taxi but he lived very poorly in a single room and he packed me off to "People's Palace" run by the Salvation Army. They told me that they had no locks on the doors so we should watch our luggage. Soon I found a cheap accommodation in a private hotel.



I went to see Slovenian Franciscan fathers in Waverly. Father Okorn and Father Korbic came from America to organise religious services and cultural social life for Slovenian migrants. They started to print a magazine Misli before they returned to America. Misli were then published by Cujes until Father Rudolf Pivko took over. Pivko was a missionary in China

and was expelled by communists so he came through Japan to Australia. I helped Pivko with production of Misli. I did the title page for two years until Stanko Ropotec took over with Fr. Bernard Ambrozic who later changed the format of Misli which remains to this day.

Those were the exciting, productive and interesting times for Slovenians. We organised gatherings and celebrations. For one New Year celebration we had 820 Slovenians. I organised the program and hired Paddington Hall while Darko Sedlar organised food and drinks. Slovenian opera singer Darmota who came from Vienna by invitation of the ABC sang a couple of songs to a delighted audience. I painted my first portable backdrop of Lake Bled for the Paddington social.

The success of our social life inspired Slovenians in other cities to form Slovenian associations. More people also subscribed to Misli and so Slovenians gradually became better connected throughout Australia.

I worked as an assistant head waiter in Wentworth hotel until 1955 when I left for a holiday in Canberra. I was very impressed with the beauty of the city. I stayed at the Kurrajong Hotel and walked to nearby Hotel Wellington; I had a drink with a man who delivered flowers to hotels. He invited me to accompany him on his deliveries. We stopped at Hotel Canberra which is now called the Canberra Hyatt Hotel. The delivery man told the manager that I was an assistant head waiter in Wentworth Sydney hotel. The manager offered me the same position in his Hotel.

From Misli subscriptions I had an address of Habor Family in Queanbeyan and on my day off another hotel employee took me there. The two oldest Habor girls were not home but I saw the picture of a girl I wanted to marry.



Josefine warmed my heart; she was working at Woolworths in Canberra. I wanted to make a good impression on her Family so I asked Father Pivko to come with me on my next visit. I wanted to get married before I was 25 like my parents did so we rushed the wedding a bit. Father Pivko married us in a double wedding in Manuka St. Christopher's Cathedral on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1956. Fini's sister Olga married at the same time.

My wife Josefine, they called her also Fini or Josie, later told me that she married me only to get out of

Queanbeyan which was then considered a slum area.



Young Bresnik Family 1971

songs. Vlado Skrbinsek, Frank Hribar and Ivan King joined them and they called a meeting in a Methodist hall in Forrest. Between 20 and 30 Slovenians attended. Skrbinsek took a chair as the organiser of the planning committee and they decided to form a Slovenian association. Skrbinsek was elected president, I became a secretary and Falez volunteered to be a treasurer. Vice president became Ivan Urh. At the next meeting we elected the committee and decided to register our association as Slovenian Australian Association Inc. We began organising social events and dances. I was responsible for liquor licence at every social. We also organised children's concerts and teachers to prepare the programs.



Soon we built Slovenian club with volunteer labour. Our tradesmen happily contributed their time and money for our new home. My contribution to the club was a 3 by 5 metre mural of Lake Bled our national icon.

We met other Slovenians in Canberra. I met Cvetko and Ada Falez when they came to see the chef of the hotel, because they both worked in the hotel kitchen. I also met Ivan Urh at their place later.

A few Slovenian boys lived in a hostel where Australian Parliament House stands now. They liked to socialise and sing Slovenian

I was always in a hotel business in Canberra doing various jobs until I became an assistant manager of Tooheys hotel in Kingston.

Josie and I were visiting her parents and on the way we always looked at a little shop in Queanbeyan that was often closed. We made some inquiries and were told that the income was too small for the owner's family with six children. We approached them and asked if we could lease the shop and were offered a six months lease. It was a very primitive setting with one refrigerator and a hand cutting machine for cold meats. We took a loan and modernised it. One day a bank manager came and told us that the bank owns the shop because the owner became bankrupt. We went to the bank and signed the shop over to us. We mortgaged everything. With growing clientele we needed to extend and refurbish. I was a member of a Rotary club and another member who was a manager of the biggest Queanbeyan enterprise guaranteed my overdraft. I hired weekend

drivers to sell ice-cream, soft drinks, chips, chocolates, sweets and cigarettes on the streets of Canberra and that proved very profitable. The drivers were bank tellers who welcomed some weekend overtime. Our business grew rapidly; we extended the shop with two flats above. I bought another van and every lunch time I delivered hot pies, sausage rolls, salad rolls and all above mentioned goods to the building sites, the most famous being the Canberra Mint. In the end our little shop became Frank's Superette.

I used to help my dad with beekeeping and this became my hobby. Honey is not only the sweetest, nicest taste, but a great medicine for many ailments. I fell in love with bees, despite a sting or two and made some money by selling honey. In 1968 my good friend Daniel joined me in this hobby, and we together started beekeeping in Queanbeyan.



In 1972 we bought a farm near Cooma. Our children at the time liked to watch TV series Bonanza so they named our farm Ponderosa. I told them that it wasn't big enough so we named it Mini Ponderosa.

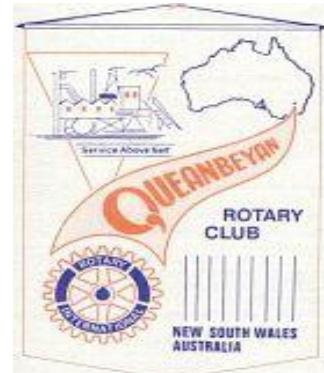


In 1977 we sold our Superette and in 1985 moved to Cooma where we build our home.

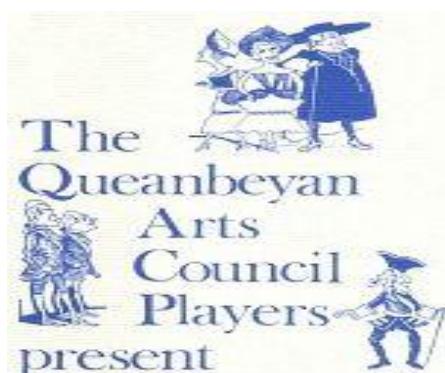
We raised cattle but now we are pensioners and can no longer manage the farm. We are happy here but maybe we should have sold the farm and moved back closer to Canberra and our children's families.



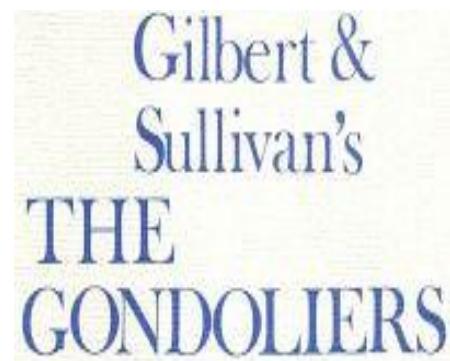
I offered my services to Australian community; I have been a member of a Rotary club for 22 years, I have been elected Alderman Councillor in the Queanbeyan City Council for 10 years and served on various



committees; I represented our council as a delegate around the State. I also served as a Justice of Peace.



The Queanbeyan Arts Council Players was formed in 1974. In 1977 I was in the Gondoliers and in 1978



the Pirate's of Penzance ".

I organized a permanent National Costumes Display in the Queanbeyan Community Centre emphasizing the region's diverse multicultural community.



One of my hobbies is poetry. I published a 28 page booklet in Slovenian on my Computer; it includes two Hymns I composed in Slovenian and in English. I have distributed the booklet in Australia, Slovenia and Belgium.

My Catholic religion has always been a great comfort to me. Jesus really is the way, the truth, and the light for me. Mother Mary really is our mother waiting to receive us at the end of our earthly journey.

I served in various capacities in the Catholic communities. I grew up as an altar boy. I have been an Acolyte since March 1978. Acolytes are Christian men instituted by the Bishop as lay ministers to help priests and deacons in their ministry.

I am saddened that much of the catholic community no longer follows the values and directions of our Holy Father in Rome like we used to. People consider public opinion more important than a doctrine and the rules of the church. Public opinion favours fringe groups who do not want to comply with rules of the majority so life became unpredictable for everybody. If Jesus was here with us public opinion would have him killed every five minutes.

I wish that the old discipline and morals would return; we used to have respect for life and people around us; we felt safe.

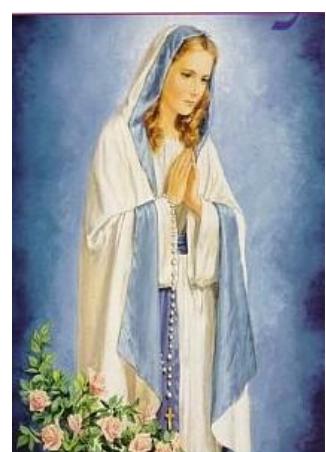
I dedicated my life to our heavenly Mother Mary; I believe that she played a greater role in the life of Jesus than all the saints.



On my pilgrimage to Fatima in the evening of 13th of June 1997 I felt a strong presence of Mary; I saw a bright light above me in the cloudy sky and felt cold sweat wash over me; Josie was next to me and she thought that it was the moon but we suddenly realized that the moon was in the opposite direction. It was not till the October 2000 that I dreamed that I was in a huge cathedral listening to the heavenly music. I remember these words being said: Vseh podob Maria which means Maria of all images. I got up and became inspired to write a song and compose a tune I heard in my dream in Mother Mary's honour.



I had the music written for my song and I presented it to Slovenian clergy but they rejected it. I believe it bothered them that I beseeched Mary to bring back the old morality and virtues. I have presented this Hymn to the Polish Pauline Fathers at the Shrine of our Lady of Mercy Penrose Park pilgrimage and they accepted it. The hymn was officially sung for the first time on the coronation day of the Black Madonna in the presence of the Archbishop Canalini and four bishops, a number of clergy and several



thousand pilgrims on the 26 August 2001. I felt very honoured and touched. Since then they sing it regularly. We had a word that other parishes added the Hymn to their hymn selection.

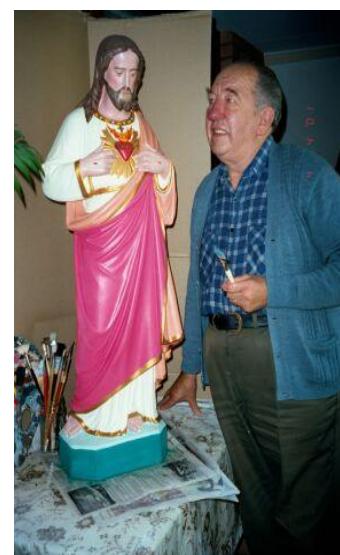
Slovenians only rarely offer recognition to other Slovenians. It takes a stranger to appreciate your art. That is so often the case. Even Jesus mentioned that a prophet is never appreciated in his home town. Hieronymus says that a stranger will praise your talent but your own people will be jealous of your success.

It seems that Slovenians do not let one of their own get ahead; they pull each other down like crabs especially when they know them personally. Instead of being proud that we belong to a nation of talented people we belittle each other's successes.

I was one of the first Slovenians in Australia and one of the first who started to organize social and cultural gatherings.

Despite escaping from communist regime in former Yugoslavia I tried to maintain cordial relations with Slovenians at home; I was eager to promote cultural exchange programs. The cultural exchange was not possible without the approval of Yugoslav embassy in Australia until Slovenia became independent. Some Slovenians resented my contacts with Yugoslav or Slovenian authorities because they did not want to deal with the regimes they escaped from because of religious or political oppression. These Slovenians resented those of us who wished to enrich and improve our social and cultural life by keeping in contact with Slovenians at home.

I always lived by Christian values and forgave those that wronged me. I also hope that others would forgive any of my unintentional failings. I wish Slovenians could dance and sing together and enjoy each other's company. I still believe that we all wish to reconcile before we will follow each other on our last journey. Unfortunately national and international political and religious differences made us enemies when we most needed each other's friendship, company and support. We realize now that we expected too much; although we are all Slovenians we could not be the same because we came from different backgrounds with different levels of understanding.



Painting and singing provided much joy for me throughout my life. I started oil painting during my school years. When I came to Western Australia a friend saw me painting a picture and he suggested that I would be a good sign writer. I got a job and made a huge sign but one letter was missing and could not be corrected. My spelling wasn't good enough so I had to return to the factory job. While working in a hotel I had Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays free. I bought painting equipment and started painting.

Lake Bled is a Slovenian icon; it is the most beautiful lake with an island church in the middle. I only had a photograph of Bled but I began painting it as a landscape and later as a mural.

I like traditional art. While in Sydney in 1953 I saw David Jones offering one thousand pounds as a first prize for a painting. There were various sections and in the religious section another Slovenian Stanko Ropotec won the first prize. It was a contemporary painting of Jesus quietening the sea. That inspired me to study contemporary art. I became quite successful and have been awarded many prizes. In Melbourne I met Frank Benko who was a successful mosaic artist. I felt proud that Ropotec, Benko and I promoted Slovenian culture in Australia.

Our St. Patrick church in Cooma has been restored in 1999; the statues needed to be

restored and I happily took the job. It was a wonderful new experience.

I am grateful to God, that I remained a traditional catholic, led by the Pope. I am most grateful for my family; my loving wife who helped me in everything I did; my three healthy and capable children who gave me nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

I am happy that I was able to accept and actively contribute to Australian way of life. I am also happy that I was able to contribute to the social and cultural life of Australian Slovenians.

Slovenians are generally pretty ambitious lot; we try to prove ourselves worthy wherever we may live. We are proud of



being able to overcome hardships and obstacles. Maybe we need to win public recognition because we come from a small country that has all through history struggled to maintain its identity and culture because bigger neighbours coveted our beautiful and rich land under the Alps and stretching to the Adriatic Sea.

Perhaps we Slovenians take ourselves too seriously; we are always careful about the impact we have on life and people around us. We try to build a good reputation and represent our nation with integrity to the rest of the world. We are also concerned about the personal standing in a community; we want our ethnic group to be acceptable and respected by other Australians as well as by the Slovenians in Slovenia.

### **“Queanbeyan Art Society”**

*The Society has come a long way since it was officially opened back in 1967 by the then Mayor, Fred Land, at the home of local artist Mr Frank Alcock and in the presence of its three other artists founding directors, Messrs. Frank Bresnik, Otto Huszar and Ernie Beaver. An important milestone was the 1980 acquisition of O’Neil’s cottage, built 100 years earlier on the bank of the Queanbeyan River. The cottage was acquired when viewing it as the subject of the winning painting by well known local artist Mrs. Peg Minty, at the Society’s annual exhibition in 1978 opening by. A great deal of community volunteer work was needed to get the old cottage shipshape for a gallery and among the major contributors were members of the Rotaract, Apex, Rotary, Quota and the Art Society members, with the expert builder and also artist, Mr Trevor Hardy and number of community members. Frank Bresnik as Alderman of the Queanbeyan City Council has been a daily help, worker and supervisor for nearly two years to finish the new gallery for official 1983 opening.*

**I wish to finish on a quote from the late American President John Kennedy:** Don’t ask what the country is going to do for you, ask yourself, what you are going to do for your country.



My granddaughter Nasha in my village Smartno

parents were over 30 when they married and settled in Smartno near Litija. Mum was a parish priest's cook and dad was a miner. I was born on 12th of February 1929, the second of six children. It was Shrove Tuesday in the coldest winter they remembered.

We were considered very poor. I remember being hungry most of the time; I remember us children rattling our spoons long before the corn meal was ready!

Dad was a coal miner in Germany but at home he found jobs on the farms; he cut hay, prepared wood, etc. His work was not regular so Mum helped to feed the family by also working for farmers. Dad cleaned water reservoirs on railway stations. They gave him a special train wagon to live in and to store his tools while on the job. When a reservoir needed cleaning, they connected his wagon and took him there. On Saturdays he came home, then went back again on Monday morning. Later he worked in a local tin mine until it closed.

Dad also dug water wells. He kept records of every well he dug so he was in a good position to give a quote and negotiate the price.

Mum insisted that we go to mass every morning during May, and at least every Sunday at other times. A miracle happened early one morning on my way to mass. It was freezing cold when I found a 100 Dinar note in the snow. I ran home and gave it to Mum. She took it to the parish priest so he could make an announcement from the pulpit, and return the money to the rightful owner. He was a good priest and he liked Mum. He told her that nobody needed the money more than she did to feed her family. He added that he would not make an announcement, but if someone told him within the week that they had lost the money, he would give it back.

We waited a week and nobody came forward so Mum bought about 100 kg of corn. I felt like a hero because I had helped my family survive that winter. The menu was sauerkraut and cornmeal. As the snow began to melt, Mum began to sow the vegetables in our large garden and that was the main source of our food.

For Sunday lunch mum bought 250 grams of meat some bones and a piece of liver. That was a meal for seven of us. We each got carefully measured portions of meat and liver. There was also fresh salad, roast potatoes, and applesauce. We looked forward to this special Sunday dinner.

During spring we picked young dandelions on the roadsides. People used these first greens for salad. We picked lots, and my sister went from house to house to sell it. Once, she was so excited when she sold the last of it that she ran home to tell Mum but forgot her bag and money somewhere. We always teased her about it.

We had a nanny goat, a very precious source of milk for the family. At sunrise I took her to graze until I had to go to school. I would take her again after school until dusk. She was a wicked and stubborn animal! If I took my eyes off her for one minute, she escaped into someone's field and ate their cabbages and other vegetables. I was forever in trouble because of her!

In the spring, our goat had a kid that we sold to buy necessary provisions, like cheaper beef, oil, salt and clothing. Goat kid's meat was considered a delicacy. The owners of the leather factory had a permanent order for one. Our goat produced up to seven litres of milk a day after the kid was gone; we exchanged this milk for double the amount of cow's milk. People believed that goat's milk was a remedy for those suffering from tuberculosis.

Each spring, we bought a piglet so Mum could fatten it. We killed it before Christmas. Every piece of meat was carefully preserved. The fat was reduced into lard. We smoked the meat and made excellent blood wurst, kranskies and salamis. Even the head was cut into pieces and later cooked with barley.

We had Scripture twice a week. One chaplain was a sadist. He never hit the rich farmers' kids, but some poorer ones were up for punishment at every lesson. All of us were scared of him. He really enjoyed torturing us!

He would call a whole line of students to him – many boys wet their pants in fear! He would clamp the head of a student between his knees, lean back on the chair, and hit him on the backside with a stick. If he broke the stick on you, you had to bring him a new one at the next Scripture lesson.

Once, someone said that I murdered birds even though it wasn't true. The sadist priest grabbed the short hair on the side of my head. He shook my head so fast from one side to the other that I could only see lines in front of me. Chunks of my hair dropped on the floor. He kept grabbing new bits until I admitted that I had killed the birds. We hated him!

I didn't dare tell my parents, but my father noticed a bald patch on my head and wanted to know what had happened. Father went to the priest and told him if he ever touched me again, he would smash his face and his house. I didn't get hit much after that.

One Sunday afternoon, my father was drunk when he passed the sports ground where an organisation called Sokol was having a big festival – food, drinks, dancing, and gymnastic displays. Dad called out "Heil Communism!"

Everything went dead quiet. As he continued walking home, a few boys caught up with him and wanted to fight. He turned and put his hand into his back pocket. "Come boys, come here!" He beckoned them with the other hand.

Careful! He has a pistol! someone said. Everyone moved back quickly.

I don't know if my dad was only boasting or if it was true, but a couple of weeks later, they put him in jail. He said that he had made a mistake. Instead of saying "Heil Sokol!" he had said "Heil Communism!"

Dad inherited some money from his relations in America so he began building our home. We had just settled into it in 1941 when the Germans invaded Slovenia. They began transporting priests, teachers and Communists. They inspected every student – they measured our faces and wrote down the colour of our eyes. We were told that fair-haired, blue-eyed people were allowed to stay. It also helped if your name sounded German.

My father was taken first. After a few weeks, the rest of the family were told to pack what we could carry and we joined Father in Ljubljana. We travelled to Serbia where the citizens were very kind to us. They gave us an old mud house with one big room

and a little kitchen. We put straw on the floor and slept one next to the other, five children and our parents. The shopkeepers and other rich people paid for our keep.

In Serbia, Mum and some other women cooked in the school building for the rest of us new settlers. We brought tin cans to fill with food to carry home. We called this food 'corba', a kind of soup made from potatoes, cabbage, onions, and tomato thickened with corn flour.

During the German occupation, partisans in Serbia carried out isolated attacks by blasting bridges and the railway to sabotage transport. The Germans retaliated – if partisans killed one German soldier, Germans killed 100 Serb civilians. For one German officer, they killed 1000 Serb civilians.

The town's people were ordered by the Germans to guard the railway against partisans' sabotage. There were about 20 guards every night, and each adult male had to serve at some time. The town's rich people paid my dad and other Slovenians to do their time guarding. There was no other income so they accepted.

The job was very dangerous. If the partisans destroyed the rail, all guards on duty that night would be shot! I remember my father telling me how he thought he saw the shadow of someone hammering something on the railway. He pleaded with what he thought was the shadow of a partisan, not to blast the railway. As he got closer, it was only a dog eating a bone!

My father was never a Communist but we believe that we were transported because he had shouted "Heil Communism". He could actually be called a German collaborator because he guarded the railways in Serbia for the Germans, in order to save Serbian lives.

About 1200 Germans were housed in the Army barracks at Palanka. When Italy capitulated in 1943, 200 Italians were brought over from Albania to look after horses for Germans. They were allowed to come to town in the afternoon, and many of them came to our place.

My father read German newspapers and was well informed about politics and the War. He sold wine to about 20 regulars, who came to hear the news and to drink. They toasted each other quite openly with the slogan: 'Slavs will win against Berlin!'

Once, an Italian soldier offered Dad some bridles, reins and chains in exchange for wine. These were valuable commodities during the War, and the Germans had lots of that stuff in the barracks. The Italians helped themselves to anything they could sell for drinking money.

Peasants brought wood, vegetables, meat and wine to sell at the market once a week. Dad offered farmers the horse gear that the Italians had sold to him, and they

paid for it with wine. When Italian soldiers came again, Dad served them the wine and asked for more belts, chains, reins and bridles.

At first farmers brought bottles of wine, then small barrels, and then bigger barrels. Once, they brought a barrel that wouldn't go through the front door so they had to cut a bigger opening into our mud house! Hundreds of litres of wine – ruzica being the favourite – were sold each week.

By now, Dad had quite a business buying and selling alcohol. He tested the wine for strength by putting a strip of newspaper in the glass of wine. The wine would soak into the paper and the water ran out over the glass.

He told the wine producers that they were putting too much water in their wine so he could pay them less. I don't know if it really showed that water was being added but the farmers believed him. I think it was only a trick Dad used to get wine cheaper!

Eventually, about fifty regulars came to drink outside our house most evenings. They sang, told jokes and laughed while they drank. About twenty Italians, many more Slovenians, and sometimes, even a few Germans came to our house. When Russians began coming, they wanted vodka, and they drank it in big wine glasses!

Someone must have told the Germans about Dad trading in horse gear so they came to search the house. A Serb interpreter came with them, and he saw the chains through the straw on the floor but quickly covered them up. Dad liked Serbs.

Italian POWs also traded things like old uniforms and other sorts of clothing for wine. Once, Dad got a jumper and later sold it to a villager; the wife of the Orthodox priest recognised it as one she knitted for their son. When she approached the man wearing it, he told her that he had bought it from my father. After the invasion, the Germans had arrested local men and made them parade in the yard. They had to look up at a window where the Germans and their Serb collaborators stood. They chose 18 men to eliminate. The Germans took them into the field and ordered them to dig their own graves before they shot them. Italians had to bury the bodies and before they did, they took their clothes. This woman's son wasn't even dead yet! He pleaded for mercy but was hit on the head with a spade.

The woman asked Dad where he got the jumper but he only told her part of the story: he said that the Germans had killed her son and that the Italians had taken his clothes but he couldn't tell her that her own Serb neighbours pointed out her son for Germans or that he had been hit with a spade so he would fall into his grave.

In Serbia people raced pigeons. At an arranged time on Sunday mornings, owners released groups of up to five birds from their homes. One sort raced in circles and the others flew high and did up to ten summersaults down to the rooftops. Some stayed in the air for up to 8 hours. The owners and the players placed bets on whose

pigeons would stay the longest in the air and whose would do more summersaults. Some pigeons were killed by peregrine falcons.

I would let my pigeons circle up, and when they came back close to the ground, I whistled them up again. One of my pigeons always came to sit on my head. At night, the Russians liked to give him vodka to drink until he got drunk!

Dad used to send me to buy him big packets of tobacco from the farmers. When I sold some pigeons, I also bought a bag of tobacco then made smaller packets to sell to those who came to drink at our place. I made quite a bit of money but when I had a good amount saved my father took it to buy wine. Once I made a good deal when I traded a pair of young pigeons for two piglets. Usually, I just traded them for corn and wheat.

A pigeon's courtship is much like ours. The males are very protective of their females. Before they mate, they wipe their beaks and then they kiss. After mating, both pigeons fly a couple of circles. Both parents look after the young –they sit on the eggs and bring food.

I bought a pigeon pair of a really good breed. They mated and had young every month. When the chicks were still in the nest, there were already new eggs. I had about a dozen pairs of pigeons the year before we returned home from Serbia. Someone came and stole them. Eventually, I found out who it was and I told Dad. He came with me and told the thief that we would report him to the German police if he did not return them and pay for my losses.

The man had re-established my pigeons at his place by not letting them out until they had young. He knew that they would return to look after the babies. The thief was afraid of my father and brought back the pigeons and the money.

Before I left Serbia, I sold most of my pigeons. I took three pairs home with me but in Slovenia, peregrine falcons got them. It was 1945 and I was sixteen. I looked for an apprenticeship but there was nothing available.

I found a job in the textile factory tying the ropes that ran around pulleys to turn the spindles under the machine. There were about 600 spindles and I had to check them regularly during my eight-hour day. I had to be on my knees most of the time and my hands were blistered from pulling the ropes. It was a very dirty, hard job.

After about a year I got a position as an apprentice electrician. When I completed the apprenticeship I worked for a private firm for two years before I applied to go to a business school that would qualify me to become an independent contractor.

About seventy of us started a two-year program but only twenty of us finished. It was pretty hard. For the first year I had a scholarship from the textile factory and lived in

a boarding school. They took away the scholarship in my second year, so I moved in with my sister, Ivana, and her family. I went to school mornings and worked afternoons.

In 1952, I finished college and started full-time work until they called me into the Army. I served in Serbia from 1952 until 1954. Slovenian boys had to go to the southern Yugoslav republics and soldiers from the southern republics served in Slovenia because the Communists wanted to assimilate the five Balkan nationalities and change them into one Yugoslav nation. We were all supposed to speak Serbo-Croatian to build the brotherhood and unity. The children of mixed marriages had no choice but to call themselves Yugoslavs but the rest of us resented it. Tito had a Croatian father and Slovenian mother – he was a Yugoslav! Maybe he believed that an assimilation and forced brotherhood would save Yugoslavia. Maybe if Communism lasted another generation people would forget their nationality.

When I returned from the Army, I worked for about three years as the manager of a government electrical company. At the end of 1957 I moved to Ljubljana and opened a private electrical workshop and installations business. I employed about five electricians and some apprentices. I met Cilka, and when she finished teacher's college in 1960, we married.

I worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day. I bought a block of land, a car and a television. In those days that meant that I was doing well. I often worked late in the night, but no matter how hard I worked, I was not allowed to prosper because I was in the private sector – a rotten branch on the so-called healthy Socialist tree.

The shire council invited me to join the government-owned cooperative but I refused. They arrested me in July 1962 to investigate how I made my income. They wanted to teach me a lesson!

The investigator pleaded with me: Please understand Mr Zagar that I have to find something, anything! He interrogated my employees and the people we worked for but he found nothing. I began to understand that in Communism, it isn't right for a private business to be more successful than the government sector. I simply wasn't allowed to succeed.

When I got out of jail a month later, Cilka and I began preparing for our escape to Austria. Our son, Marko, was only eighteen months old. We asked relatives to look after him but it was too dangerous to tell them about our plans. They would commit a crime if the authorities found out that they knew and did not report us. We believed it would be easy to reclaim Marko through the Red Cross once we were



Joze and Cilka with Paula and Francek Lorbek

settled.

We sold most of our belongings and left the money for a man who would smuggle Marko to Austria if we could not get him through the Red Cross. Then on 13 October 1962, Cilka and I climbed over Mount Olsava into Austria.

Upon arrival, we met Francek and Paula, a-Slovenian couple living in Slovenian part of Austria. We were afraid that they would call the Border Police but instead they washed our clothes and gave us good food. We stayed with them for a few weeks and they became our lifelong friends. They called us night birds because we only came down from the attic at night. Austrian border guards used to visit Pavla and Francek during the day so we had to stay in hiding. Next, we hitchhiked to Salzburg. An American motorbike racer gave us a lift and said that he would wait for us on the German-side of the border but we told him not to bother. We bypassed the border at midnight. As we ran to cross the bridge into Germany; Cilka fell into a freezing creek; I fell on the bridge, hurt my knee and tore my clothes. We found an empty hay shed

in the paddock but we couldn't go to sleep because we were freezing. We went out onto the road again to hitchhike but the first car was a police car that took us back to Austria.

In Salzburg, they questioned and photographed us before they put us in jail. Four days later we were transported to a refugee camp in Vienna where men and women slept in different dormitories. Early every Monday and Thursday mornings a man came and called out the names of those who had to go by bus back to Yugoslavia. Cilka and I were terrified as we listened for our name to come up!

The authorities informed us that we would have to get Marko before they would let us emigrate. My brother came from Germany and said that he would contact the man who was to bring Marko. He took the money to pay the man but changed his mind and tried to do it himself. My brother Ciril was young and reckless, and the Border Police caught him with Marko. They put Ciril in jail and the police family took Marko. Cilka's mum collected Marko three weeks later. The authorities told her that her family will go to prison and the government would take their land if she would let Marko go with anybody else.

In March 1963, I found a salesman in Graz, who often travelled to Slovenia. Cilka wrote to her parents to say that we returned to Slovenia and will come to collect Marko. The salesman posted the letter in Ljubljana and a few days later he went to collect Marko.

A doctor prescribed the right dose of sleeping pills for Marko. The salesman took the springs out of the back seat of his car and placed Marko inside to bring him over the border. We were waiting in Graz. Towards the morning, we heard Marko's voice on the steps. It was the most exciting sound we had ever heard and the happiest time of our lives!

On May 13<sup>th</sup> 1963, we boarded the Qantas plane to Sydney. My first job in Australia was sugar cane cutting in Queensland. Later I worked in the Jindabyne-Island Bend Tunnel, part of the Snowy Mountains project. From Jindabyne, we moved to Canberra where I worked as an electrical contractor. We built our home in Canberra and intended to stay there. We went for a holiday to Lightning Ridge in 1968 and stayed because I wanted to have a go at opal mining.

Opal mining changed our lives forever. People here say that opal mining is like any other gambling only you also develop muscles. Gambling on opal was exciting and unpredictable. No two days were ever the same. The years passed too quickly.

My family actually witnessed the rise and the fall of Lightning Ridge.

The name Lightning Ridge originated from long before opal played any role in the lives of people around here. The Ridge is the only elevated ground in the flat

countryside; the red iron ore rocks attracted electric storms and lightning once killed hundreds of sheep and a shepherd here.

Says Roy Barker: Aborigines always had eyes to the ground foraging for food as they were, so they surely noticed pretty stones since some opals would have surfaced after the rain eroded the ground. They must have been delighted by the beautiful colours but they never considered them as having commercial value since opals are not food and they do not provide shelter.

Nobody is quite certain which white settler first spotted a flash of lightning in the stone. Maybe it was the first white shepherd during the late nineteenth century wandering around the ridge in the middle of the flat landscape. Maybe Mrs Parker from Bangate station became intrigued by the shiny stones Aborigines brought to her; maybe it was Mrs Ryan strolling near the government tank at the beginning of the twentieth century that saw something shiny in the dirt. Jack Murray was the first man who took a serious notice of the sighting and began to look for opal in 1906.

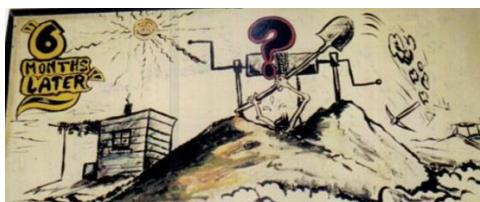
All agree that Lightning Ridge grew up as the black opal town; the place blessed with the most spectacular colourful gem lured people from all over the world to search for this beauty. The Ridge blossomed during the last four decades of twentieth century when thousands of migrants swooned over the opal fields.

Graham Anderson said: Rich people like to go camping once a year but opal miners choose to camp all year around. They are where they want to be; they are doing what they like doing; they do it when they feel like doing it.

Lightning Ridge, known as a home of Australian national symbol the rainbow gem black opal is also a home of just as colourful world adventurer opal miners who live on hope which is the high that lasts for a lifetime. They dream of the gem that might come in the next load of dirt to make all their castles in the clouds a reality. It might take a lifetime for the gem to appear but this lifetime is filled with hope and dreams. The relaxed lifestyle is the reason most miners like to return to Lightning Ridge. Mining for black opal unites Lightning Ridge people but the uniqueness of our different life experiences makes the place excitingly enchanting.

Diggers Rest hotel in middle of Lightning Ridge was the main meeting place for opal miners. Drinking singing and storytelling was part of everyday socialising before air-conditioning and television began to provide home comforts.

My first memorable impression of Lightning Ridge came from the paintings on the walls of Diggers Rest hotel. An unknown artist painted a story of a hopeful American in a huge limousine coming to Lightning Ridge dreaming dreams of instant riches he will find.



The artist followed the man's Riches to Rags story. After six months of sweat and toil the man walks away swearing with his head down and the bundle of rags over his shoulder. The hotel has since then burned down and the pictures were destroyed but I have here old photos of some. They really represent our tourist resort and miners' dreams.

I have witnessed many such real Riches to Rags stories. It is well known that about five percent of opal miners become rich, about twenty percent make good wages, another twenty percent scrape for their survival and the rest go broke.

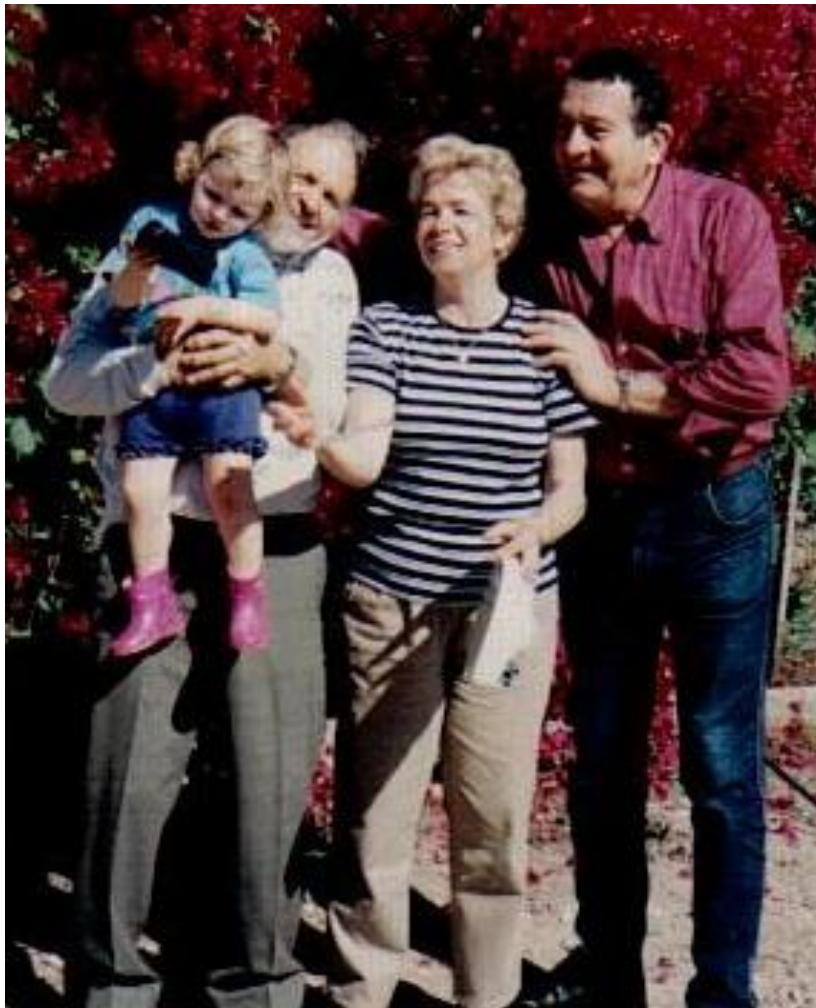
When we first came to Lightning Ridge nobody locked their doors, if they had doors at all they were open and everybody was welcome at any time. Machinery was left on the field and nobody touched what wasn't theirs; opals were passed around for inspection; everybody licked the dirt of the nobbies to see the colour better; everybody trusted everybody else.

People say that opal miners want to get rich fast but getting rich is only a dream. Miners know how unrealistic this dream is but you have to have a dream to survive.

When we came in the sixties; the town had four teachers, one policeman, a visiting priest and a bush nurse. One policeman administered mining, traffic and law and order. If he said to a miner I don't want to see you here tomorrow, the miner had to



pack up and go. We had no ratters no thieving and no disorder. We had no social security or unemployment benefit. You couldn't say that you were looking for employment if you chose to live in Lightning Ridge. There was only opal. When the money ran out miners left town to seek employment and save money before they returned to have another go. Since 1985 miners can apply for social security benefits so more and more opal miners exist on welfare. The opal fields changed. Unemployment benefits attracted some who are not self-reliant and responsible; ratters came to steal in the mines of honest hardworking miners. Everybody began longing for the good old days when one could trust everybody around him.



Now we have almost more people in the offices than down the shaft mining. Bureaucracy is producing corruption; those in the know have the power to use the poor miner any way they like. The pen pushers became the lucky people on the opal fields. They are the first to know where opal was found and they can exploit this knowledge. Mining became too expensive for an ordinary bloke so most of Lightning Ridge people are on some kind of social security. Office workers are out looking for the needs in the community. The more people look for needs more needs appear. The more social security offers the more scared and insecure we feel. Our names became a part of the invisible computer statistics. We are fish in the net.

We have many government agencies to take care of people, but people stopped caring. In the olden days people knew that they had to rely on each other so they were good to each other. Now miners don't even care to get to know each other. Many miners invented the machinery and dwellings from the scraps found on the rubbish tip; we developed and exhausted the opal fields. Opal mining offers too

many temptations and opportunities to take more than is appropriate. Partnerships, marriages and friendships were broken on account of opal.

Now we retired. Lightning Ridge, once vibrant tourist destination has become a very quiet home of retired fortune seekers. The wages elsewhere are high, there are no more adventurer migrants to risk their lives in pursuit of opal; the bureaucracy has spoiled mining with endless rules and regulations. The office created jobs for officers and many miners left town in protest. The easy going self sufficient community we once knew became a refuge for social security receivers. Hot Bore Bath seems to be

the greatest attraction in Lightning Ridge now because old tired bones find some relief in the artesian water. Miners who could afford it, escaped from the heat of Lightning Ridge summer and the town became regularly deserted for months. We spent most summer holidays in Canberra.



We spent every school holiday away from the Ridge. My wife Cilka used to say that we really lived in Canberra and only worked in Lightning Ridge.



Fishing for trout in the mountain streams and the company of good friends gave us much pleasure over the years. During our stay in Canberra in the sixties we met many Slovenians and they became our lifelong friends.

I treasure the memories of the times with Polde and Ivanka Bajt's family; we were celebrating, fishing, pig-hunting and playing games. We enjoyed the company of many other Slovenian lifelong friends like Slavica Brumec, Marjan Koren, Toncka and Stane Heric as well as Falez, Hribar, Osolnik and Macek families. Many of us met in Tumut during the festive Christmas seasons for well over thirty years. We camped on the banks of the big, cool clean Tumut River for years and there was much merrymaking. We caught many fish and fried them on the open fire. Eating, drinking, singing and remembering were memorable and enjoyable for all. We shared our lives and these friendships sustained us.



I still  
like  
to  
join  
my  
sons  
on  
the

boat; we always compete who is going to catch more fish. We remember all the ones we caught and the others that got away. I am glad that my boys enjoy the pleasures of nature and a healthy lifestyle. I enjoy being with my children and grandchildren; I keep in daily contact with them. Family and friends really are the most important people.

We also look forward to our yearly holidays on the Queensland coast where we recharge our batteries in the company of friends like Knap, Heric, Visocnik, Cuderman and Klemen families.

**Nothing is new under the sun; new generations just see the old events with a new understanding. The master and the slave changed names and positions but both live at all times.**

### *My childhood by Cilka Zagar.*



Cilka Zagar's family in 1952

I was born at the beginning of WWII. Despite the war I had a wonderful childhood. My parents were simple, gentle and almost unnoticeable people. My father used to make toys and whistles for us children; he told us fairy tales while he was weaving baskets and making farm tools during winter; he took us to the forest in spring to show us birds making nests. I remember him taking me with him to catch a badger. We stayed in the field most of the night and he told me about the stars. Mum used to sing with us children as she sewed pretty dresses for us girls. I liked to comb her hair while she told me

about the lives of saints. No wonder my earliest ambition was to become a saint or at least a princess.

After the war mum changed into black. I was surrounded by women in black. Black scarfs could be seen going to church every Sunday like black umbrellas in the rain. I could hear mum sob at night and her crying frightened me; her eyes were red all the time. Nobody asked why she cried. Everybody in the house whispered. There were

six children still at home yet the house seemed silent like people lost their voices. Dad stayed with the cattle when he wasn't working on the fields. He stopped telling me stories, he barely noticed me. I remember mum patting his hair once but he pushed her hand away.

I started school in 1946; we learned under the tree because someone burned down the school during the war; we carried a homemade chair to school every day like children carry a pencil case these days. We learned how lucky we were that our hero partisans won the war and the revolution. We chanted the morning greeting: Death to fascism, freedom to the nation. For our homeland with Tito, ahead.

We learned that we were all the same and equal now and every type of work was honourable. We learned to be grateful for the equality, freedom and brotherhood of nations. We wrote slogans on the walls of the public buildings: Tito Stalin. Death to Germans and their collaborators. Death to traitors.

Every new experience seems normal to a child. I felt a kind of euphoria, a new beginning, a spring at the end of the war. We learned that Tito was our best teacher, our father, our saviour and the father of the nation. We sang songs in his honour. We created great pageants for his birthday.

My beautiful young teacher was singing with us children now like mum used to sing before. I loved my teacher and tried to please her. At the age of six I had no idea who Germans or Russians or traitors were. The teacher once asked the class who the traitors were and a boy said that his brother was a traitor. Somewhere in me was an unspoken fear that my brothers were also traitors. Nobody ever talked about them but I heard whispers that they were killed after the war. I believed that there was something to be ashamed of. I was also made ashamed of my parents because they owned land and went to church and did not rejoice in the communist victory. I was ashamed because they cried for my traitor brothers.

So much shame! So much fear that something dreadful was going to happen because my parents did not love Tito. So much guilt. It seemed to me that I was growing smaller every day. I was hiding in my confusion.

I proudly brought home my first school reader. Dad tore out the first page where the picture of Tito was. I felt that there was something very wrong with my father. My lovely teacher asked about the missing page. She took me to see the principal. I said that my little sister scribbled on it so I tore it out. The teacher and the principal whispered and looked at me. I don't know why I lied.

I was nine when the name Stalin disappeared from the walls; we heard whispers that our Tito quarrelled with Stalin. Most slogans were gradually rubbed out, changed or repainted.

A man in a black suit came at that time with a paper that ordered the surrender of our piglets. Mum protested that she needed to sell the piglets so she could buy shoes for the children. The man in a suit gave a signal for the two men in working clothes to load the piglets.

Mum stood between the men and the piglets like a mountain. The man in a suit told her to move out of the way or he will arrest her for being with Russians.

I did not sit with Russians when you sited with Russians, back-chatted mum and I grabbed her skirt in fear. Watch your tongue, said the man and his voice reached my bones.

I barely remembered my three older brothers. They were gone before I started school. The youngest stayed in Russia after the war and there were whispers that he was a communist; I became proud of the brother that returned from Russia victorious.

As I grew older I needed to understand what terrible thing my two brothers did to deserve to be killed in the dark forests of Kocevski Rog after the war. What was I afraid of? What was it that made everybody afraid of speaking about their fear?

At the age of sixty I first spoke about these things with Valentin, my so called communist brother. He became successful after the war and we all looked up to him. To me he was always a distant shining star. Now I wanted to know him. We began to correspond and he writes:

Jews have a day of cleansing, a day when the door opens and through this door should only go the one who truly confesses his sins and repents. I will try to pass through that door.

My parents and teachers made me keenly aware of the life choices: heaven, purgatory or hell. We had to fear hell and strive for heaven. For a catholic child this used to be simple. You sin, confess, repent and sin again. As long as you confess before you die you have nothing to fear. I worried about dying without confession. It did not seem fair that the eternity depended on this last confession. Why didn't God keep some kind of ledger to balance your good and bad deeds?



My brothers Joze and Rudi

was the fourth of nine children to a subsistent farmer. I still wonder how my parents clothe and fed us all. Two cows and two hectares of land was all they had but I don't remember ever being hungry. If they were lucky they sold a nest of piglets and maybe one calf a year.

Our idyllic lifestyle ended when the war began.

Our village was on the border of German and Italian occupied territory. We were under Italian administration until in 1943 Italy capitulated.

I was a restless teenager ready for excitement and rebellion. I suppose I was adventurous and often disobedient so I often had to be punished by my father. In 1942 at the age of 12 I ran away from home and joined Italians. They wanted to take me to Italy but mum begged our priest to intervene so they let me come home. I recently read what the priest wrote in his diary; Valentin looked like a lost little Jesus and his mum commented: of course he did being the son of Joseph and Mary.

I vividly remember when in 1943 Germans transported Slovenians into German labour camps. I was 13. I saw people crying and packing their meagre belongings in bundles as they were forced to leave their homes. Brave and idealistic I wanted to help these people and fight the enemy.

My older brothers were hiding at the time but Home guards came and they took Jozef, aged 18. Partisans came for Rudi, aged 16 but he had pneumonia so they left him. Home guards took Rudi towards the end of 1944. I was already gone by then.

At school I sat next to a boy whose parents were known communist activists. We were friends and on my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday 8 August 1944 I left home to join partisans.

There was no forced ideology at this time and I remember our unit going to Christmas midnight mass in 1944. In January 1945 they offered to send me with another 62 Slovenian boys to the military academy in Russia. We had to walk about a hundred kilometres in snow to Zagreb and in March 1945 the plane took us to Belgrade; on April 1945 we arrived to Kiev where we celebrated allied victory on 9 May 1945.

In Russia I learned in Russian what Russian authorities wanted me to know. Mainly I learned political science, ballistics, armoury, topography, strategies, etc. I remember the hunger, the loneliness and the homesickness. This was a sad part of my life. I was forever hungry and cold.

I liked swimming in Dnjeper, horse riding in the open countryside and dancing at the weekend. Russian girls provided some intimacy and emotional experience for us young boys so far away from home.

I returned from Russia in October 1947 for a holiday. At the age of 17 I felt like a stranger in my family. The door between my father and me remained closed forever. Each of us lived out our own bitterness separately. I needed the love and understanding of my family but my family mourned my dead brothers. We never spoke about it but the silence was painful. My mother cried a lot; she showed love and understanding towards me but my father remained bitter to the end. In that atmosphere I left home. I tried to make something out of my life. I always wanted something better.

On the way back to Russia I stopped at my aunt's place in Zagreb where I again met a girl I knew from my childhood. I decided not to return to Russia and eventually this girl Ljerka and I married.

I began working and studying at the same time. I became an engineer and later a pharmacist; I was a director of the pharmaceutical factory Pliva for many years. I succeeded in my efforts but I found happiness in my family. There is a reason for everything one does. I always tried to make the best of what life offered.

In life one easily finds a crutch for himself when the going gets tough but one rarely extends this crutch to a fellow traveller. We like to celebrate with others but in one's pain one is often alone, an island for himself. As I look at the world events now I see

that we did not learn anything. Young boys still kill for the beliefs their leaders instilled in them. They all also want God to be on their side.

So writes my brother. I am proud of him; he is a good man, he is an outstanding citizen, he is an intelligent human being, and he is a kind person.

I do not know what my two older brothers would be like if they were not murdered after the war. My parents considered them outstanding and excellent sons. I had no chance to know them as brothers.

Looking back I wonder why Slovenians still suffer the consequences of what these teenage boys did sixty five years ago.

## Slovenia revisited by Cilka Zagar



As I grew up in Slovenia during the 1940s, subsistent farmers produced their food, their wine and timber, their tools and utensils, much of their clothes and all of their toys. We washed and swam in the nearby river Krka; we skied on the surrounding hills and skated on the frozen creeks. The cows pulled the wagon with the produce. We stored fruit in the cellar, we smoked meat in the chimney, made lard, ground the grains, shelled the beans, made doonas and pillows from home grown chook and goose feathers. Dad read the newspaper and told stories for entertainment and enlightenment.



As I

returned home during the nineties, I expected to see everything as I left it thirty years ago but my sister who is still living in our tiny village also had a computer and a dishwasher, a video and a television, a car and a tractor. Our tiny village store now sells goods from all over the world much like Australian supermarkets do. Farmers produce cash crops. Even little Slovenia could not escape technology and progress.

I was not homesick for this modern Slovenia; I was searching for the sights and sounds and smells of long ago; I hoped to feel like I did during my growing up; I realised that homesickness is as much a wish to be young again as it is to return to an unchanged wonderland in which one first discovered love. Home is not a place on any map of the world, there are no roads leading home; I can play with memories of home and youth as perfectly in Australia as I can in Slovenia. The only home I am really homesick for is the one I carry in my heart. The place I called home has changed, it changed hands and has no memories of me.

Joe and I married in 1960 and arrived with our two years old son Marko to Australia in May 1963.

In 1966 I began teaching in Canberra. In 1968 my family went for a holiday to Lightning Ridge and my husband, Joe, found a two-carat opal at Canfells.

Let us stay for a few months, said Joe. I resigned from my job in Canberra, found a new one in Lightning Ridge School and kept on providing bread and butter for the



Walgett in 1975 with my class, the Principal Sr. Betty and my assistant Unkey.

family.

It never occurred to me that perhaps Joe should consider my job or my opinions or wishes. The man had to lead and the woman had to follow; that's what I believed at the time. Joe is ten years older; when I met him he had a business and he employed people. I was still an obedient student and in many ways a child at eighteen. I am a follower by nature while Joe is a leader. He is outspoken and has been the most vocal and constructive critic of all my activities. He encouraged me to have a go and overcome new challenges. I rebelled a lot but in the end I am grateful to Joe for making me try harder.



My Aboriginal Dennis family from Gingie Mission

started mining and he found a few stones and a few friends. Joe never liked to work for the boss; he was an independent man and Lightning Ridge provided an opportunity for him to work on his own, at his own pace; he hoped that here he could prove himself and prosper with his tenacity and hard work. Joe promised that we will return to Canberra for Christmas; every Christmas for many years until I reluctantly accepted Lightning Ridge as our home.

We intended to keep that first opal Joe found but we needed a roof for the house and this tiny stone paid for it.

In 1974 Joe decided to start a business venture in America. I quit my job ready to follow. By the time Joe changed his mind another teacher replaced me at school.

In August 1974 I found a job in Walgett Catholic School and intended to work there until Christmas. Working with Walgett Aborigines became a source of much challenge and happiness for me. Aboriginal people liked me and I liked them. I felt like I found a new family. I worked in Walgett for the next twenty-six years. I learned about Aboriginal way of life, their customs and history.

Dudley Dennis, my illiterate Aboriginal friend, once said to me: It doesn't matter where you live, it is people you live with that make you either happy or unhappy.



With my three boys Joze, Marko and Marjan

Government can give you all the rights and all the money but if the people around you don't like you, don't need you and trust you, you have nothing. Dudley was talking about his Aboriginal people but this also applied to me. I felt very privileged to work with people who liked me. I looked forward to being with my students and their parents. The nuns and other teachers also became my friends.

When our sons left home I began to study at university by correspondence. This gave me a sense of achievement. As a student in Slovenia I used to earn a bit of money by writing stories and poems for publications in newspapers and magazines; now for the first time in Australia I also found time to write. For many years I was shy and a little scared to express my opinions or tell about my feelings. Now writing

helped me clear many personal issues. I always enjoyed writing so this became my main hobby. In my social isolation writing was also my survival strategy.

My Aboriginal students wrote me letters when I had no time to listen to their stories. The way they wrote about their lives seemed fresh, colourful and sincere. I loved

their writing so I prepared it for publication. In 1990 Aboriginal Studies Press published our book *Growing Up Walgett*.



My family in 2000. Jozef, Anica, Cilka, Valentijn, Minka, Jozica,

accompanied Aborigines in their search for bush tucker and bush medicine. Diocese in Armidale published a few of my books about Aboriginal food, medicine, legends, culture and traditions; these booklets became the teaching aids for teachers and parents. I recorded what was still left of the local Aboriginal language and these notes became a foundation for the teaching of Aboriginal language in this area.

In 1995 my novel *Barbara* was translated into Slovenian and published in Ljubljana. *Barbara* tells Australian history of the second half of twentieth century as experienced and perceived by Slovenian migrants.

My novel *Magdalena* amongst *Black Opals* was translated into Slovenian and published in 2000. *Magdalena* tells about the diverse group of people who came to Lightning Ridge to find a shortcut to riches and happiness.

Magabala published my book Goodbye Riverbank in 2000. In this book Aboriginal



At the launch of my book Magdalena. Joe and I are with Australian Slovenians Ivan Zigon and Aleksandra Ceferin and the editor Aleksander Zorn

elders tell how they experienced the Transition from their traditional tribal grounds on the Barwon-Namoi riverbanks into the rural towns.

Historical society published two collections of my stories about Lightning Ridge miners. I regularly write for newspapers and magazines.

Lately I published many books with Lulu.com internet on demand publisher. I also regularly contribute to Slovenian and Australian publications.

I am happy that I was challenged to overcome obstacles because overcoming them made me stronger, wiser, more understanding and tolerant. I appreciate Slovenians who came with me, I respect those that stayed at home and I am grateful to Australians who made my personal development possible.

My only regret is that I didn't offer more support and understanding to my parents in their old age. I also feel a bit guilty that I deserted my country so I could enjoy the freedom and prosperity in Australia while Slovenians at home struggled to achieve their independence and democracy.

## ***My American connection***



My American relations.

was five at the end of the war and we were extremely poor. Mum found a large brown canvas that fell off the retreating German truck and she began sewing clothes for us children. We had canvas nappies, canvas underwear and overwear. In 1946 I started school in a canvas dress.

The bright light in our lives at that time were our American relations. My aunt Jenny sent us the wedding pictures of her children and we admired their beautiful clothes and refined features. America seemed a magic land of milk and honey to us poor war ravaged Europeans. Most people had somebody in America and we began receiving parcels of clothes from them. We received nylon dresses and nylon stockings and high heel sandals. I wore the sandals to school after Dad cut off high heels and blocked the toe hole of the sandal with a bit of wood so the snow would not get in.

Children of the communist parents received proper shoes from the communist government. I realized that my parents were not communists and that we were not proper people in some way.

I loved our rich American aunt but I was also made ashamed of my American sandals. The knowledge seeped into my soul that people who received parcels from the 'rotten' West weren't as good as people who didn't.

In 1972 I visited my Aunt in Cleveland. She was over eighty but she repainted her whole house for my visit.

My cousin Martin told me the story of his jacket:

My father died in 1942, Martin began. Mom was left with three teenage children. She went from house to house to work as a dress maker to provide for us. She sewed me a jacket so she could send me into the navy at the age of sixteen. She told me to send that jacket home as soon as they gave me a navy uniform. She wanted my brother Rudy to follow me in the same jacket a year later. I was sent to Pearl Harbour. When Japan attacked I was wounded and sent to hospital but all I worried about was how to send that jacket home.

My cousin Jennie said:

We had a happy childhood. We weren't rich; far from it, but we used our imagination and invented things to play with. My father worked for General Motors so Mom was the first on the block to have a washing machine, a refrigerator, and a television. Depression hit us hard. Mom put some savings in the bank but the bank folded and we lost our money. In 1942 Dad died from bleeding ulcers. I was 18 and had to start working, Martin joined the navy, and Rudy was at school. Mom worked in the sewing factory. I got married in 1946. I had two little children when my husband became sick. He could no longer work and I didn't work for a year so Mom had to help everybody.

Mom had a hard life with dad. He was drinking. I remember us boys having to sell carts of wood on the roadside, said my cousin Rudy.

I suppose the happiest time for Mom was when she came home and read a chapter of her 'povest' in the Slovenian Catholic newspaper, tells Jennie. This paper had a page where they printed a chapter of a Slovenian story. Dad usually prepared vegies for dinner but Mom just disappeared into her bedroom with the paper.

That 'povest' was the highlight of my aunt's life; it was a reward for her good work and for being conscientious and fair and generous. That chapter must have brought her closer to everything she left behind in Slovenia when she joined the boy Martin from her village Dobrava in Slovenia to begin her married life in America. She had never seen her home and her people again so she needed this povest to help her dream of the people and places her children knew nothing about.

After dad died in 1942 Mom erected the monument for him; she soon also bought a plot for herself and had her own monument erected. Next to the star came her date of her birth 1.2.1891 but she left the space next to the cross where we only had to insert her date of death 21.1.1986. For 44 years she then looked after her resting

place. After Sunday mass she never missed a trip to the cemetery to pull out the weeds, wipe the marble and wash the angels, tells Martin.

I realised that my Aunt was not rich but only hardworking, generous and caring. She took care of her belongings and she told me the names of her descendants who will inherit them.

I realise that I am much like my aunt Jenny. I take care of people and things; I make sure that everything runs smoothly and that everybody gets their fair share. It worries me that people no longer pass on their belongings. These days people pass away and their belongings are usually sold at a garage sale or are donated to a charity shop. Whatever is left over goes to the tip where scavengers delight in finding bits of treasure among the tons of trash. Some entrepreneurs even organise a special trash and treasure shops where more valuable or interesting items end. I like to look at things people loved and abandoned. Sometimes I find wedding albums, wedding dresses and wedding gifts among the trash soon after the wedding itself. I often see jewellery that must have at one time delighted someone. Many gifts are still unwrapped among the waste.

I remember my last visit to my aunt Jennie in 1985; she was 95 and she walked with a frame. We leaned on the fence and admired her garden. I would like to gather the seeds from the lettuce but I can't bend, she said. Next year I will have to buy the seeds if I don't collect them now, she added. I scooped the seeds and packed them away for her for next year. Her face brightened. The weeds are going to take over, she pleaded. I pulled out the weeds. Her garden was her life. On the way to the airport she sang me a Slovenian farewell song: Adijo pa zdrava ostani-Farewell and stay well.

Aunt Jennie died a few months later. She planned out her entire funeral; she chose the songs to be played and the menu for her wake.

My Aunt was my America. I suppose I was her hometown.

Travelling in Pennsylvania we saw a sign saying: Slovenian Association. We told the doorman that we are Slovenians from Australia. He announced it to everybody and people greeted us enthusiastically. Mostly older men and women rushed towards us introducing themselves in a variety of old Slovenian dialects.

When did you come to America? I asked. We were born here; we were never in Slovenia, they all said. It's so nice to meet someone from home, though, they insisted.

They were the children and grandchildren of Slovenian migrants who came to America after the First World War. They learned Slovenian dialects from their parents. We ended singing old Slovenian folk songs.

Slovenians sing wherever they are to express their feelings. I wonder why Australians don't sing. Maybe coming from all over the world they have no songs in common. Why do some people always sing and others never?

I travelled with my family on the last road between the northern edge of Canada and the North Pole. There are no sidetracks and few settlements in this virgin country. I stopped to get a drink from the only hotel for many miles. A man came towards me, his eyes alight, his arms outstretched, big smile on his face: I barely recognised you, he said to me in Slovenian. I almost fell into his arms before I remembered that I have never seen the man before. We stood speechless for a moment and then he said in English: I am sorry; I took you for someone else. The smile left his face; the eyes lost the shine, the arms hung beside him.

You are Slovenian, I said in Slovenian. Yes, yes, yes, he came to light again and we shook hands.

My Slovenian face was familiar to him; he mistook me for a Slovenian woman he knew. We hurried with explanations of who we are, where we come from, what we do, where we live, where we were born, when we were last in Slovenia. Soon we discovered friends and acquaintances in common; soon we were sitting in his log cabin discussing history, geography, philosophy, and childhood memories.

As Joe drove through Beverley hills we stopped next to a group of women beside the road to ask for the shortcut to the airport. Joe was telling me in Slovenian to mark the road on the map. One of the ladies came towards me and hugged me. I was stunned. You are from Slovenia. Please come in, she said in English. I tried to explain that we were in a hurry. I'll show you the shortcut, she said.

As we drank coffee in her beautiful mansion she told us that her grandmother was born in Bela Krajina in Slovenia. I always wanted to go to Slovenia, she said. She only spoke a few Slovenian words but she wanted to hear us speak Slovenian.

In Cleveland Joe stopped in a no parking zone for a minute while I jumped out to get something from a shop. A man stopped to talk to our two boys in the back of the car and they told him that we are from Australia. The man invited us for a drink in the pewter club next door. Joe told him that he is not allowed to park the car there. The man bought ice-creams for the boys and called a policeman to look after them while we went to the club. He told everybody that we are from Australia and people came to join us. The man was Cleveland's Traffic Commissioner; he had a brother in Sydney so he wanted to know everything about Australia.

On a trip through Canada we became excited when we met a couple of Australians. We realised that we were homesick for Australia.

I am fortunate to have two homelands but whether I am in Australia or in Slovenia there is the longing for that other homeland.

I lived in a tent sometimes, I slept in a four by six trailer some nights and for most part I lived in a modern, comfortable house.

It is so true though what my Aboriginal friend Dudley said: It doesn't matter where you live; it is the people you live with that make you either happy or unhappy.

As for myself I learned that people remember me not for who I am or what I do but for what I recognised and appreciated in them. People loved me not to make me happy but because loving made them happy.

I also remember gratefully those that discovered and appreciated something in me. Loving also makes me happy.

Above all I learned to appreciate being a tiny part of the beautiful and perfect creation. I can finally let myself merge with the rest of the universe and enjoy its intricately mysterious diversity without trying to understand it. I praise the Creator who knows why things are as they are. I really am busy counting my blessings.

## **My political upbringing**

Maybe I should blame my father for my interest in politics and people in general. One evening in 1946 at the age of six I went with him to the first pre-election meeting in our newly liberated homeland. I sat on my father's lap as the men of our small village deliberated as to who would be their most suitable government representative. My brother Valentin's friend, young former partisan, Rajko, was conducting the meeting and he explained that our representative would have to attend the meetings in Krsko. My father was nominated but he said that he would not have the time and anyway he had no bike to travel twelve kilometres every month. To that Rajko explained: Don't worry, you will not need to do anything, we just need a name. They already have the man who will represent this region.

My father laughed a little and the men followed him. Rajko became frustrated and said: if you are going to laugh at me I will stop the meeting. The men looked at each other and slowly they concluded the meeting and we went home.

Maybe this is a reason why I refused to ever become elected as anybody's representative.

## ***From my diary by Cilka Zagar***

In the box of old papers I find a diary I began forty years ago when Joe and I came to Australia with our two years old son Marko. I open the tattered old pages to read what I wrote when I was still a young girl in the Australian autumn of 1963.

May 1963

Joe heard that one could earn good money cutting sugar cane in Queensland. We travelled to Queensland of sandy beaches and everlasting sunshine. The smell of frangipani blossoms, the sight of the blue clear surf, and the clean freshness of the vast fields inspire me to daydream about our better future.

The gang of Spanish sugarcane cutters was willing to take Joe as a partner if I would cook Spanish food for them. Can you cook Spanish food, a man asked me. Of course, I said. Food is food and it has to be cooked. It is natural that a woman would know how to cook. It comes with the gender like cutting sugar cane came natural to Joe. Nobody needed to know that I never cooked a meal before; I was a boarding school girl.

In return for my cooking we would eat for free. The Spanish sugar cane farmer provided living quarters for his cane cutters. I knew a few English words and so did the Spanish cutters. They told me that everything I would need is in the cupboard. As the men left for work in the morning I inspected the cupboard for provisions. Everything was covered in black. I shuddered and shut the door quickly.

As I recovered I stilled myself for longer inspection. The cockroaches scuttled into the corners as the sun hit them. The butter underneath was nibbled by them and the jar of sugar still held a few big brave ones that did not feel intimidated by my presence. In the crevices of the bread moved the long tentacles and munched away. I closed the door and took a broom and banged it on the door to scare the living daylights out of them. When I opened the door again the clusters of moving black wings and tentacles hung onto the corners but the food was free. I took everything out of the cupboard and let the sun shine on the monstrosity of black clusters of cockies hanging in the corner of the cupboard from the ceiling to the floor. Like me they were probably considering a new strategy of attack. We knew that we were enemies, deadly enemies.

I took the hose and sprayed hard into every crevice in the cupboard. They ran in their hundreds and I swept them out and brushed them into the bin where they were supposed to suffocate and never return. Luckily I had a hose and enough water to drown the buggers. There seemed no end of them. They kept coming huge and ugly from tiny cracks in the walls. I kept drowning them all day and by the time men returned my kitchen was clean.

It was no use telling men about my predicament. Living with cockroaches was obviously no problem for them. I had to be sensible and find a way to fit into cohabitation with the rest. It was my problem if I couldn't stand the long, fast moving black monsters. Men just brushed them aside casually. They are all a fact of life. You can never get rid of cockroaches; they have been there before humans and will probably remain after we become extinct.

The climate suits them and there is plenty of food, was all Joe said.

No use crying or waiting for help.

I couldn't sleep at night. As soon as I closed my eyes there came millions of black enemy dancing in front of my eyes. I sat in the car all night. The car was the only sanctuary not yet infested by my mortal enemy.

In the morning I returned to my clean kitchen to prepare breakfast for my men who had a hard day's work in front of them. I opened the cupboard and my heart sank. I could feel tears running down my cheeks. I lost my battle. Either the cockroaches I drowned rose from the dead or their relations replaced them and settled on the clean shelves over the sugar and butter and bread. I closed the cupboard door and banged on it with the wooden spoon to frighten them away. Cockies understood and moved into the corners so I could reach the food.

When alone, I began to consider my future. I could either leave the place and let cockroaches defeat me or find new strategies to defeat them.

Nobody ever took any notice of my fear of cockroaches. One has to live with pests one could not destroy.

I remember my early childhood. Sometimes cockroaches could be heard chirping behind the bench around the stove during the day but in the evening they ventured onto the ceiling. As the light was turned on they scuttled to the corners and sat quietly. Mum crept close to them and in one quick strike killed them with the broom. But others came the next night. Mum insisted that cockroaches came from the neighbours since we regularly killed the ones in our house.

When the floorboards of our kitchen were replaced in 1945 we discovered that cockroaches had a cosy home right under the old floorboards. Mum still insisted that they all came from our neighbours but the horrible masses of black beetles felt quite at home until we so rudely disturbed their dwelling. They began to run in all directions in their hundreds looking for safety and the new hiding places. We armed ourselves with spades and brooms and killed them like fire-fighters kill the fire that is trying to destroy the house. For many months since this assault I had nightmares about cockroaches crawling over my body. Nobody took any notice of my crying at

night as I silently watched and listened for the left over cockies. Phobias were not heard of and being scared of the small creatures was considered plain silly.

At school we put our lunches in the drawer under our desks. When I opened the drawer I found a cockroach eating my lump of bread contentedly. Other sensible kids just brushed the unwelcome guests away like one brushes the fly from one's eye. I could not eat the cockies' leftovers.

I watched the floorboards while I listened to the teacher explaining that we had to be grateful to the communist revolutionaries who liberated us and brought us freedom and prosperity. I was convinced that under the floorboards rested millions of my enemies contentedly waiting to eat my lunch. I stopped bringing lunch to school and hoped that cockroaches would die from starvation.

We were finally liberated in 1947; our potato crops were attacked by the beetle brought from Colorado. We tried to kill this Colorado potato beetle manually at first. School children were sent on the fields to check for and squash the unwelcome tourist. The village co-op provided a prize for every creature we brought to them, dead or alive. Any prize was welcome in those poor, after war, times, so we, children, swarmed over the potato fields like locust.

Eventually America provided DDT powder that would kill any pest. We dusted the fields but Mum also sprinkled DDT powder in every hidden corner of our house. Mum was sensible.

From then on we had no more cockroaches. I was so proud of my home and my mum. We looked down on neighbours who did not liberate their homes. I felt superior belonging to the family that lived in the liberated house. We were clean.

One day our kind neighbour brought us a jar of cream because our cow was having a calf and did not produce milk. I gratefully dipped a piece of bread into the thick cream. When I pulled it out there were huge tentacles of the cockroach attached to my bread. I screamed and threw the bread away, the jar tipped over and mum told me not to be silly. Nobody considered my aversion to cockies an issue. It would surely develop into phobia if anyone allowed for it. Or knew about it.

Mum told the neighbour then about the magic of DDT powder in the hope that our whole neighbourhood would become liberated from the pests. Having pests in the house was shameful to mum rather than terrifying.

Mum considered our family better than people around us. Especially since she cleaned our house of cockroaches.

12 June 1963

I went to the local grocery shop and asked for some kind of pest killer.

Not that it helps much, said the shopkeeper. I spray every evening and I sweep them out in the morning but new ones will come in a few days. They multiply.

Australians are sensible about pests. They continually try to get rid of them but they don't lose sleep over them. I think the cockies became immune to the poisons, they grew stronger than poison. I believe cockroaches figured out how to win against Queenslanders.

What fails to kill you makes you stronger, said mum when she spread the white DDT powder thickly under our floorboards. She made sure that she killed.

My Queensland home became a killing field. If I am to survive I have to be smarter than my enemies. I must not let them grow stronger. They would multiply and punish me for trying to eradicate their species. Every living thing knows there is strength in numbers. I have to find a better stronger poison.

What about DDT, I asked the grocer.

Not allowed to use it near food. Too dangerous.

I want to poison ants outside, I lied. So I got the magic powder and sprinkled it outside and inside the house. I filled in every crevice on the wall and on the floor. I did not want them to grow stronger. Every morning since then I swept the dead creatures away. After a couple of weeks only an occasional cocky came to die in my kitchen. I did not tell anyone about DDT. I am watching my men for signs of poisoning but the cane cutters survived.

I remain on the lookout for cockies wherever I go. Especially in the sunny Queensland where the food is plentiful and the days are warm.

27 June 63

The grocer told me to call him George. He is an older Greek man well over thirty. He wears a green apron. He seems used to dealing with people who know even less English than he does. We both smile in places where we cannot find a word and we use our hands a lot. I am as foreign to George as he is to me but we are probably closer to each other than we are to most. I cannot understand a word of Greek and he does not go to Catholic Church. Actually neither of us goes to any church because I don't know any churches here. I see George every day as I buy all the food from him and put it on the account for cane cutters to fix.

4 July 63

A man came in the shop today with a crate of lemons to sell to George. He gave me a few lemons and said: When life offers you lemons make lemonade.

He was a kindly Italian man over forty years old and must have sensed that life had many lemons in store for me. He left part of himself with me in his little offering of wisdom. I was never short of lemonade.

3 November 64

How is your husband coping, asked George. Cane cutting is considered the hardest job.

George is the only person I come in contact with. so I consider him a friend. I keep chatting with him to practice my English. I don't know why he keeps on chatting.

I realise that I never even asked Joe how he is coping. I am too busy coping. Joe does not complain. His hands are blistered but he says that he has to get used to the machete. When the blisters harden they don't bleed any more.

I was so preoccupied with killing cockroaches that I even forgot my son Marko. The farmer's wife, a dark haired Spanish little lady, takes him almost every day to play with her little boys. Marko began to speak but the words he says I have never heard before. He points to the water but he says aqua. He points to the farmer's house and says cassia. I realise that Marko's first language is Spanish.

29.November 1964

In the morning I fry eggs and bacon and make toast. I put a coffeepot and a jug of juice on the table. The men like this breakfast. Maybe it is Spanish, maybe it isn't. As I clean after the breakfast, I smell the fires. The cutters burn the cane fields so that the fire strips the leaves. The blackened stocks are then cut with machetes and chopped into pieces and loaded on train carriages to be taken to the mill.

At lunchtime five blackened men descend into the kitchen and I serve lunch which they wash down with beer. Almost every day they eat soup and steak and vegetables. Every day they have custard with fruit. It is dry fruit, which I soak for a few hours and place on top of the custard. This must be a Spanish menu because Spanish lady showed me what to cook the first day and I cook it with small variations every day and nobody complains. Cooking is not nearly as complicated as one would imagine. One cooks the same meat and the same vegetables in different ways that's all.

Each of the men takes a water bag and off they go again. In the evening they return, wash themselves under the tap of the water tank. They eat more slowly. For dinner I roast the meat and bake potatoes. The farmer's wife provides greens for the salad. Sometimes the men go to the pub and have a few beers afterwards but most of the time they just drop onto their beds.

1 December 63

The farmer gave me a chook to kill and cook for the cutters. It had to be done.

I remember watching mum kill chooks most Sundays. If you want to eat the Sunday roast you better kill the chook. If mum could do it so could I.

I held the chook between my legs, its head in one hand and the knife in the other. Mum said that the chook dies quickest if you turn the knife into its eye. I poked the little sharp knife into the chook's eye, closed my eyes and turned the knife to squash the chook's brain.

There was an awful pain in my stomach as I stuck the knife into the eye of the chook but I had to pull myself together.

When the blood stopped dripping in the pot and the chook stopped struggling I dropped it on the ground but the chook began to run away with its head to the ground. I panicked and grabbed it to have another go at killing. As I held it between my legs again, it slowly went limp and I knew that it wasn't only pretending to be dead.

Mum used to drop the chook into the boiling water for a minute if she wanted to make the plucking easier but most of the time we had to pluck it dry and save the feathers. During long winter months we picked the feathers for doonas and pillows.

20 December 63

After six months the cane season finished so we moved south to look for a suitable place to settle down. It is going to be Christmas and we sleep in a car.

Joe heard from other migrants that one could earn good money in Snowy Mountains. This great engineering project fascinated men. Anything with the name snowy is welcome after the heat of Queensland summer.

Joe began to work in the Island bend-Jindabyne tunnel.

I was never able to quite separate the memory of the beautiful Jindabyne from the rats and mice I had to live with. And the terrible loneliness.

I read the diary from 5June64

I am expecting our second baby. We moved into the five-bedroom old farmhouse in the old Jindabyne. The fibro walls have holes in them but we feel lucky that we have a roof over our heads. We found some old pots and crockery and cutlery abandoned in the shed. We also found an old mattress and some clothes people left behind.

The owners of the houses from old Jindabyne moved up on the hill where they build a new Jindabyne. The old homes are made available to workers on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. They will flood the old town and cover up all the dirt with beautiful blue water when the project will be finished.

There is no water supply. Australia has no water springs like Europe. You can't even dig a well. Joe patched and cleaned the old empty rainwater tank, took out dead birds and cats and smaller unidentifiable animals. He didn't even let me see all the rubbish he took out. I brought buckets of water from the Snowy River to wash the tank and now we are waiting for the rain to fill it with fresh, clean rainwater.

A man passed by as Joe cleaned the water tank.

Any rats, he asked.

No, said Joe.

I never saw a rat in my life so I took no notice.

They come inside during winter for warmth, said the man.

30 February 65

We are waiting for the rain. Marko is four and he follows me to the nearby Snowy River to get a bucket of water every morning and every afternoon. I also wash our clothes in the river. I rinse them in the morning, soap them and spread them on the branches of the trees to sun bleach them during the day. In the afternoon I rinse them out and hang them on the branches to dry.

On Sunday we went to church and prayed for rain.

We should take a bucket with us to church so God could give us water, suggested Marko.

I found a box of comics and short stories abandoned in the shed. The little Mills and Boon romances are easy to read and bit by bit I learn the words and their meaning. The books are half eaten by rats and mice, they were covered in dust and cobwebs but I cleaned them. These romances saved my sanity. Luckily we brought the dictionary with us.

2 March 65

Joe is working a night shift. He comes in the morning but he sleeps most of the day. He tells me that I am lucky to be staying at home but I feel jealous when he goes to work. He meets people there while I stay home alone. Marko is the only person I can talk to.

Jindabyne 17 March 65

Marjan was born beautiful and healthy yesterday at three in the afternoon. Joe had to work a double shift. They wanted him to do the third shift because the man did not turn for work but Joe said that he had to go to the hospital so the supervisor took his place.

Joe was dirty and wet as he slumped onto the hospital bed. He didn't ask about our new baby. He was shaking.

There was an accident just after I left, Joe told me after awhile. Explosion. One man is dead. A man lost his legs. Another man had his chest crushed by a rock. If I stayed a few more minutes I could be dead.

How did it happen, I asked

The detonator didn't explode, said Joe.

What do you mean?

You know nothing about the things I have to do, said Joe.

I know only that Joe works on the face of the tunnel preparing the lights for miners before they blast another metre of the mountain to make the tunnel.

I want to know. I hold his hand. He came to see our baby, he was supposed to comfort me but I know that he needs comforting. He saw it all happen. The nurse brought our baby and while he suckled at my breast, Joe told me about his work.

There is a two-story platform at the face of the tunnel. The big jumbo drilling rig with about a dozen air drills comes and the miners set the drills to drill about four metres into the rock. There is a big hole in the middle and about sixty or more smaller holes on the face of the tunnel around the big hole. The miners place gelignite and a detonator into each hole. The air pressure pushes it to the end of the hole. Then they fill the hole with the nitrogen powder mixed with diesel. Next they place another gelignite and detonator at the end of the hole.

All detonators are connected to the wires and to the firing switch. The switch is under the lock so nobody could turn it on accidentally.

When all holes are ready, the jumbo drill and the wagon with the gelignite and the miners are taken back about half a kilometre where the firing switch is. The supervisor checks that everything is in order before he turns the switch.

Each hole has a number. The holes around the big hole in the middle explode first, then those next to it and so on. The whole lot crushes and caves towards the middle where a big hole was drilled.

After the explosion the face electrician is the first to go towards the face of the tunnel to install the lights. He can't see in front. Rocks are hanging loosely from the ceiling and can kill you.

After the electrician installs the lights, the man called chip monkey, dislocates and removes the loose rocks from the ceiling.

The loader comes to load the rocks on the carriages and clear the ground for the next drilling.

What went wrong, I ask. It is hard for me to comprehend and visualise every detail of the operation.

There is a strict rule that miners should never drill into the existing holes because the first detonator and the gelignite in the hole may still be alive. It rarely happens but it did. One of the miners drilled into the old hole and it exploded into his face. The rocks were flying all over the face of the tunnel.

How could he?

We were all tired. After the miner prepares his set of holes he can take a nap. One miner took a short cut. He was sleepy, I suppose. Drilling into the old hole saved time.

Do you know which miner?

It isn't important; we all learned a lesson. I was on the way out when they called me back to help.

How long ago was it?

Less than an hour.

Go home and have a rest, I said. Joe never asked how long the labour took and how heavy the baby was. Those are the luxuries we will talk about later.

I hate it when Joe is on a night shift. I am scared to sleep in the isolated house. During the day Joe sleeps and I keep the children quiet so he gets his rest. If I am lucky they all go to sleep for a few minutes and I sleep with them.

26June65

We had the first frost. Joe cut a pile of wood to keep us warm through the winter. While Joe was on a night shift I put the baby in the basket near the fireplace. Marko was asleep so I took a book and sat near the fire.

I heard a sound and looked up quickly. There were two pairs of beady eyes looking back at me. They didn't blink and neither did I. I sat frozen to the chair for a moment. A tail hanging out of the hole in the fibro wall suddenly moved, the heads of the creatures nodded to each other and moved towards the basket with my baby. I grabbed the baby and ran out into the freezing night. I stopped up on the hill, leaned on the tree and cried. I could hear the ice forming on the branches. I shivered. The wind touched my bones.

Suddenly I remembered Marko asleep alone amongst rats. I picked a stick and returned to the house. I rattled all the walls to frighten the rats away before I sat in the middle of my bed with my boys on each side.

I read out loud to learn English and to frighten the ghosts and the rats away. I read and re-read these books until I knew them almost by heart.

I told Joe but he is not worried about the rats. He bought poison and spread it into every hole.

26 August 65

In the middle of last night I heard the footsteps under the window. I looked out and saw a man's face pressed on the windowpane. I grabbed the gun, turned the light off and waited. The man went to the back of the house. There is a little slope and the ice formed on it. The man slipped and came crashing on the back door. I had no strength to hold the gun straight, let alone shoot. When I heard the man's footsteps running away I crumpled to the floor. I never again closed my eyes until Joe returned from the night shift.

I told Joe about the man. That scared him.

I am going to resign, said Joe. We saved enough to put a deposit on a little place in Canberra.

1 September 65

I sit in my kitchen sometimes and watch mice play on my wood stove. There would be half a dozen of them jumping from one pot onto another looking for morsels of leftover food. They take tiny crumbs into their dainty hands and nibble like little children. They became my pets.

We are going away, I tell the mice. I am overjoyed. Spring is here, wild flowers sprung out, the rats moved out. Maybe Joe poisoned them and they lay somewhere behind the fibro walls rotting away. I want to believe that they moved out.

7 October 65.

The trip to Canberra was a catalyst in our lives. Joe and I fell in love with Australian Capital Territory. To us it was definitely a promised land.

The cool orderly modern design and the clean, symmetric beauty of Australian Capital Territory overwhelmed me. I believe that Canberra is the most beautiful city in the world.

I want to live here, I say to Joe right then and there.

Land is cheap. We bought the dearest block of land in Pearce for six hundred dollars. The rest of our savings started Joe as an electrical contractor.

Slovenian priest came from Sydney every third Sunday of the month and most Slovenians came to Slovenian mass. We wanted to see each other; even those that dislike each other and those that do not believe in God come to mass. I suppose nobody wants to miss out on seeing a group of Slovenian faces.

Australia is full of foreigners. Even Slovenians in Canberra seem foreign to us. They came from other regions; they have different background and they think differently.

23 April 66

I took an evening job in a local club. As a barmaid I met with Australians for the first time. The men leaning on the bar were eager to talk to me. They introduced themselves as Jack and Sam and Tom and Dave. Jack asked my name and I said: My name is Mrs. Zagar. He burst out laughing.

I know you are Mrs. Zagar but what is your name?

Cilka, I said and felt like a woman who has committed adultery for the first time. I felt completely naked because I revealed my first name to an almost complete stranger.

Men were friendly; I suppose anybody is friendly with a young barmaid while they have a glass of beer in their hand. They say that a barmaid looks prettier with every beer men drink. They came at exactly the same time and left at the same time to go home for dinner and to kiss their kids good night. Joe kissed our kids goodnight while I worked.

Most men spent a couple of hours after work in the club and would have two to three beers. Anything over that may lead into the change of home-going time and trouble at home. They were older men all of them. Any man over thirty was an older man at the time because I was so young. Some of these older men held high positions in the government but to me they were known only by their first names and by the size of the beer they drank. They appreciated my eagerness and memory. I would see them at the door and by the time they came to the bar their drink would be waiting for them. I liked to talk to learn English. Broken English was not a deterrent for a young barmaid as much as it was for men. Joe complained about Australians who mumbled their sentences so fast that he could not catch their meaning.

13 June 66

Kathy, another young mother, who works with me, invited me to her home. It was the first Australian home I ever visited.

Coffee, said Kathy as we sat down.

Oh, you don't have to, I dismissed the invitation, convinced that she will ask again and at least once more urge me to partake of the coffee with her.

You don't mind if I have one, said Kathy unaware of my expectations. She made herself a cup of coffee and accepted my refusal of her hospitality without a sign of discomfort.

I never again refused a drink of any kind from Australian hosts when I wanted one. You don't get the second chance. I had to learn fast.

2 August 66

On a big dance night in the club a man asked for many fancy drinks and I felt good that I knew how to make all of them. Before he left the bar he asked for the screwdriver. I was glad that I became familiar with this tool. Having an electrician I had to know tools. I brought a half metre long screwdriver that I previously saw sitting at the back on the beer keg. I placed it in front of my customer but he opened his jaws and looked around to his friends. They burst out laughing. The music stopped and everybody looked at me. I was the only dummy who didn't know that vodka with orange juice is also called a screwdriver.

I felt embarrassed but looking back I think people liked the opportunity to laugh. They remember and retold the story. People are usually grateful to those who make fools of themselves. Gradually I began to laugh with them and at myself and my mistakes. There are millions of opportunities to make a fool of yourself when you are transplanted into another continent and society.

## ***Marko Zagar***

I was  
born  
in



My baby boy and I at Movie World

Ljubljana on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1961. Surely this was not a world changing event or if it was I certainly don't remember any of it. It's quite possible that my birth was greeted by wise men and angels and stuff but unfortunately no one recorded those particular events. In fact I don't remember much of my very early years so the time till I grew a bit of a brain is mostly hearsay.

My parents tell me that the escape from the communist regime into which I was born was interesting to say the least. I probably should have stayed for a while yet because I really hadn't obtained much of the cultural awareness needed to make a decision

but my parents were going and I must have decided at the time that I really should sponge off them for a little while yet. This was especially true since I didn't quite have the means to make it in the big wide world on my own. I was eighteen months old.

My parents escaped on foot over the mountains to Austria while I went partying with my uncle before he tried to get me over the border. He was supposed to smuggle me straight to Austria over the mountains but he stopped at the few pubs on the way and the police caught us. Mum and Dad were not happy. Dad never spoke to his brother again which seems a little sad I suppose. I am not clear on the exact sequence of events but eventually I ended up drugged and smuggled out of the country under someone's car seat. This could explain my hatred of pills etc and my love of those evils nicotine and alcohol. It could also explain why I like parties.

My father left because of the political situation though I must confess that his explanation has always been a little vague. There has been a mention of him spending some time behind bars because he owned a private business in a place where it was desirable for everything to be government owned. Mum of course tagged along like she still does; I think she might have been fond of Dad.

Once we escaped Slovenia (formerly a part of Yugoslavia) into Austria we were presented with a choice Australia or Canada. I convinced my parents that Aussie was the go. They of course claim it was something to do with the plane to Australia leaving first.

Despite being born in Ljubljana my earliest memory is of being in the Australian outback and we had broken a windscreen and my parents were cleaning up the glass. I was two and a half years old. The trauma of a broken windscreen must have shocked me into awareness. There were vicarious memories told and retold of me standing next to a gearbox in Slovenia in the nude posing for a newspaper photo shoot; there were tales of my escape from former Yugoslavia but despite all that my life until that broken windscreen is a mystery to me.

In fact until we moved to Jindabyne in around 1964 most of my life must have been memorable only to my parents because they can't stop retelling it. Does it get better than this? I certainly hope so. We initially lived at Berridale from where my dad would drive to Jindabyne each day to work in tunnels as a face electrician. I remember walking towards Jindabyne with my mother to greet dad on those days when he came home in the daylight. I still remember the big black bull and I asked mum if that bull was a cow. For some reason my parents retold this experience. There was an old vintage car stuck in the middle of some blackberry bushes and it was so cool to play on it. I don't remember the house we lived in or what we ate or learning to read and write or even what we did for fun. I just remember those walks to greet dad.

My next recollection was living in an old house near the Snowy River. It's interesting that 40 years on I again live in an old house near a river. Was I homesick for that old fibro home of my childhood? The house was designated for sinking once the Jindabyne Dam was constructed and I am sure that the house I live in would have been demolished if anyone but I had bought it. Life was pretty easy then and I certainly don't recall missing out on much or having a particularly difficult time of it though I am assured we were poor. What you never had you never miss, I suppose. People can only compare childhoods to their own childhood.

Somewhere around this time my brother was born and we got a dog. Actually mum got the dog for her birthday. Dad wanted a dog so he bought it for mum and there was much said about it as a result because it was never certain as to who owned the dog. Mum tells me that she was starved for attention at the time and the dog was given more of it than she did. But this German shepherd was generally known as Marko's dog. My brother's birth mustn't have been a great event either because I do not remember any of it although I was nearly four. Though I did hear that we were thankful he was born mainly because it meant that dad was alive and whole.

How do the two events relate? Dad would often work double shifts but on this particular day my brother was born so Dad did a swap to hold mums hand and drive her to Cooma – our nearest hospital. On that day the driller used existing holes to speed the process up. The face electrician works near the driller setting up the lights etc. The driller should never reuse the holes cause sometimes they have unexploded charges in them. The face electrician that took dad's place lost both his legs.

Dad worked on the tunnels and I started school, which again I can't remember at all. I have no idea who my teachers were or who my school mates were or what games we played. I do however remember being driven there by the local doctor who lived next door and more importantly I went to school with his daughter. I suppose this is a good time to bring it up as my best memories revolve around the topic of sex.

We were both 4 going on 5 I guess and our favourite past time was playing rudies as we called it. That was my first look at a girl and we both tried to work out how different we were and why. I loved that game. Even if my piker of a mother caught us and made us walk back to the house both naked it didn't stop us. What about the doctor's wife coming over? Did mum ask her for advice or did she ask mum; however I think they decided that maybe it wasn't as dangerous as they thought. I never lost my fascination for the female form so no lasting damage was done.

It's about that time that memories also start to get a bit clearer. Certainly about things that were of interest to me. I remember catching my first fish in the Snowy River, playing with my dog (yes the one that used to be mums) and riding my bike

with training wheel. I remember steering the car from my dad's lap and being of assistance whenever something had to be fixed.

As I grew up we moved a bit first to Canberra then to Lightning Ridge where I suppose I spent much of my formative years. But interestingly we always seemed to have an attraction for Canberra. Maybe it was the fishing maybe the friends or maybe we were escaping the heat of Lightning Ridge summers. I ended up having friends in both places but never really formed lifelong attachments. Andrew Falez and I go back a long way and in some ways followed similar paths. Part of growing up in Lightning Ridge was that it was a melting pot of cultures. There were a few Slovenians and Croatians which is where I learnt to speak Serbo-Croatian as well as Slovenian which had been spoken at home since birth.

I did my couple of years at Lightning Ridge primary school before travelling 70 km each way to Walgett for high school. Back in those days school wasn't considered a big thing for most kids who left as soon as they could but about 15 of us stayed through to complete year 12. In year 12 we had elections for school captain and I was voted Vice Captain or as some teachers preferred captain of the vice. Because I was in a remote area school I pretty much got to pick my university and chose University of New England where the official qualification was supposed to be Economics. However I tended to be much more interested in sociology particularly the sociology of football and pubs.

I left after a couple of years of having a great time and spent a little time chasing this girl in Wyong before ending up in Canberra. Canberra was familiar to me and although youth unemployment was high I ended up working 2 and even 3 jobs from digging trenches to washing windows. After a while I joined the public service and bought the window cleaning company. Marjan my brother was in a similar boat and also ended up in Canberra where we both did the window cleaning and I worked in the public service. We never made much money but it was interesting. I recall Marjan and I were doing the glass on the Albermal building which required us to walk along a ledge around 2.5 foot wide and 9 stories up.

We just had a water fight up there and decided we really should get going cause we wanted to get the top few floors done so our employees wouldn't be up high. In those days safety wasn't a word anyone understood and certainly Marjan and I were immortal. I started work properly and as I climbed between the building and an external column my foot slipped on the soapy ledge. I recall thinking oops better be careful here cause it's a long way down. About 10 minutes later Marjan opened a window grabbed me by my shirt and said we are quitting for the day. I asked him what was going on. Next door was an identical building being cleaned by another company. Marjan pointed at the body on the concrete below and told me he had just

fallen off the same floor as I was working. We packed up and left after offering our condolences to the other guys. I recall we went to the pub.

The cleaning business failed but Marjan got into the building trade and I had a nice steady job. I got married and started to build us a house on a small hobby farm and worked ridiculous hours first at the office and then on the house. Soon after the house was finished Daniel was born and shortly after that Michele. Things went well for a while and we paid off the mortgage but I was working longer and longer hours. I was soon offered the position of Departmental Liaison Officer for a Minister and worked in Parliament House for 3 years. That was about the beginning of the end of

that marriage and on looking back I might be poorer but feel much better about it.

I ended up spending a year in mum and dad's flat and sought solace in alcohol and floozies. It was a hell of a year and although I saw the children a lot I still had much free time on my hands. I suppose I should have seen it coming but eventually Jacki captured me. I had always made a point of telling the ladies that I was not commitment material and that I am not interested in a relationship but I got caught.

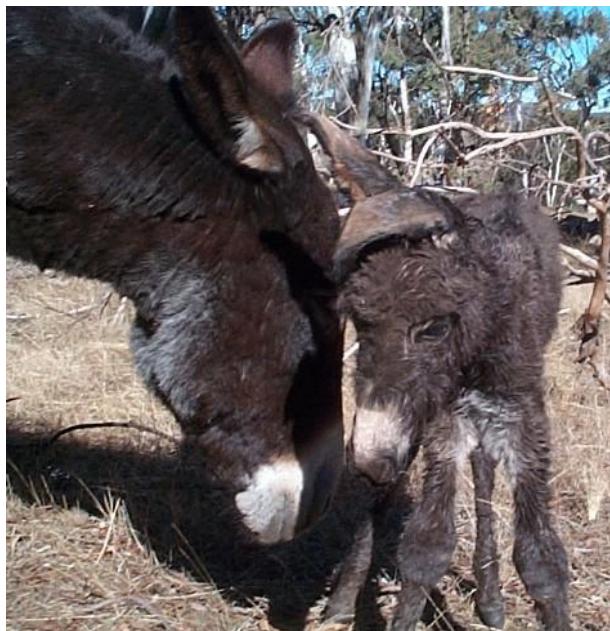
We bought a farm and I was back out of town and very thankful for it. We

now live on a gorgeous 30 acre block with the Yass river running through it and horses and donkeys and chooks and all sorts of other animals.

I am sure there are lots of other stories to tell but if you want to read about those you'll have to write them as I tell them.

Mum asked me some questions which require profound answers for the book so profundity here I go.

I really have no memory of my life prior to arriving in Australia and really my earliest memories are of Australia so I suppose in some sense I am as Aussie as they get. I went back to Slovenia when I was 11 but again that is a damned long time ago and really I didn't feel all that much ownership of the country. It's not that I don't now but I suspect at 11 more complex ancestral feelings and roots just don't exist.



A new foal

I do remember however that we hung around with Slovenians as a family and I hung around with Aussies as my mates.

We were an itinerant lot to some extent when we first arrived and learning English as well as Slovenian and cross cultural issues weren't a consideration in my life. When we moved to Canberra I recall things like eating chocolate biscuits while helping Dad with electrical installations late at night. I was small enough at the age of six to fit into places out of dad's reach to help do more delicate parts of electrical



Jacki and Andrew training our Champion Donkey

installations. I remember dad asking me to check the power points. In those days occupational health and safety weren't invented yet so the way to check power points was to have a batten holder connected to a bit of wire with bared ends. I am sure the instructions were turn off power point put bared wires in the slots turn on power point; if light works all is good. I worked out you could go faster if you turn on power point plug in wires and see if the globe lit up. I do remember vividly the first time I held onto the bared bits and found out electricity bites. Dad laughed it off and to be honest after a bit of sobbing so did I.

I have never been into hero worship of any kind. There is no one that I would rather be or that I try to emulate. Is this due to a lack of passion? Nope. It's more a case of I am reasonably happy with who I am.

In terms of influence I have had lots but they were transient rather than any long term ones. My friends are rarely lifelong; in fact the only friend that I have known for most of my life is Andrew. Once I fall out of a particular activity or move towns I tend to lose touch with the people I was there with. That's not to say I consciously exclude

them from my life but rather I move on. I suspect if I didn't have roots and a strange sense of obligation I would love to be an itinerant.

What am I looking for in life? I really want to be the first old fart who wins the World Rally Championship and plays for Australia in the Rugby World Cup. I suspect as the years pass by I am not going to meet these rather lofty goals but hey, dreaming is for dreamers and I have been known to do that occasionally.

I rarely plan too far ahead because you never know what will turn up. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good. I try to live with the knowledge that I only get one ride on the merry go round of life and there's no point in crying around in circles.

I am comfortable with what I have done so far and I could be more comfortable if I didn't enjoy the good life as I do. I am not hugely comfortable with talking about my achievements; I have done a bit.

I would change my decision not to go halves with Bill Gates in that little computer company he started. Mind you he never offered to go halves. There is very little point in mulling over decisions you have made and wondering what the consequences would have been. If you didn't learn from the first experience then you are bound to make the same mistake again. I make lots of mistakes so I must be a slow learner but for all of that I have survived.

While I am Slovenian in terms of heritage especially when girls tell me they like European men, I am also a composite of culture. I can be totally yobbish when the mood takes me, especially when there are pretentious sods around. I don't tolerate pretentiousness particularly well.

I know a little of Slovenia though it does tend to be from the perspective of people who don't live there anymore. I probably know more than the average person and even more than some of the people who have Slovenian Heritage. To be honest I think they are people like any other. Some are good and some are bad. I do take pride in the Slovenian snobbish academia, though I wonder if the new Slovenians have that same drive to learn and know.

It was interesting when my son Daniel spent a month or so in Slovenia that the kids his age were just as yobbo and just as recalcitrant as the kids in any other country.

There seems to be little of information about my heritage. Basically I am peasant stock and they don't write history. Do I feel any affinity with the people who did something important and were Slovenian? No, not really they're not in my sphere of consciousness and there is nothing there to tie me to them. On the other hand I am always interested when a Slovenian Australian makes it. Not because I see it as some vicarious path to glory but rather as a shared path that led us in different directions.

Food is something I enjoy and while I love Slovenian food I also love the foods of most cultures. In fact, food is what brings people together. Australia in particular seems to be drawn to the food first then the people. Though in recent years this hasn't been always the case particularly when looking at Middle Eastern cultures. We still like their food but the cultural and religious differences seem to be a sticking point. Maybe that will change in time.

I belong to both cultures I suppose but there are lots of Aussies and Slovenians that I don't have too much time for. It's not their culture I feel drawn to but rather their personalities, mores, values and sense of fun.

When I was a kid, mostly in primary school, I did get a bit of the wog boy stuff but I think that because I wasn't Greek, Italian, Croatian, or Serbian they weren't sure where to classify me. If I was teased it doesn't seem to have affected me greatly. Most of my friends were Anglo's and I was accepted for the most part. It may have helped that I was a biggish lad and very strong.

My mother asked whether I practice Slovenian language, Slovenian hospitality, cooking, entertainment, relationships. To which I responded what is Slovenian hospitality? Feed people till they are full, make sure they drink enough and make sure they laugh? If that is Slovenian exclusively then lots of cultures have stolen our hospitality. I regularly slip in a Slovenian influence in my cooking but then I think Slovenian food is heavily influenced by Italian and Austrian food. In fact other than Kransky I am a bit hard pressed to think of a food uniquely Slovenian.

I should add that I also slip Asian Middle Eastern and any other influences that I can into my cooking.

I do speak Slovenian whenever the opportunity arises, though interestingly I tend to slip into English when speaking to mum and my brother but it's almost exclusively Slovenian with dad.

My favourite line is that I have a non English speaking background or that English is my second language. Why does this please me I suspect is cause I have a range of accents from North Walgett (that's Lightning Ridge to the uninitiated but it sounds very out there when I want to be a yobbo) to the crisp professional accent I use in my work. I suppose it's in the same category of when people ask what I do. I tell them that my trade is economist.

Of course with a name like mine you would have to be pretty dumb not to realise it is not Anglo Saxon. But then it could be Irish if Mark O'Zagar is an Irish name.

It is interesting that I do have a love of Celtic music so perhaps I am Slovenian Irish Australian.

I read an article a few years ago that Slovenia was one of the European tiger economies and I must confess that I am proud of Slovenian economic achievements. However what I perceive now is that it's losing some of its identity. There was a quaintness almost hobbit like feel to the old Slovenia. It was a place where food and friends were more important than money and possessions. I think that if they are not careful that identity will be lost.

Daniel loves Slovenia and plans to go back. Mind you Daniel fits in pretty much anywhere he goes. Daniel is a bit like me in that respect in that it doesn't matter to him about class or heritage but rather who the person is to be with. It would be nice but at Daniel's age the only way that it would really happen is if he spent a year or so in Slovenia.

Slovenia runs the real risk of becoming just another homogenised European country. If Australia is the melting pot of cultures Slovenia is an ingredient. As the ingredient becomes more desirable it becomes watered down and then eventually it becomes artificial. It's always difficult to temper progress with maintenance of older cultures.

The push to become part of the EU is probably among the greatest risks it faces to maintaining its cultural identity. As different cultures arrive to experience the Slovenian culture they will dilute the essence of being Slovenian and change it to suit their cultures.

My philosophy varies according to my mood. The flippant me says live fast die young have a good looking corpse but unfortunately I have made it past the young and good looking. So I changed it to: I want to be rich and retired.

Perhaps it should be that you should try everything twice before you decide you don't like it just in case you did it wrong the first time. I also think we could reduce the number of commandments to: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Every generation is different. Society has made us different and certainly our aspirations change as we grow older. There are some core characteristics that we share but life changes us, which is damned fortunate since otherwise we would simply be clones of our parents.

## ***Memories of growing up in Lightning Ridge Marjan Zagar***



Marjan fishing for trout in Krka River in Slovenia.

was born in Cooma on 16 March 1965. We moved to Canberra in 1966. In 1968 we moved to Lightning Ridge and my parents built a house next to the school. I was four. Next to our house was a drain where sometimes during floods the yabbies would be washed down and I would catch them. I used to stick my finger in the hole and pull the yabby out until one time there was a big one and it cut my finger. I loved it when it rained so I could walk and play in the mud.

I liked living next to the school so I could go home during lunchtime. We used to have plots to grow vegetables at school. I got Brussels sprouts. Very boring I thought when other kids were growing radishes and beans. I remember stealing other people's radishes and beans.

I remember times when we went to Glengarry to mine for opals. On the trip home we used to stop in Cumbora to have an ice cream. It was so special that ice cream. Marko and I would try to make it last as long as we could while driving home.

We would sometimes stay overnight in Glengarry and sleep on a trailer. My brother and I would go into the mine and dig with dad. Once we stumbled on a patch of opal. I remember when we made a long corridor but there was no trace of opal. Dad gave up and went up to switch off the compressor. In the meantime mum lifted the jack hammer to see how heavy it was. She pressed it against the side of the corridor and just inches under the surface was a nice patch of opal. It was worth a few thousand dollars. We drove another corridor in that direction but there was just that one spot.

Life at Lightning Ridge was very laid back and safe. I would often be gone for hours playing with my friend Emil. We would wander all around Lightning Ridge. There was never any fear of bad people just dogs that were roaming loose. One thing that we all learned in Lightning Ridge as children is that if we wanted entertainment we would have to use our imaginations and improvise. Today there is entertainment provided for children but nothing can compare to what fun we organised.

Everything was a hand-me-down back then. I was so happy when I got my first bike (hand-me-down). There are millions of burs in Lightning Ridge and we were forever fixing the tires. There were no tar roads and the cathead burs were thick.

We would have BBQ's all the time. I remember we would buy a cow or a sheep from the farmer. We had a bowling alley on the block and friends would come for BBQ and to play bocce which is a European kind of bowling. When the bowling alley was being built we went to gather termite mounds in the bush and use them as the base for the alley. The soil was fine and when levelled, screened, watered, salted and compacted with a roller you would only have to drop the ball gently and it would glide across the surface to the other side of the ally.

There were many exciting arguments about the rules of the game and about measuring how close the ball is to the jack. Precise measurement tools were used. Everything had to be by the rule. I like to play like that knowing your partner was not letting your side down by playing haphazardly. This made the game very competitive.

For every school holiday and long weekend we would go on holidays mostly to Canberra. From there we would often go on fishing adventures with other families. We would go to places that required great determination and often found the adventure of getting there very memorable. We felt rewarded when we reached our goal and everyone enjoyed each other's company. One particular time I remember is when seventeen of us packed onto an old army Land-rover; we also had sleeping gear and provisions piled on top of us. I bet the people who were there would remember the jar of pickled paprika that opened on us all and of the fluid seeping over us. The bush track was so rough that we had to cut our way through fallen trees at times. When we got to our destination there was a lot of talk and laughter about the adventure while we prepared for the fishing. The food was always the best. My

friends who were not accustomed to European food absolutely loved it. Slovenian custom is always to welcome friends with food. Whenever I went to other places it was rare to be offered something.

High School was seventy five kilometres away in Walgett. The first thing that springs to mind is the school bus. A large part of my younger days was spent travelling. I travelled about 32000 km a year and in six years about 192 000 km. My mum travelled on a high school bus for twenty six years to work in Walgett. How many kilometres is that? She sat at the front preparing lessons, studying, reading or talking to other teachers. We had to be at the bus stop at 7.00 in the morning each day. The bus would arrive home at about 5pm. Now if you think of today's buses with air-conditioning and comfortable coach seats you would think it was not so bad. The buses we had were hot and packed with kids screaming and running around. The temperature was often above 40 degrees; the best we could do was open the window to let a hot breeze in. The seats were vinyl bench type so you were sweaty and stuck to them. After a time we established our regular seating positions with the older students getting into mischief at the back of the bus.

I am not particularly fond of my Walgett memories. The teachers were inexperienced; it was usually their first job and they stayed only until they got a posting of their choice. Every now and then a good teacher like my English teacher Thomas Grey would show a genuine interest in the welfare and learning of the students. He would organize trips for the school and try to bring the outside world into our school. While in Walgett I found that people from surrounding towns looked up to Lightning Ridge. This made me proud.



Marjan and Marko Zagar with Marjan's daughter Nasha

What made me happiest in Lightning Ridge is my family. We may not have had everything but you can't ask for better caring and loving family. We had hardships and different views but I know that my parents tried to provide the best. I wouldn't trade it with another. I sometimes worried because our customs were different but now I realise that every family in Lightning Ridge is different. I often felt self-conscious when my parents spoke Slovenian with me in front of my friends. I think that all children growing up feel the same at some stage in their life while dealing with new experiences and learning to find their place in life. At times I felt that my parents were too controlling but really it was only when they felt I needed it. Other times they allowed me more freedom than many other people; I was able to roam the opal fields all day specking when I was 11 or 12 years old; I could ride my motorbike unattended all over the country side. I drove my first big tip truck back to town from the field when I was 12. Once I remember the police car passed me and I thought he would stop me as I was so young and the truck was not registered. The only thing I could think to do was wave like everyone else does and they waved back. That's how it was in those days. The policeman probably thought I was helping my father so he turned a blind eye.

My mother was the one to ask if I wanted something; she was the compassionate one. My father was the strict and forceful one although fair. We often clashed but most teenagers do with their parents. I will never forget pig chasing at Deshen's. We

had a new Fairlane with a bull-bar. Dad would run the pigs over and then kill them; he would cut choice cuts of meat from them. One particular time we had to run over a pig a few times before we got him.

When we had motorbikes my brother and I would often go pig chasing with dad; we would catch the pig alive with our hands. We never used dogs because we preferred to choose the pig that we wanted. Our motorbikes would be loaded in the trailer and we would go to a nearby farm. The motorbikes would be unloaded and we would

carry a wheat sack with us. Then we would ride about 50 metres apart on the bikes until we came across a group of wild pigs. We would pick one out and make it as tired as we could by chasing it into the open and circling around it. You usually knew the pig was tired when it would start to chase the motorbike. That's the time to jump off the bike and catch the pig. This would be done by grabbing it by the back legs and lifting it up and rolling the pig onto its back and then placing a foot onto its neck to keep it steady. The other rider would then come and we would slide the sack over the pig's nose and onto its body. Once this was done the pig would become still; we would place it onto the



Here I am with my wife Kathy and our daughters Nasha and Eliza at our son's Janez' Christening for my fortieth birthday.

handlebars of the motor bike over the tank and ride to the trailer and put him inside the cage. Often we would catch 3 or 4 pigs. After taking the pigs back to the sty; my

brother and I had a job to feed them every afternoon with boiled wheat. We had a big silo for wheat storage and a 44-gallon drum to boil the wheat.

Slovenians know how to prepare a variety of special meats. We made Bacon, Krankies, Pursutto, blood-wurst, speck etc. Everybody loved these delicacies.

As I got older I would often help dad in the mine. I remember my pay was \$10 a truck or 10% of the opal found. That is OK even in today's standard when you think there are a lot of miners who can't even cover their expenses.

When I was free from chores I was roaming the fields on my motorbike looking for something to do with my friends. In the summer I would go for a swim in sheep dams with my friends. These were fun times. We had no cold swimming pool in Lightning Ridge so this was the best we could do to keep cool in the 40-degree heat. We would have mud fights and swing of a rope from a tree. We even had a very crude way of waterskiing on the dam. Most teenagers would either have a motorbike or an old barely running car to drive on the opal fields; neither were registered or registrable. To be able to water ski we would find an old car bonnet with a curved shape at the front, get some fencing wire and tie it across the front so you could hold. Then we would find another long length of fencing wire and tie it to a car. The car would then drive around the sheep dam and we would go for a water ski. It got a little dangerous at times when the person started driving too fast as the bonnet would come out of the water and onto the bank and over the bumps. Also when there were about 20 of us anxious to jump on the bonnet and avoid the wire that was coming around. All in all no one was really hurt and we all had lots of fun. I would never trade this experience with a computer game or TV. Lightning Ridge taught everyone who lived there to "improvise, adapt and overcome" My dad was always improvising and adapting; he is clever like that.

I remember the first phone we had was a wind up one. The phone was very expensive to use and all calls had to be made after 9 pm when the call rate was cheapest. In a way telecommunication made people drift away from friends and family; they communicate much less face to face. There is nothing like looking at someone in the eyes and seeing their true feelings. On the phone it is always a guessing game. They sound happy but are they really? You can only tell by looking at the person face to face.

When I was in High School I had a good English teacher Thomas Grey. We wrote poetry and performed plays. These are some of the poems I wrote as a teenager:

*Me*

*Me is love*

*For mum and dad*

*Me is motor bikes  
On the bush track  
I feel lucky  
Lucky as can be  
Because I am not hungry  
And I can see  
I am I  
You are you  
I feel happy to be here too.*  
*Motor-bikes  
Racing spinning  
Jumping winning  
This makes the motor sport living  
The speed is like lightning  
The falls are frightening  
People are watching  
Down comes the rider  
Another behind  
Rolling rapidly round and round  
To a stop he comes  
Lying on the ground  
People shout  
Watching the ambulance take the man  
A life has been taken  
The wife is heartbroken  
The son is sad  
The devil's word has spoken  
The trophies still stand  
They shall never go  
This was a rider who was never slow.*

### ***Alcoholics***

*They drink all day  
Never to stop  
A glass or two  
Or just a drop  
Their eyes are red  
Their breath is vile  
They drive right out of style*

*They drive to the left*

*They drive to the right Until they wrap themselves around a street light*

### ***My impressions from my holidays in Slovenia.***

Whether you're driving, flying or walking into Slovenia the first thing that will place you in awe are the huge mountains, old forests and the beautiful lush pastures of the lower slopes. Everything is so green and vibrant. Over every hill there is a little village and every house has a nice quaint garden with flowers and fruit trees. The forest trees are tall and dense yet there is little undergrowth which makes walking through them easy and mysterious. The forests are like those read about in fairy tales.

Slovenia shows its age with the beautiful old buildings and castles that are dotted



Kathy, Eliza and Nasha Zagar

around the country side. It is not uncommon to find a small church perched high up on a mountain peak that is inaccessible to vehicles of any type and is a long hard steep hike to visit.

After being enchanted by the beauty of the countryside and starting to interact with the people you notice the friendliness and welcoming atmosphere that they portray.

The people of Slovenia make you feel like family when you are in their home even when you have only met briefly. Food and wine is immediately brought out to entice a welcoming friendly happy atmosphere. It works too.

Slovenia has not been fully westernised and most restaurants still serve tasty traditional foods that keeps the population healthy and slim. The people of Slovenia are still very traditional and use any excuse to have a festival or gathering to socialize and enjoy each other's company. In a restaurant one table may break out in a song and then suddenly the whole restaurant will join in. This shows openness and confidence in the people; they are not self conscious about themselves.

The beauty of the country must have brushed off onto the people or perhaps the other way around.

Natasha Zagar

Hi I  
am



I helped my relatives in Slovenia with grape picking.

Natasha; I am 9 years old. I am part Slovenian because my dad Marjan Zagar is Slovenian. My family calls me Nasha because in Slovenian Nasha means ours. They all love me very much. I was born in Canberra on 21 January 1998. Nanny taught me many Slovenian songs and I even sang one for my teacher. I know many Slovenian words to say to my nanny and poppy. I cannot write or read Slovenian but I will learn. I have visited my relatives in Slovenia. I like my aunt's place because they have a dairy farm. It was fun playing with little calves. I saw a mountain called Triglav. Before I was born my parents Marjan and Kathy climbed to the top of Triglav which is 2800 m tall. We took a boat to a church in the middle of the lake Bled where my grandparents Cilka and Joe Zagar got married. We also visited Nan's relatives in America before we went to Orlando in Florida which has a Disney land and Expo. We went for many rides. I was a bit scared.

My friends come from different countries. Angie comes from China, Emma from Malaysia, Amna from Pakistan. I feel happy when I see my family and friends. My hobbies are netball, soccer, dancing and singing. My netball team is called the Torrens Tiggers. I have a rabbit, a cat, a fish and a guinea pig. My favourite movies are the Saddle club, Pokamon, Aeroplane crashes, and Myth busters. I go to Torrens

Primary School. My teacher's name is Mrs Tobler. My maths teacher is Mrs Breenan. Mrs Breenan is pregnant. My music teacher is called Mrs Swift. My art teacher is called Mrs Collings and my library teacher is called Mrs Hines.

My family is very loving and caring. I take care of my sister and brother. Every year for Easter we visit Nanny and Poppy who live in Lightning Ridge. Poppy used to mine for opals and we always find some colours on the ground there.

**On my tenth birthday I gave this interview:**

**What kind of people do you choose for friends?**

I choose the people who look out for each other and who co operate like if you're sad and lonely they would keep you company and help you with the problem. I choose happy people so we can enjoy our days at school, at each other's houses, or even at a park. My friends don't need to be rich as long as they are kind and caring and happy.

**What are your most precious possessions?**

My most precious possessions are my family because we do lovely things together like going to see movies; we have picnics and maybe just go for a little drive. Sometimes we travel or we might just stay home but anywhere and at any time we still have fun. We get into a lot of fights but eventually we get over them quickly and quietly so others don't join in. But in fights, in sadness or in pain we still love each other. Sometimes people in the family might not want to do stuff that you want to do but instead of fighting we just say ok and ask again later.

**What scares you and why?**

The most frightful thing to me would be my dad because when you're watching a movie he will sneak up to you and jump out at you. The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing would be spiders with hairy legs and sooo many eyes just looking at you like they are going to bite you. The 3<sup>rd</sup> would be when you are on a boat near the edge in the middle of nowhere and you think you going to fall in the water or a shark is underneath the boat you are in. After those 3 there is nothing else I am scared of.

**What makes you feel happy?**

I am happy when I see lots of people happy and smiling. I am happy when I see nature growing big and strong as we go into the bush in Lightning Ridge or just outside Canberra. I love going on bush walks and looking at nature. I think the happiest people would be my friends and family because they have me. I love to see everyone and everything happy. I think the happiest person would be me because I love everything.

**What makes you angry?**

Janez makes me angry when he does not listen to me. He will hop on the electric scooter by himself and say bad words; he hits and kicks. There is another thing that makes me angry: when Janez goes into a toy shop and will not come out so I have to pull him out while he is crying because he got a smack. Eliza also makes me angry when she says: I hate you Nasha, or: you're mean. Sometimes dad makes me angry sometimes mum and sometimes I am just angry. Dad makes me angry when he pokes me and mum makes me angry when she teases me.

## **What is the nicest thing about your mum?**

The nicest thing about my mum would be that she loves me; she's kind to me and always smells nice. When she is grumpy I know she still loves me; when she is late for work and she doesn't give me a kiss I still know she loves me. I think my mum is the best one in the whole world. When she is sad or very upset I try to help her with the problem big or small. I try to help in any way I can. She is very beautiful and she is the best. She likes to give us treats every now and then.

## **What do you like most about your dad?**

What I like about my dad is when I am sad he will ask what is the matter and if he can do anything to help me get over it. I love my dad because he is strong and handsome, he is a builder and he is good at it. My dad teases me sometimes but I know when he is working he does not get to stuff around. My dad is great at parties and great when at home. I love my dad because he always takes care of me like I would do for him.

## **What are you good at?**

Well my hobby is netball and cleaning. My hobbies might be netball and cleaning but I am really good at shot put and helping others. I am good at way more stuff but that is what I am best at. Once two of my friends had a big fight and they were so sad about it they were crying but a couple days later with my help they were the best of friends again.

## **Describe your sister and brother.**

My brother and sister are one of a kind, they sometimes are silly and other times they are like anyone else. My sister's name is Eliza and she is the best sister any one could have because if you ask her to do something she will do it straight away and she makes beautiful pictures for you. This year she is turning eight and is very tall. My brother's name is Janez. Janez is a Slovenian name and it is pronounced yanes in English. My brother is turning 4 this year and has a very big temper. I love them both so much.

## **What would you like to do when you grow up?**

When I grow up I want to be a doctor and help people in need of my help. I want to be a doctor because if at any time someone in my family is badly hurt or has a problem I will be able to help. Big or little I would try hardest to fix the problem. I would also like to be a doctor to get more money than the other people because I am going to live on a farm with two of my cousins and one of my friends. If I live on a farm I know it will be hard to get to work but somehow I will do it.

**If a good fairy would grant you three wishes what would they be?**

If a fairy would grant me three wishes my 1<sup>st</sup> one would be to have a very healthy baby because I would not want it to die from diseases after I have done all that hard work to make such a beautiful baby. My 2<sup>nd</sup> wish would be to have a magic necklace that has any power inside and if you press the middle you can choose which power you want. And my lucky last wish would be to have a big room like my mum's because she can fit a whole army in it.

**If you could only invite 3 people to your party who would you invite and why?**

I would invite one of my friends two of my cousins. My 1<sup>st</sup> cousin would be Britt because she is my kindest cousin; she is kind because she doesn't say I have to play with her. My 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin would be Connor because he doesn't play the play station all the time and he plays with me when I have no one to play with. And the one friend would be Amna because not many people invite her to parties.

**If you could have your party wherever you wanted where would you choose?**

If I could choose a place to have a great party it would be at dolphin beach at the coast because it has a place like donut and it is filled with fresh, flowing sea water. I would like to have it there because you can walk through the water that is one and a half meters across and not deep. The last time we were at this place there were lots of dogs and their owners; there was even a dog that thought we were its owner and it liked playing fetch.

**Describe three times in your life when you were very happy.**

One of the things in my lovely life would be when we went overseas to Disney land and Slovenia. I loved Disney land it was so cool seeing all of the different characters from the Disney classics. I also like sailing on Lake Bled in Slovenia. The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing that made me very happy was when Santa bought me and my brother and sister a trampoline. Now every time people come over that's the first thing they will go on; it's like they are attached to it. And the 3<sup>rd</sup> would be being with my family.

## If you were saying a prayer what would you thank God for?

If I was praying to thank God I would pray to thank him for creating the world because if he didn't there would not be me and I like being on the earth because otherwise I could not be with my big and beautiful family or my wonderful friends. My friends and family are the most important thing because they look after me. I would thank God for my family because they are paying for swimming carnivals and school fees. I am very happy that god and my family are on this earth.

## What do you think God is like?

I think god is a kind man like my family. I think he is important to me somehow; I don't know how but he just is. It must have taken him years to make the world. He must be very strong and must have a heart of an angel. He must be as graceful as a swan. His skin must be as soft as a duckling. His face must have been shaped by a true artist. But I would not care if he was ugly which he isn't. I would care who he was inside. He is one of the best people in heaven.

## What are your favourite toy/animal/ colour/ book/song?

My favourite toy is my first teddy because I have had it since I was a baby and because it is really cute. I have a few favourite animals: I really love horses but the 2<sup>nd</sup> one is rabbits. My favourite colours are purple, blue and gold. But my favourite is purple. My favourite book series are goose bumps and the saddle club. I like many songs but my favourite one would be: You are my sunshine.



***Hi, I am Eliza Zagar.***



Here  
I am  
in

Disney land Orlando in Florida in 2005. I went to Slovenia with my family. We saw where Nanny and Poppy were born. I like animals and I know a lot about them. I am a good sports person and I like art. I have a guinea pig called Sarah and a rabbit called Gingie. Everybody in my family loves each other and we have good manners. Now I am 7 years old.

## ***My Slovenia, my Australia By Albin Porsek***



I was born on 9 February 1920 on the outskirts of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The beautiful St Martin's mountain above my home is a pilgrimage and tourist destination.

Slovenia is the most beautiful country in the world and my birthplace is the jewel in its crown. It is close to mountain lakes Bled and Bohinj. Bled has a little fairy tale island with the church and a wishing well. I remember my home and the changing seasons that Slovenians celebrate.

The last time I was in Slovenia I walked with my father up St Martin Mountain. He showed me a place where in 1919 he picked blueberries with my mother in

the forest. They were young lovers. My father was nineteen and mum was eighteen. They loved each other but dad's family did not want him to marry mum because his family was rich and mum came from a very poor family.

Mum's mother bought a little wooden cottage and a little paddock on which mum produced most of the food. She also had a smoke-room in which she smoked meat for the restaurants.

When I was about four, mum married a handsome man but he was poor and he came to live in mum's house.

I was a love child but neither my father nor my stepfather loved me. I don't know which one hated me more.

The court ordered my father to pay child support for me and he hated me because of it. He turned away when I met him on the road.

I remember mum sending me to dad's butcher shop to buy meat. She hoped that he would give me some extra but he never did.

When I was about eight years old Dad married a rich girl and they had twin daughters. Dad then asked my mother to let me live with him but she did not let me.

My father was a butcher and his two daughters, my stepsisters, have a butcher shop each in Ljubljana.

Mum and my stepfather had eight more children and they worked hard to survive. My stepfather became a Shire treasurer. He was considered a good, hard working and well-respected man. I felt that he disliked me because he hit me all the time. He never let me go anywhere or do the things I wanted. When he hit me at the age of fifteen, I grabbed him and pinned him on the ground. I did not hit him but I told him that this was the last time he would hit me. I was a tall strong boy by then. From then on he never touched me but he tormented me verbally. Mum tried to protect me and that annoyed him.

I finished primary school and three years of secondary school before I began my apprenticeship as a cabinet-maker.

I always wanted to become an artist. I painted church domes with the artist Zeleznik. I wanted to study with him but unfortunately Mum could not pay for me. I had to take an apprenticeship to become a carpenter-cabinet maker.

I am grateful to Ivan Cerne who was my boss and teacher. When I finished my apprenticeship I worked there for two years until the war changed everything.

Slovenians were split in three groups.

The old Slovenian leaders, the prosperous business people, the rich farmers and those influenced by the church were afraid of Russian communists who wanted to change the society. They hoped to survive the war and continue as they were. Most later supported Domobranci, which means home guards. They guarded their homes and their way of life.

Most poor factory and farm labourers welcomed the change. They had nothing to lose so they joined OF Liberation front, organised by Russian revolutionists, which promised to take from the rich and give to the poor.

We were a Catholic family and interested in survival rather than politics. There were many people like us just trying to save their lives.

Italians occupied Ljubljana but northern outskirts where I lived came under Germany. My two sisters just finished primary school when Germans took them to Klagenfurt to become Hitler's Youth. They worked in the kitchen of the army barracks.

I was very sick with pleurisy and a chest infection at the beginning of the war so I did not have to join the army. When I went back to work in 1943 partisans took me during the night. In the morning mum reported to the German police that partisans

took me during a curfew. Germans caught the partisans. As a punishment two partisans came next morning and shot my mother in the kitchen in front of six of her children. My youngest sister was two years old.

The younger of the two partisans who shot my mother was my school friend and a boyfriend of my sister. Later he realised what he had done and he hung himself.

Germans sent me to Klagenfurt in Austria where my sisters worked in Hitler Youth camp. I secretly returned to attend mum's funeral.

In Klagenfurt I got a job as a cabinet-maker in the same barracks as my two sisters. At the end of 1943 they sent me to the Russian Front. Grenades were falling all around me but young person gets used to everything. I was lucky. Once I picked a grenade that fell next to me but did not explode. I chucked it away. They were going to give me a bravery award for it.

In May 1945 I got civilian clothes from a farmer and tried to return to Austria. Russians captured me and put me into a solitary prison. After a week they let me out to work for them. I escaped to Austria and found work in Klagenfurt where I worked before.

I met Justine who escaped from Slovenia with her boyfriend who was a Home guard. The allies returned Home guards refugees to Yugoslavia where communists killed them.

Justine and I became friends and we got married in 1947.

Justine's sister Maria also escaped to Austria with her home guard boyfriend Vinko Ovijac. They managed to escape and migrate to Venezuela in 1948.

May 1945 was a miserable wet month. Twelve thousands Slovenians poured on the fields of Austria and surrendered to the Field Marshal Alexander along with thousands of other refugees. The world was tired of the war; they had to solve refugee problems quickly. Sending refugees home was practical and sensible as far as British were concerned but sending them to Tito was a death sentence for these anticommunists.

In 1947 Justine and I applied to immigrate to Australia. We learned English for 31 days on a ship. We signed the contract to work for two years wherever they sent us. I asked to work as a cabinet-maker and they sent me to Sydney.

I worked in the Burwood hostel where we lived. Justine worked in a hospital as a cleaner.

In 1955 Justine and I guaranteed to give Justine's sister Marija and her husband Vinko a job and accommodation so they were allowed to come to Australia.

In two years we saved enough to buy an old house and we were very happy. I learned enough English to open a workshop with a wonderful friend from Africa. We worked together until he died five years later. After his death I expanded my factory and eventually employed eleven people making occasional furniture. I worked very hard as a manager of the factory. I delivered furniture to the shops like David Jones and Mayer's. The lifting of the furniture was hard and I damaged my back.

I had to sell the factory and I opened the furniture shop in the hope that the work will not be as hard. I had to deliver things and I could not do the heavy lifting. I also had a second hand shop, which I had to sell in 1975. My wife ran a furniture shop with other employees.

In my spare time I did inlay pictures in wood. I still have some beautiful works.

At that time I visited a Slovenian friend Joe Vrtacnik in hospital. He damaged his back while opal mining and could not walk. When he was released from the hospital I drove him to Lightning Ridge.

Vrtacnik married an Aboriginal girl and sort of became part of the Aboriginal community. I lost touch with him later.

Bore bath helped my back. I went twice a day to soak in the hot water. For a few years I travelled to Sydney for therapy and back again into the bore bath.

Lightning Ridge became more and more attractive. Looking for precious gems seemed exciting. I also liked the easygoing, friendly, honest miners. I returned to Sydney but the dream of the colourful gem and colourful life did not go away. I built a portable camp in Sydney and brought it to the Ridge. It was an escape from the pressures of my business and from hard work that aggravated my pain.

I finally sold my furniture shop and the land in the Blue Mountains during the nineties. I was happy to get rid of the worry and the problems. I built a house in Lightning Ridge and my wife moved up to be with me.

My health was not good. My wife also became ill and she died in 1998. I only own the house I live in now but even that is too much to take care of most of the time.

Soon after we came to Sydney I met other Slovenians and we talked about building a Slovenian club where we could meet and celebrate and have a Slovenian school. While I was off work with my bad back I searched around for a suitable land and found it. We collected donations from Slovenians and bought the land.

We built our Triglav club with voluntary labour at weekends. We elected the committee and the president. There were twelve of us permanent trustees, foundation members, to see that everything was running well. We opened the

charitable organisation Triglav Community Centre so we did not have to pay tax if there were any profits from the club activities.

Soon after Slovenian priests Bazilij and Valerian began to organise the building of the religious centre in Maryland and later Slovenian clubs grew in every larger city of Australia.

Some Slovenians co-operated with the Yugoslav embassy while others congregated around the church.

Those that resisted the embassy were interrogated when they came begging for visas to go home.

As the foundation member of Triglav and its trustee I continued to work for Triglav but I watched out for any impropriety from the embassy. They offered the club many things in order to keep us friendly. They brought artists and books and music from Slovenia but in exchange they demanded to be our guests so they could keep an eye on us.

In 1980 I returned to Slovenia with Justine for the first time since 1943. Dad's daughter invited us to stay with her and my father was there. At the age of sixty I spoke to my father for the first time. I saw Slovenia and my many relations for the first time after thirty-seven years. Since then I keep in touch with my relations.

Dad told me that he loved mum and that he was sorry that he did not marry her. He was also sorry that he ignored me when I was a boy.

Dad was born in 1900 and died in 1983. He was always a serious, businessman. People respected him and his family. His daughters helped him in the shop and later each of them opened their own shops.

There was poverty and misery when I left Slovenia but now Slovenians live comfortably. I could have had my own business and prosper there with them in Slovenia.

I am much like my father. I had little time for socialising. My business success gave me much satisfaction.

Mum was a happy, outgoing person. She was an honest, hardworking woman and people respected and liked her. Mum was not interested in making money.

Australia offered opportunity to migrants to make something out of their lives. The bank offered me as much money as I needed to open my business and I never had money problems.

Australia became my home. I like the warm climate and friendly people. I became especially attracted to Lightning Ridge. The bore bath was good for my back, bush life

offered freedom from pressures of the city life, people are friendly, and looking for opal gave me hope. Unfortunately my wife did not find happiness in Lightning Ridge. She missed her Sydney friends and city life. There are about a dozen Slovenians in the Ridge but they come from different backgrounds and don't mix well.

I am not a regular churchgoer but I have been doing the BBQ for every church function during the last twenty years. Sisters and the priests have been good to me.

I haven't been well since my wife died but there are many people who look out for me.

I am happy that Slovenia became independent. I am grateful to Slovenians who stayed home and made the independence and democracy possible. I believe that Slovenians are more united and kind to each other now than ever before.

Slovenians were under German rule for centuries. Now they are eager to get back with Germans into European Union. I suppose it is good for Slovenia to be in the company of the European nations but it makes one wonder. Why did Slovenians fight for independence for centuries? All our poets and writers and artist and politicians dreamed about the happy future when we will be our own masters. Now, however, only ten years after we became independent, we want to become a part of The European Union. The wars and poverty and struggle seemed meaningful as long as there was hope and faith that one day Slovenians will rule Slovenia. It seems like we are throwing away what our ancestors died for.

## ***Karl Knap***

I was born on 17 July 1931 in a little Slovenian mountain village Magneti in



Karl with his wife Fanika

Notranjska. Around us are other little villages scattered in the forest. One of them is Slivnica which became a tourist attraction because witches were known to live there. Now there is a restaurant with a four metre high witch with a broom looking down the beautiful slopes of Nanos mountain on one side and on Postojna's side one can see the churches of St Urh, St. Jacob, and St Vid nesting among trees. People go to yearly pilgrimages to these churches and after the mass they have dances and festivities in the restaurant.

My father lived in America from 1907 until 1914 and there he married his first wife. He returned to Slovenia because there was nobody else to take over a fairly large farm. On his return he was taken into the Austrian army during WWI

because Slovenia was a part of Austria.

Dad and his first wife had two children but his wife died in childbirth with their third child. Dad came to mum's place looking for a maid to help with his young family. Mum's parents had five girls and they told him to choose any one of them. He chose my mum. They later married and had another eleven children. All of us children had work to do as soon as we began to walk and talk. We were subsistent farmers; we produced everything we needed to survive. I became a shepherd before I had my first pair of pants. Little children used to wear a shirt. We had to prepare food, hay and wood for winter.

My parents often hired other village people to work for us in the fields. We always had horses and oxen for work and cows for milk. We sold calves, pigs, potatoes and timber.

We were a large family so boys slept on the hay in the shed. We gathered for breakfast; usually we had buckwheat or corn meal with bits of meat in the fat reduced into lard. We prayed before and after eating; we ate quietly and quickly. My father told us what jobs we were to do each day; we had to clear the forest and paddocks and orchards in the spring, later we fertilised the fields with manure, ploughed them and sowed potatoes and cereals, vegetables and clover. By May we cut the first grass for pigs; later we hired mowers for bigger paddocks. We were happy when they hired other workers because mum cooked better food; I was happy when I saw women coming carrying baskets of food on their heads. People liked to come to work for us because mum was a good cook. After lunch movers had a two hour rest but the family in the meantime had to rake and load the hay.

Every evening after dinner there were festivities with drinking and singing and socialising.

After haymaking we had to harvest and store cereal crops and other produce. We had a wheat thrasher powered by a horse that walked outside. I often had to scoop the grain; I was black from the dust. People looked forward to harvest time because in the evenings there was much merry making with drinking and dancing to accordion music. We thrashed millet with our feet; we went from house to house every evening to clean the corn cobs. These activities brought young people together.

In the autumn we made hay for the winter, women harvested flax which they had to spin during winter for weaving. We weaved baskets, repaired the wagons and made ladders during the winter. We had a big wood oven for bread making and also for warmth during winter months. Sometimes we slept on the warm oven stove. My grandfather always had a stick next to him if anyone misbehaved. He died for Christmas in 1943 at the age of 99.

My father was an important horse wagon driver; he looked after horses before anything else; we had one pair of horses for home use and one for hire. I often went with my father to look after the wagon brakes when he worked in the state forests.

Every evening we had to pray rosaries; in the winter months we prayed three rosaries every evening.

During winter we killed pigs. Women were talking about how many fingers of fat their pigs had. Everybody awaited this family festivity with great joy because it offered a variety of delicacies to eat. By eleven a clock mum had a roast ready. The pleasant smells of roasting reached everybody working in the snow outside.

By three in the afternoon we had lunch of soup with homemade noodles in the soup made from the bones of the pig. In the evening we had blood wurst ready. The next day we reduced fat for lard. We liked to steal bits of meat cooked in the fat and ate it with bread.

After Christmas we distilled spirits from the fruits grown in the garden. For the Shrove Tuesday we got dressed in fancy dress to have fun. We went from house to house and everybody gave us some food which we brought to the evening festivities where young and old danced. There was a tradition that during Lent forty day to Easter there were no other festivities. If the girl did not marry before Shrove Tuesday she had to wait until after Easter. Everybody had large families when I was young and we made our own fun and festivities.

Life changed since then; from twelve houses in my village there are five empty now; soon another three will be empty; when old people die there is no one to take over. On our big property are only three horses, everything is overgrown; people say that it is not worth working on the land; they are selling their forests and fields.

In 1938 I started school in St Trinity. I had to walk to school one hour each way through three villages. I remember that I had to carry a stick to stop dogs attacking me. I also remember Serb Cetnik soldiers working on the road. They had long black beards and the children were scared of them.

In 1941 Italians invaded my part of Slovenia. They demanded that our teacher starts teaching in Italian. He obeyed but partisans came and killed him because of it. My schooling was very irregular after our teacher was shot. For the next six months there was no school at all but then a lady teacher came. On the way to school one day we met men who told us that they will shoot us if we don't go home; we were not to tell anyone that we saw them. They were first partisans in 1941. They had hunting guns and fir branches in their hats instead of the star. As children we took food to forest, we gave partisans a sign that we were coming by whistling a certain song.

My brothers joined partisans to resist Italian invasion. My oldest brother was a commandant of the group that sabotaged railways from Borovnica to Postojna; my second oldest brother was a Captain in armoury division. I was a regular currier; I did not look suspicious or dangerous because I was little. I knew all the secret pathways in the forest. I had to carry messages to partisans about things happening down in the village. I also carried food and water to them. I was afraid that Italian authorities would catch me so I took a cow and pretended to graze it as I moved towards the partisans.

Partisans came to sleep on hay in our sheds but they were too scared and careful to come to our house. People knew that partisans often met in our house. There was a

lot of shooting between Italians and partisans. My father was the only one in the village who had horses; I often had to go with him to pick dead partisans. As the snow was melting in spring we sometimes found dead bodies, guns and ammunition, dead horses and mules; most were partly eaten by wolves.

Italians had their station barracks in nearby Velike Bloke; When they capitulated we went into their barracks with a wagon to take suitcases and boxes full of blankets, flour and other stuff. Once I found four pairs of skis. Partisans found out and would have confiscated them so I buried them in the manure. When I uncovered them a year later they were rotten so I had nothing. I was grazing cows and many times German planes flew over us and shot at us; we ran into the forest; once they shot two cows and we had to kill them.

After Italian capitulation Germans took over. Some women went to church in Begunje where Home guards were stationed. They told them that partisans were meeting in our place. The next day Home guards came and robbed us. In a nearby village they took all the boys with them. These boys sang together and helped each other before but now they betrayed each other and began shooting each other. It was a dirty political war. Many partisans and home guards were killed. The Home guards that escaped after the war were returned and killed secretly in the forest of Kocevje. Thousands were buried in mass graves.

When I visited Kocevski Rog I felt sad, everything is silent in those forests; even the birds are not singing.

My younger brother Tone was captured by Germans and they returned him home after the war. Tone worked in the butchery in Germany. He told us how at the end of the war he went through the city and all the shops were open with nobody inside. With his Slovenian friend they found a horse and a wagon and loaded it with food and clothes. Each of them also took an accordion and they travelled towards Austrian border where they met Russians advancing towards Germany; partisans confiscated everything even their own backpacks.

My brother Lojz was under aged; he went to get water for partisans but Home guards captured him. They took him to Velike Lasce and gave him a choice to join them or be killed. He received Home guard uniform but no weapons yet by the time war finished. He and other Home guards and some associated civilians escaped to Austria because they were afraid of communist reprisals. Lojz was in Vetrinje until July 1945; he returned home sick, emaciated and weighing 36 kg. He was lucky that my family was with partisans otherwise he would end in Kocevski Rog.

My oldest brother Franc was killed when he was 24 years old. After the war my parents found his grave among fifty others near the hospital hidden in the rocky

mountain Sneznik. On top of every grave was a bottle with the name in it. My brother's body was frozen and wrapped in a sheet. My parents brought a coffin and buried him in Cerknica. This partisan's hospital was so well hidden; we could barely find it with the help of the doctor who worked there.

After the war I had to leave school to work on our farm. In 1947 I started to work with my uncle who was a carpenter. In 1951 I was called into the army to serve in Macedonia for two years. The policy was to send soldiers into another republic because they hoped to assimilate five Yugoslav nations into one Yugoslav nation.

I always liked to work with wood. As a 13 years old boy I used to make wooden clogs. I am very happy and proud that I became a carpenter.

When I came home I started work with a building construction firm in Ljubljana and became a carpentry apprentice. I worked during the day and attended school at night. I met Slovenians who came from America on holidays. They told me how easy it was to earn good money in America as a carpenter. You could get 380 dollars for five days work. I started to plan my escape.

My uncle came from America and he promised to organise for me the entry to America if I escaped to Austria. A friend and I escaped but my uncle changed his mind. A friend transporting timber to Austria by railway arranged a hole between the logs on the truck where my friend and I could hide. We arrived to Jesenice but the train did not stop and police arrested us and interrogated us for 3 days before they let us go.

My second attempt was with a group going through Murska Sobota. The girl in the group had a bottle of slivovic; she wanted to throw it away but we didn't want to waste it so we offered to drink it. We became a bit drunk and talked loudly about our plans. Some scruffy villagers listened to us but we didn't know that they were detectives. They arrested us but we told them that we were just tourists. They took us for interrogation in Ljubljana

On my third attempt I was introduced to an UDBA police man who assisted escapees for money. He took a hunting gun with him and pretended to be hunting for a badger that destroyed corn fields. I was afraid that he would shoot me.

We were to cross the border over the creek Kucnica. He told me to wait for him under some bushes in the evening but I was waiting under the wrong bush all night. After not eating for the second day I returned; the policeman rang the border patrol not to be there from midnight until one in the morning. When we came close to the border I paid that policeman 4000 dinars. He ordered me to leave him also my bag with my personal belongings. He told me to cross the creek but I was afraid that he would shoot me so I ran through the corn field. As soon as I was in Austria I fell

asleep under the bushes near a footpath. The first words I heard when I woke up were two border guards saying: One escaped again. They were inspecting my footprints only 100 metres away from where I was hiding.

In Austria I found an orchard and ate some apples when a Slovenian speaking lady approached me and asked if I escaped from Yugoslavia and if I was hungry. She fried eggs for me but before I could eat them policeman came and took me on his motorbike to Rosenberg prison. They interrogated me for four days before they took me with fifty others to the refugee camp in Leibniz. There we had to assemble every morning; they called out the names of people who were granted the asylum. The ones that did not get the asylum were returned; Yugoslavia paid Austria one cubic metre of timbre for every returned refugee. Most likely people to be returned were unskilled; those who left behind their children, people with criminal records and some who were sick. Slovenian farmers sometimes demanded that they return their sons because they had no one to work on the land.

I got the asylum and was sent to Leinz camp on 6th July 1957. Farmers came every morning looking for labourers. I also cleaned the ships until I heard that one could earn good money as a forest worker. In the meantime I got a visa to go to Canada but I missed the ship and would have to wait another 3 months. I had a chance to go to Australia in three weeks so I agreed to go.

There were hundreds of migrants and we exchanged stories of our escape. Women and men lived in separate barracks. A young girl Fanika came to visit her relation Tone who slept in the same room with me. Fanika and I became friends. Tone was an invalid; he told us that he held a cow by the tail and steered her towards the border to escape from Yugoslavia. Fanika and I got married before we left for Australia. I made a good choice; Fanika and I have been happily married now for 49 years. We have three good, happy and healthy children. On 18.12 57 we sailed from Genove on Italian ship Aurelia for 34 days to Australia. Many of us had papers to go to Canada but we could go to Australia sooner. We never once regretted going to Australia. Canada was closer to Europe but Australia has a lot of other advantages. The work was easy to find, the climate was wonderful and the people were welcoming.

On the ship Aurelia we had some English lessons but I remember most the celebration when on Christmas day 1958 we crossed the equator. We had roast meat and wine instead of usual macaroni. We arrived to Fremantle on 22 1 1958 and from there to Melbourne and then to Bonegilla

We were very impressed by Bonegilla refugee camp, the food was excellent and plentiful and we had no work to do. Slovenian priest Father Bazilij came from Melbourne and he picked 20 Slovenians to select clothes from the Red Cross bin. He also organised jobs and accommodation for us.

I learned a lot in the first 18 months while working for builders Pekol and Turk. We were subcontracting mostly weatherboard houses. Once the other two went to the pub when someone from the office brought three open pay envelopes. I had a look inside them and saw that my friends had 48 pounds and I had 23. I started to think to go and work on my own.

Another Slovenian asked me to work with him for a German fellow. He watched me work and said: I can see that you have experience so you can work on your own. I gave him a price and he accepted. When I put the frames up I asked for progress payment but he said that he had no money and will bring it in two days. In the meantime I put up the roof. He told me that he invested money and can't take it out. I finished the house. The bank manager came to reposes the house and declare him bankrupt. After three years the court ordered that he pays me one quarter of the price. I was very surprised and disappointed that a Slovenian can do something like that to another Slovenian. I learned from this lesson.

I found another German partner and we built new houses for two years.

In 1960 it became harder to find work in Melbourne. I looked in the paper every morning but when I went to apply there would be many carpenters waiting for one job. Once they advertised for carpenters in a sewage tunnel; there were about twenty other carpenters but the supervisor was German and he presumed that I was German because my name sounds German so I got a job for three months. The pay was good and after that my friend and I started subcontracting on Housing Commission homes in Broadmeadow.

In 1972 we got a letter from authorities to come to a meeting. We had to obtain building licences. About 200 tradesmen assembled in a hall and we filled in appropriate forms. They told us that from that day on we were all licensed builders; they already had our licences issued and they handed them out to us. All I had to do beforehand was to supply references from my employers on previous building projects. I have always done a good job and I went along well with my customers and employers so that wasn't difficult.

Once in 1962 I went to the unemployment office to ask for the dole. There was a big queue and I saw two Slovenians waiting. I became embarrassed and left. I bought a newspaper and found a job on a hotel. There were 8 carpenters and after two weeks they called me into the office and asked if I would be a foreman. I was very proud and I worked as a foreman for three years. When we finished the hotel we began to build 40 flats. The company had another worksite with another foreman. When we finished the flats they asked the other workers which foreman they would like to work with and they chose me.

The work was far from my home. When they began building a school nearby I asked for a job there. I became a foreman on Altona School. When I finished that job I started to buy old houses and renovate. I made some new houses and the business was going well.

In May 1973 we went to Gold Coast for a holiday and loved everything about this new place. We moved to Gold Coast in October 1973. We bought five units to let to tourists; I built a three bedroom unit for us underneath and another one for letting to tourists. When Fani got sick and could not manage the place we rented the units out permanently until we later sold them. We lived there for seven years until I built a new house for us. After that I started building houses for others. There was plenty of work because Gold Coast was growing fast. When we arrived on 12 10 1973 there were 28000 people and now in 2007 there are half a million. When my brother Ludvik came for a visit me in May 2007 with his wife he was very impressed with the beauty of Gold Coast. He was amazed at how clean and new everything was. He couldn't believe it that on public BBQ places you even get timber for free.

I don't work much anymore but I still can't sit still. I lease out one factory and have to do maintenance.

The



Knap Family

happiest times for me and my family were when we used to go camping along the river Own in Bright. Bright is a beautiful town much like Europe and all our friends came camping with us. We had music, singing, eating and drinking and telling stories late into the night. There was much laughter and reminiscing; we enjoyed the new friendships and still keep in touch with old friends. There were many rabbits in Bright in those days and we used their meat in many recipes. We also liked to go fishing.

Now we are retired and enjoy good social life with friends and family. We have everything we ever wished for.

I often worked long hours seven days a week but we were never short of anything. We had our priorities in life; we didn't spend on luxuries until we managed to buy essentials. These days young families want to buy the best of everything when they start out and then they have problems with repayments.

I am very proud of my wife, our marriage and our three children. They are all successful, honest and hardworking people. Both sons in law are also very nice and we help each other.



*Fanika na obisku pri Cilki*

## *Franciska Knap*



I was born in Slovenia on 13 July 36 (Melisa Savinjska Dolina) as the youngest of eight children. At home they called me Fani but in Australia my name sounded funny and caused many people to have a laugh. Don't be funny they used to say. I am a happy and sometimes funny person so the name suits me. Australians know me as Franciska and I can be as serious as anybody when I am doing business. I am an honest and fair person but I do not allow anyone to take me for a fool.

My father was employed on a sawmill and in a flour mill; my mother looked after the family.

In 1941 Germans occupied my part of Slovenia so I had to start in German school. I remember being terrified of American planes shooting down small German Stuka planes; we children often ran into hiding.

Life for us children did not change much after the war. I left school at the age of 16 and became a domestic servant in Maribor. I always wanted something better; I heard from people who escaped that one can earn good money in the west. I told mum in confidence that I planned to go. She wasn't happy but she gave me five American dollars for the trip. My father later said that he would have stopped me if he knew. He was a mayor and he felt that stopping me was his duty.

In June 1957 my friend Jozica organised a guide to take us over the mountain Olsava where we were to cross the border illegally and so escape to Austria.

I packed a change of clothing and my ID. There were three other people in our group. The guide brought us to the top of the mountain at midnight and told us to go straight but we got lost; we wandered around until we became exhausted and went to sleep on the moss under the trees. Next day we wondered left and right, we felt very tired and hungry but we could not find the way. Again we slept in the open. On the third day we suddenly heard cow bells. Jozica and I followed the bells but the others stopped hidden in the bushes. We came to the paddock where we met two boys. They told us that we were in Austria but the path we were walking on was actually the border between Yugoslavia and Austria. It was midday and the boys told

us that guards have a lunch break. They would be having dinner break from 5 to 6 and the border would be safe to cross again. Jozica went to get the other three. The boys' father came and invited us to their shepherd's hut in the mountain; they gave us food and beds. They spoke Slovenian and German. At five in the morning we heard accordion music. Some boys came on motor bikes to take us to the church annual pilgrimage festival. We had lunch in a restaurant. I went to the toilet and when I returned everybody was gone. The police arrested them. The boy who brought me there wanted to take me to Germany on his motor bike but the man at the petrol station told us that the police left a message that they will arrest the boy if he does not bring me to the remand Centre. We all assembled again in the remand centre and by the morning many others joined us. Police took us into the refugee centre where they would decide if we would be granted asylum or be sent back.

I was allowed to apply for entry to Australia. I met Karl in the camp and we married on 26 October 57

We travelled on ship Aurelia to Australia from 18 December 1957 until 22 January 58. We were enormously happy as we arrived to Bonegilla migrant settlement. It felt like America came to us with all the good things we heard about. We stayed two months doing nothing but enjoying good food.

I never once regretted escaping or coming to live in Australia. My family would never succeed in Slovenia as we did in Australia. We enjoyed the freedom, good earnings and friendly people.

Slovenian Franciscan Father Bazilij came from Melbourne and promised to find us accommodation and work. He arranged with a Slovenian builder Jozef Turk to employ Karl as a carpenter. I looked after Jozef and Karl while I expected our first child. On 1 January 59 our daughter was born dead. It was the saddest time of our lives. I blame the hospital for my daughter's death because they sent me home after my water broke. After three days they had to perform the caesarean to save my life but they could not save our daughter. When I came home there were about 300 sympathy cards and our friends were of great support to us. Father Bazilij comforted us and offered to pay for the proper burial for our daughter but Karl told him to save the money for more needy people as we had enough money for the funeral.

Father Bazilij helped many Slovenians find accommodation and jobs. Everybody turned to him when they needed help.

When in Slovenia UDBA the secret police questioned Karl about the activities of Father Bazilij; they told Karl that Fr Bazilij was a traitor; he was anti communist but Karl only had good things to say about him.

English language was our biggest obstacle but there were lots of new Australians then and we found many new friends. We are still in touch with some of them after 45 years. We joined Slovenian association in Melbourne and felt quite at home with other Slovenians there.

After Jozef Turk married Jozica, we lived together and remained friends to this day. In 1960 we moved in a bungalow on our own block where we later built our house. Our daughter Albina was born in 1960. Karl began to work on his own and I looked after the family. I minded other children at home and took some part time work but mainly I was home to support my family. Our second daughter Cvetka was born in 1963 and our son Johnny was born in 1968.

My children spoke only Slovenian with us while in Melbourne but when we moved to Gold Coast in 1973 they lost Slovenian speaking peers and friends so they started to speak only English. They became self-conscious and did not like speaking Slovenian any more. They said: Why did you come to Australia if you wanted to be Slovenians? They understand Slovenian but they do not speak it much.

We bought five units in Surfers Paradise and Karl built two more on the same block. We lived in one of the units and I let the other six on daily or weekly basis. Our children helped me wash, clean, and cook breakfasts.

Karl began building houses. After six years I had to have a heart operation and the work became too much for me. We began renting flats on longer terms until we finally sold them.

In 1989 we moved into our beautiful home and never looked back. We were never short of money but we always managed our money carefully; we never wasted anything.

I always loved to have the children well dressed; people often commented on how nicely dressed my children were but I bought remnants of good material cheaply and made their clothes. I always managed money wisely and prepared good meals with little money. We always had lovely gardens and grew our own vegetables. My children tell me that I am an excellent cook and I love to cook for parties as well.

Hard work, good management and co-operation made us quite well off. People who are lazy and careless with money and possessions often feel jealous when they see others better off but they like to live day by day without worrying about tomorrow.

Karl is a very capable builder; he is quiet, patient and compassionate man; he is an excellent worker and provider. Some people say that I don't deserve him. I know that I have a wonderful marriage but I never forget to work on it every day. I look after myself first because when I am well and happy I can look after my family better. My

husband is too kind and people would take advantage of him if I did not stop them. I stand up for myself and my family.

I have a good life now, I swim every day in my swimming pool, I go to gym a few times a week; I go bowling often and dancing every Saturday. We exchange visits with friends for dinners and games, we go for holidays and picnics. We attend most events in Slovenian clubs and invite friends for card and billiard nights. Both of us go lawn bowling and Italian bowling bocce in Slovenians club.

Every year we return to Melbourne and spend some time with friends there. We go to Bright where we used to camp in our younger days. Bright is the most beautiful town and it reminds me of home.

I have help with the housework now once a week. Karl prepares a healthy breakfast; he makes fresh fruit and vegetable juice every morning; we also take health supplements.

We enjoy Slovenian mass when our priest comes to visit.

I love singing; whenever I hear singing I join in; people always ask me to start them off. I also love acting; we prepared many plays and sketches to entertain our club members. Karl and I like dancing.

I was always good at athletics and played volley ball well. I am a thoroughly happy person and appreciate my good life.

When visiting Slovenia I look at young generation; they have big ideas and plans but they are not ready to have a go and work hard like we did. People at home don't socialise as much as we do; they keep to themselves. They have good standard of living but they complain instead of being grateful for it.

In Australia we are more satisfied with what we have. We have a very good medical care in Australia.

It seems unfair though that people who worked hard and saved are not entitled to a pension. In Europe everybody who worked and paid tax gets a good pension regardless of their savings. We don't get a pension.

## ***Dominik Simoncic***

I was born on 23 March 33 in Krize, a small village near Raihenburg. I had four sisters and one brother. One sister was killed in Germany in 43 and one brother drowned during the war. I lost touch with my family after mum died in 1966 at the age of 65. Dad died in 58 also aged 65.

Slovenia was under Germanic rule for centuries and many Slovenian places had Germanised names. After the disintegration of Austro-Hungarian Empire Slovenians joined in the kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenians, which was later renamed Yugoslavia. We became a part of Yugoslavia for about sixty years. Yugoslav government wanted to get rid of German words so they renamed Raihenburg into Croatian name Savski Brestavac. The town's people hated the new name and they poured the bitumen over it. The town remained Raihenburg until they changed it into Brestanica in 1954. The creek Brestanca runs through the town.

In 1941 I was 8 when Germans invaded Slovenia. Germans transported us to German Labour Camp in 1943. I celebrated my tenth birthday in Krsko jail where we had to wait for the transport. We returned home in July 1945.

My father was an easy going man. He worked in Luxembourg and earned a bit of money but he lent it and lost it. He was fond of old Austrian Empire and he proudly wore Franc Joseph's buckle in his belt. Those were good times, he used to say.

My mother was in charge of the family business. She was against communism because she knew that communists took the land from the farmers. She used to say that communists make people eat from the trough like animals.

Times were really hard for my generation after the war. I wanted to become a mechanic but I lived too far from the city to go to high school. I had to take what was available.

Yugoslav regime was bad for Slovenians. Many men came from Bosnia and Serbia and they were given opportunities in education, work, and accommodation before us.

Slovenians wanted some autonomy for Slovenia, they wanted to have its own army but Tito would not allow it. We had to pay high taxes to bring the South Slavs up to Slovenian economic standard. Tito wanted to create one unified Yugoslav nation out of six very different Slav nations.

Slovenians were always a part of Western European community while South Slavs were under Turkish Empire for 500 years; they belong to Orthodox or Muslim religion; they have different work ethics and traditions.

We had a fair sized farm but we soon learned that in communism it didn't pay to produce more than we needed because we had to give the surplus to the co-op for less than it cost us to produce. They prescribed how much we should produce and how much we had to give. In 1948 we had a flood and all our potatoes rotted in the ground. We only produced 3000 kilograms but they ordered that we give 6000 kilograms to the co-op. We would have to buy the potatoes to give them to the co-op.

Stalin was considered a great teacher at that time and Tito followed in his footsteps. Tito promised to destroy all private ownership and he was well on the way doing it. Political leaders were getting richer while many people starved. The rich became greedier every day.

Montenegro leader Djilas had a more humane idea of communism. I remember him saying that he will not travel in a car until every citizen could travel in a car.

Slovenia became independent in 1991 but Slovenians still don't trust their leaders because they become greedy when they come to power.

I found Australian and English bosses reasonable and fair. They liked me because they knew that I worked well and knew my job.

I also like Germans because they are well organised and do their work well. Even socially Germans are more correct than others. Italians stick for each other, Greeks don't even let you get a foot in their business but Germans appreciate a good worker whatever nationality.

I continued my primary school for a couple of years until I got a place in the industrial training school in iron works at Jesenice. I was making cast iron alloys.

I was trained in the whole process of iron casting. Later I worked for Gradis, in Ravne and in Velenje as a coal miner. When they couldn't sell the coal I lost a job. I went to Blagojev Kamen in Serbia where I mined for wolfram and gold. Wolfram is used in electronics because it has the same extension capacity as glass and it melts at 4300 Celsius. They separated the wolfram and gold from the dirt. In 1955 I went to Montenegro to work in a tunnel as a powder monkey.

In 1955 I was taken into the army for two years. I trained for ten months as a sanitary first aid worker and later I worked in ambulances and clinics in Kosovo and Macedonia.

After the army I worked as a mine explosion expert on the road works. In December 57 I escaped to Austria and applied to migrate to Australia.

I came to Fremantle on 14 October 59 and was taken to Bonegilla. After six days they sent me to assist a coppersmith in South Australia. It was a boring job because we did very little; the hours seemed twice as long as they do when you work.

After three months I began working in Leonora goldmine 150 kilometres from Kalgoorlie.

I went to work in Wittenoom blue asbestos mines in Wittenoom gorge. We drilled five levels into the gorge and we had to work bent down because the hanging wall was low. I had to sit for hours with my feet in the water. I stayed for four years. Blue asbestos is used for insulation, fire proofing and for purifying water. Locals used blue asbestos metal on the road and around their homes. Moving asbestos produces dust which is dangerous for your health; small particles you breathe in settle on the lungs and expand; this causes mesothelioma.

When I stopped asbestos mining my hands were damaged. The constant vibration of the drill and other mining machines kills the nerves and I had no feeling in my hands for ten years. If I put my hands into cold water they turned completely white.

There was no compensation, we did not know about our rights.

After asbestos mining I went to WA nickel mining. I was sinking shafts north of Kalgoorlie. The water ran from the ground and I drank it. It looked like water but it tasted like milk. Once the shift boss saw me drinking it and he told me that it might be radioactive.

We were paid by the yard and we worked very hard to earn more money. I had a bet with another Slovenian bloke as to who will do more work; I worked so hard that I earned twenty-five pounds a day. He lost the bet and still owes me a case of beer. On one particular day I earned sixty pounds, which was big money then.

We had trouble with the manager who extorted money from the workers. He demanded that we pay him twenty pounds a fortnight. If we did not he would write less hours for us. Most of us resigned in protest.

I went uranium mining in Esherana near Pine creek. There was no bitumen road so we could not mine during the wet season because the trucks could not take the dirt. They transported uranium ore to Malin about one hundred kilometres from Pine Creek. In Malin mill they ground the diggings and then separated uranium by flotation. Australian uranium is shiny yellow powder.

I was very lucky as far as health goes. Tons of rocks were falling around me and the machinery was smashed but I was never seriously injured. I earned double wages because I worked in dangerous situations.

In 1965 I went to Tenants creek gold and copper mine but I did not stay. The heat and the lack of air in the shafts made miners go mad. I returned to Wittenoom and later to Kalgoorlie.

In 1977 I went for a holiday to Andamooka where I had a go at opal mining. I met Peter Milas and his family. They told me about Lightning Ridge and they came with me to see if we would like to move to Lightning Ridge. I liked the life style and the town. You work when you feel like it and for as long as you like with people you choose. I spent all my money on mining. I had no idea where opal was so I paid to have holes drilled in the wrong places.

I knew about mining but I knew nothing about opal. In opal mining you have to trust your partner or you have to watch him every moment you mine with him. I trusted everybody from the start and they all cheated. Now I don't trust anybody. There are too many opportunities to cheat in opal mining.

Less was a friend and we worked happily until we found a good trace but then Les became moody and wanted to get rid of me.

I began working on my own but even when I worked on my own opal cutters cheated me.

In 1979 I went nickel mining near Kalgoorlie to earn some money for opal mining. By the end of that year I returned to stay in Lightning Ridge for good.

In 1980 I began working for Richard and his partner; they had a claim and equipment. Richard told me that we would share a third each. He told me that it was dangerous in the mine he had, but I was used to dangerous mining. I picked the first pillar and found twenty thousand dollars. Richard's other partner who worked in the same mine before me found nothing. I found colour in the wall and on the floor so the other partner must have been stealing from Richard. I made a connection and found another level where I found buckets of opal. This opal was put in the safe but it disappeared.

I realise that I was very naive and that perhaps I should not have trusted people. Being cheated and betrayed was a story of my life. Some stole from me others borrowed and then disappeared. People come to Lightning Ridge from all over the world and you don't know who is who and who to trust.

I knew many women and I had a chance to marry but I suppose I didn't trust women either. I saw women leave their husbands and children, others made their children's fathers provide for their extended family.

I live on my own with my four dogs. I feed hundreds of birds. I believe that all living things are brothers and sisters. I believe in nature. Animals make the nature wonderful. I cannot kill an animal. I like good food but I would never have meat if I had to kill. I am especially fond of Italian artichokes and mushrooms. I like venison and duck.

I am a Catholic but my faith changed; I have concluded that religions are old fashioned politics. There is an almighty power and people try to explain and use that power for their own benefit. They organised religions. More people they can get to believe their explanation of the Almighty more power and wealth they have.

I think God was smart because he did not create a wife for himself because people might worship his wife instead of him. Even so most people pray to the Virgin Mary. They even pray to their particular statue of the virgin.

Religions were invented when people still believed that the earth was flat and that everything rotated around it. I read science and history books. They discovered that earth is like a bubble among the billions of bubbles floating around in infinite time and space. New bubbles come into being and the old ones burst in infinity of Big Bangs.

I spent much money on books and reading them changed my beliefs. People see the bad things religious leaders do and they lose faith in their God.

Everybody insists that their God is the only true God but I believe that if there was God he would ban religions.

## ***Vladimir Strehar***

I was born in Maribor Slovenia in 1939 and came to Australia as a teenager in 1956.

My father had a workshop making furniture in Maribor. He employed 38 men. During the WWII he joined communist resistance force. After the war communists nationalised his workshop so he turned anticommunist. Mum was always very religious but dad turned to Catholic Church only because he was disappointed with communism. My younger brother became a priest.

I left school so I could help dad in the workshop. He trained me to become a carpenter but I never passed any exams. Dad was very strict. When I was seventeen I made a mistake and cut a door a bit short. Dad hit me with a plank. I told him that he hit me for the last time. My cousin worked in Austria. I went with her to her home near the Slovenian-Austrian border. From her home we could see the border guards playing soccer and so we crossed to Austria unnoticed. We went to my uncle in Graz. He told me to go back home. My cousin and I hitch hiked to Salzburg. She went to work there and I reported myself to the authorities. They interrogated me and then put me into the refugee camp. Austrian farmers and builders came to the camp to look for workers and I went to work in the quarry. The owner of the quarry did not have any children and he wanted to adopt me. I decided to stay in Salzburg. At the time I met a friend who wanted me to go with him to Canada. I registered to go to Canada but I needed a guarantee of a job there. It was easier to get to Australia or Africa. We had to sign up for two years work in Australia because they sponsored us and paid our trip. We boarded the ship *Toscana* just before Christmas 56. It was full of European migrants. Many Hungarians fled the revolution; there were also Italians and Greeks and Jugoslavs.

We came to Melbourne and from there to Bonegilla migrant camp. Most Europeans did not like Australian food in the camp but I was not worried about the food because I found a girlfriend there.

After a fortnight I was sent to Melbourne Broadmeadow camp and worked there for 7 months. That was very unhappy time for me. The pay wasn't good and the camp life was lonely. I wanted to go back home. I cried for home. I was desperately homesick. My friend and I worked together and shared a room. We went to the authorities and told them that we wanted to go home. They told us that we must first repay the money for our trip to Australia. We had no money so we had to stay. They gave us a job in a factory making plywood. We worked a lot of overtime and earned much more money.

My friend was very clever and he later became a boss of this same factory employing 1500 women in Homebush. He drank a lot and had much trouble with women. He would get into fights and had trouble with the police.

I met Toni who told us that one can earn better money in Sydney where they were building Waramanga dam. We worked there for 16 months. We cleared trees and burned them; these were beautiful thick perfect old trees but we just blasted and burned them.

There was a group of Slovenian political migrants who were in a position to find good employment for people. They recruited boys for work on Snowy Mountains Scheme. I went to work on Tumut 2 tunnel close to Cabramurra for 16 months.

As I returned to Sydney I met many Slovenians. Catholic Slovenian priests had a 40 room hostel next to the church. They offered free accommodation to Slovenian migrants who had nowhere else to live. There was a wonderful Slovenian kitchen underneath and a billiard room. We also had dances on special occasions.

I met Maria who came with her boyfriend. When her boyfriend went to work in Adelaide Maria and I fell in love and moved in together.

I met Steve while I worked for Snowy Mountains Scheme. He went to Andamooka and brought some colourful rocks and said that they were worth thousands of pounds. That's how I was introduced to opal. My German friend Ray told me that I don't need to go to Andamooka because there was opal also in Lightning Ridge. We had no transport so we put together 56 pounds and bought an old car. Ray drove but he took the wrong turn and we ended in Nyngan. It was raining, the road was muddy and he hit a tree. I had bad cuts to my face and I lost 3 teeth. A farmer came along and took us to Coonamble. The car was not worth repairing so we left it there and took a taxi to Lightning Ridge.

We believed that Lightning Ridge was a town but there was nothing. The only shop/hotel was shut because it was Sunday and we could not buy anything. Harold Hodges took us in to camp at his tram motel. Ray found his friend and stayed with him but I stayed with Harold. Fred Reece used to come to do jobs for Herald and he said that he will show me where to find opal. I started mining in New town biscuit bend about four feet deep. I found some small stones and showed them around in the pub. Harold offered me eighty quid for them. Billy Francis said that it was a good price.

I returned to Sydney to fix my taxes. I met Joe and Ricky and John whom I knew from working on the Snowy Mountains scheme. Joe had a car so we all went to Lightning Ridge. In the pub there Herby Brown told us about Coocrain opal field where he

found good traces. Ivan who was with me on a ship coming to Australia came in with Jim the opal buyer.

Joe, Ricky, John and I registered a claim each and began working as a sort of partnership. Joe knew that we depended on him for transport because he had a car so he felt that he could boss us around. He did not want to pull the dirt out. We worked like that for 14 days. John and I pulled the dirt out for each other on the hand windlass. There was a shallow level and we moved fast to make a connection and get some air. In the meantime Joe and Ricky moved with Mick Bower who found good opal.

I left the nobbies we found on the side of the row for a week. One day Les brought us some tobacco and as I rolled a cigarette he hit one large nobby we had in a bucket with a pick. It showed beautiful red on black; over 100 carats of red in rough. We had that nobby in the bucket for a week but we didn't bother to snip it. The nobbies were scattered all around us. I showed a snipped piece of that nobby to the buyer and he gave me 250 quit for it. We then collected a bucket of nobbies and left it with the cutter. After he cut the stones he told me that in the future I should always stay with the cutter while he is cutting my stones. He priced the red stone at 3000 quit but said that I should ask for 5000. Three buyers came from Sydney especially for that 83 carat stone and we sold it for 3800 quit. The buyer said that we either take a house in Sydney or the money.

I went to Sydney and took two teenage girls with me because they wanted to visit relations in Sydney. My girlfriend Maria heard about the girls so she left me. She was pregnant with my baby but she had an abortion. She returned to her boyfriend in Adelaide, They got married but she could have no more children. Eventually she divorced her husband. They spent all their savings on their bitter divorce. I haven't seen Maria now for 45 years. She rang me about ten years ago and would like to come back to me. I have also been divorced from my wife by that time. Since then Maria and I talk regularly on the phone but I don't want her back. I want to remember her as she was forty five years ago when we were so young and so in love.

While in Sydney I bought a Buick convertible and enjoyed myself with my friends. Andrew and Joe, my friends from Sydney, came to Lightning Ridge for Christmas 67 when the sugar cane cutting season finished. At the time Ivan came from Andamooka and said: What are you doing here? I get 1000 quit per day in Andamooka.

John and I went to Andamooka and stayed there for 9 months. I spent the money I made in Lightning Ridge and made nothing in Andamooka. We went to Coober Pedy. The roof of the mine collapsed on me there and I was unconscious for three days. They sent me into a home for disabled in Willaura for nine months because I was paralysed. Very gradually some feelings returned to my legs and hands and I came

back to Lightning Ridge on crutches. Less took me to his home and his mother looked after me. One day I went on my crutches to three mile field; I left the crutches on top and went down the shaft on a rope with a screwdriver and a candle. I came up with 1500 quit of opal.

Less and I worked together. When Les got married his father in law joined us but he was thieving all the time. If he couldn't steal the stone he would smash it. I told him that Les will kill him.

A lot of people cheated me but I still always came up on top.

As I came back to Lightning Ridge I met Suzy a very beautiful Aboriginal girl. Our son was born and we got married. Suzy's grandfather was one of the first settlers in Walgett area. He came from Scotland with his brother and they bought the land near Walgett. He had a large Aboriginal family and provided for them well. They are a well respected family.

Suzy's mother never liked white people. Once I brought my children to her to look after and while outside I heard her say: the little white dog is outside. I took the children and looked after them myself.

Suzy's family is bit like that, bossy and up themselves. They are lighter in colour and have blue eyes so they feel a bit superior to other Aborigines. I was helping all of them all my life but nobody ever said thank you. I gave them money but they put it through poker machines and came for more. They never learned to say thank you or sorry. They don't like white people but they all take and steal from them.

Suzy's father once buried the money I gave him but his son dug it out and put it through the poker machines. Suzy's mother was jealous if I made money and did not share with them.

I always looked after Suzy's relations; they still want me to share with them everything I have but they don't know how to manage money. They say that in their culture they share but they really only want to share what I made and not what they have. They stick together like Muslims against outsiders. I am an old man now but kids and relations are still looking to me for help.

Suzy left me but I still like to help her. She would like to come back but there is no way back for me. I still love her because she gave me three lovely children and we had a good marriage but I don't want her back.

I lived with Aborigines all my life. I like them but I never became one of them. They made me feel like an outsider.

I am happy that I have three lovely children and eight wonderful grandchildren to leave them everything I own.

Despite her family Suzy and I had good times together. We went dancing and socialising. Suzy sometimes came with me to check the tailings but she never came down the shaft to mine with me. Suzy took care of all the bills and administration. Our son Steve took over from her when she left. We are divorced now and she lives in Queensland. Maybe I should have gone with her but I like Lightning Ridge and I made money and friends here. I still have mining claims which I do not want to leave behind.

Our marriage has really fallen apart when Suzy's sister took Suzy to Sydney and introduced her to the cult Spiritual Australia. Suzy was going to 'church' for two years before I found out that this church had nothing to do with God or religion. It had to do only with money and sex. There are no prayers or religious ceremony.

A friend once said to me: If you don't want to pay taxes just get a few people together and organise a religion and you are free to collect tax-free money from them.

The groups of this cult meet all over Gold Coast. I told the police about their trickery but the police said that they know all about them but can't do anything because they are not breaking any laws. People join of their free will.

I attended one of the sessions with about fifty people. I told them that I am from Lightning Ridge and they told me that they have another lady from the Ridge in the group. That was my Suzy. They turned off all lights and made two circles. The outside circle pushed the inside circle towards the middle in the dark. The candle was lit and we were told to bring the money on the plate.

I also attended one of the meditation meetings. They hypnotised me in the dark room. A man was holding my hand and the woman was massaging my head. I woke up tired and wet from sweat. I was confused, dizzy and changed. For a long time after I had weird dreams about this same naked woman standing over me. After this meditation we were to choose our partners. A woman came to me. I told her that I am married but she told me that it does not matter and I can stay with her. They try to destroy marriages.

Suzy told me about her experiences through meditation. She said: I flew out of my body and into the beautiful paradise. I can still see it and smell the flowers. I have to put the deposit on that paradise or somebody else will take it.

The cult leaders knew that Suzy has a lot of money and they brainwashed her to give the money to them.

I told my children what their mother was doing and they said that I was crazy. We went together to visit Suzy. After dinner she told us that she is going to church. I told the children to go with her but they did not want to go. I wanted them to see for

themselves what it is all about. They asked Suzy but she laughed saying: Less has weird dreams.

Suzy was drinking more since we parted. The flagons made her go off. Our son said that mum is going mental. One day she trashed the house and had a fight with a neighbour over a high fence. Police took her to the mental hospital. She told the psychiatrist that her house was bugged and that people were spying on her. The doctor told her that she has nothing to hide and that nobody wanted to know anything about her. I told Suzy to tell the doctor about the cult and about those criminals that brainwashed her through hypnosis. People became depressed and suicidal after the meditation hypnosis. I found out by myself how they make you crazy. I signed the hospital form saying that Suzy's family will be responsible for her wellbeing and they let her go.

Suzy found out that I went to the police and she blamed me for putting her into the hospital so I could sign her out to go with her family. She came with us and stayed with our daughter for awhile but the pull of the cult was stronger than her family. She left suddenly and joined them again.

Our children told their mother that she has to choose between them and the cult so she left the cult but our children were not strong enough to stand up to the cult and up to their mum. Our daughter Melanie was very upset but she could not stop her mum. Suzy told her: Poor Les is dreaming.

I just spoke to Suzy's younger brother Jeff; he is about fifty and with all his education he does not seem to be getting anywhere. He is bludging for money all the time. He puts it through the poker machines. I can't understand how young people who are so smart and educated can't make a go of things.

Old people used to say that one generation builds the next one destroys and the next one begs. Maybe necessity really is a mother of invention.

We miners invented all the machinery we needed. We built camps out of nothing. We had no one to turn to, no relations, no connections, no education, no school friends no social security. We had to survive on our own and that made us strong.

My sons came with me to sell opal in America but they were reluctant to approach people. I think the new generation will never do as well as we migrants did. Young ones don't look for opportunities, they just don't have a go. I don't know if they are plain lazy or just have no ambition. I keep on looking and asking. People can only say no or go away or leave me alone but there is always a chance that once in a while one will say yes and there comes your chance. The young ones just don't use common sense; they have no ideas or initiative.

Kids these days don't think about the rainy day or old age. They live comfortably because they know that the government will provide or that they will inherit from their parents. They enjoy their comfort. We wanted them to be comfortable. I suppose we robbed them of the incentive; we took away the challenge.

Kids have every opportunity while we had to make our own luck. We lived on challenge. Our life improved every day. We were on perpetual high from the day we were born. How can our children compete with that? We became addicted to success. Now it is hard for us to slow down and see it all wasted by our children and grandchildren.

We conquered all the mountains. We dreamed of the time when we will sit on top, enjoy the view, smell the roses and drink champagne. We sit on top of the mountain now and wonder if it was all worth it. Maybe we should have left some hills for our grandchildren. Climbing the mountain was more exciting than comfort and luxury. We were scratching for survival. We are still scratching. We are also afraid of falling down from the mountain.

We, migrants, had to be twice as good as those born here because we had an accent. We had to pay for acceptance. We paid and felt stronger. We had an incentive. I suppose we got hooked on getting rich. And on being better. With nobody to rely on and nobody to interfere we became self reliant.

My friend's son said that failing uni turned to be his best experience. He had to find a job and a place to live. He was thrown in at the deep end as they say here. Everything you do becomes everything you are. He eventually finished uni while he worked.

Maybe we should not blame the kids for being relaxed. We made it possible for them to be comfortable. Still I wish they had more of a go. You never know how strong you are until you test your strength. Every time you fail at something you learn something. You learn to cope. We ran an obstacle race but we jumped higher every time. You learn what you need to know. You learn that it is easier to swim downstream, go with the wind, take risks and learn by mistakes. We are the war babies who really had to use our wits.

My father used to say: Everybody is your competitor. I was just a boy then and did not understand what that meant.

I remember other lessons life taught me.

The world is not against you; everybody runs for himself. Look for the shortcuts. Plan strategies. Build reputation, bank on it. Don't lose your cool. Seek free advice; acknowledge other people's input, use expert information; weigh pros and cons, make notes, place yourself in diverse scenarios. Don't cross bridges before you see

them. Don't burn your bridges. Be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself for making mistakes.

These lessons helped me when I had nobody else to guide me. I learned the strategies to manage life.

I asked my friend the other day:

How are you?

Like a dog without a chain, he said. Lucky you, I said.

Not really, he said.

How is that?

A dog on the chain is fed and loved.

But you are free.

I can't eat freedom, he said. My friend never married, he has no responsibilities but he is not happy. As they say: You can't have your cake and eat it.

## ***Tone Svigelj***



rosary because she prayed faster.

I was rebellious and restless so I often landed in all sorts of trouble. My father often belted me and sometimes I had to kneel on the gravel. I was afraid of my father. He did not hit the girls or the younger children but the older four boys have been smacked and belted regularly. He was an angry man.

Later in the refugee camp in Italy my father ordered me to go to church every day but I refused and out of rebellion did not go to church since then and until my wedding day in 53.

We have been considered fairly wealthy landowners. My grandmother inherited the forest called Crni vrh. She told my father that she will give him this forest if he sent me away to school. I believe that she would have liked me to become a priest

I was the first of ten children born on 18 January 25 in Bezuljak, Notranjska village of 50 houses in a Menishija district that was once owned by friars.

My family believed in God and in the authority of the Catholic Church. My parents were self reliant and believed that hard work and prudence were the way to success. I was brought up to trust God, obey my parents, work hard, save and become self reliant.

My mother Francisca nee Rogelj was a tolerant liberal woman but my father Anton was very religious. He said that he would sacrifice everything for Christ. We had to kneel down every evening while he led us in praying the rosary very slowly. We liked it when mum led the

because most village boys who studied in St Stanislav's school became priests. I felt that my grandmother liked me best because I was her first grandson. She often talked to me.

My father sent me to Ljubljana to study in St. Stanislav classical catholic high school. My teachers were priests. The life in that school was very strict and frugal. We had to get up early, wash in cold water, go to church for confession and communion, eat breakfast of prezganka (water poured over flour browned on lard) with stale bread. I did not like going to church or to school. I was never a good or enthusiastic student. I told them that I am not going to be a priest. I was never particularly religious although now my wife and I go to church every week now.

As students we read the paper: Mi mladi borci- we young fighters. We learned how much suffering communism caused in Ukraine and Russia. The articles on catholic action against the atheist communism encouraged us to protect our homeland and our faith from the threat of communism. We felt idealistic and brave; we wanted to defend Slovenia against the suffering communists caused in Russia and Ukraine...

In April 41 our teachers sent us home and told us that we will not have to sit for school certificate exams. Germany and Italy invaded Slovenia. The Second World War began for us.

Italy occupied Ljubljana and the western part of Slovenia where my home was and the rest of Slovenia was occupied mostly by Germans. Germans were considered very cruel but Italians were almost friendly with us and nobody seemed concerned about them at the beginning.

All Slovenians suffered and resisted German Italian occupation but communist liberation front insisted that all resistance be under the communist leadership. For many existing Slovenian leaders communist leadership was not acceptable.

My friends invited me to join a troika, a group of communists. We distributed anti Italian pamphlets. We attended OF (liberation front) lectures on dialectic materialism that denies the existence of God. We learned that we will have to get rid of priests and reactionaries who oppressed people. We learned that communism will liberate everybody.

The majority of the population was against communism but those that had nothing to lose were more susceptible to the promises of equality. The idea of a classless society where every kind of work will be honourable and equally well paid was attractive to idealistic young people. I grew up in a religious family so the idea of common good wasn't new to me; it was familiar to all Christians since Jesus himself promoted it.

Communist leaders told us to forget Jesus because God was a remnant of the old oppressive system.

Edvard Kardelj issued a public manifesto threatening with liquidation all that resisted the communist party and their leadership. Liquidations of prominent Slovenians became widespread and people became terrified.

I became confused and a little suspicious.

While I was a member of the communist troika I heard about the organisation VOS (wartime intelligence service) killing thousands of influential Slovenian civilians because they were considered a threat to communist revolution. I witnessed the arrest of Mirko Kosir. Partisans killed him and threw him in a cave Kirmska jama where Village guards later found his body (Jozef Kranjc).

At this time we were in the process of getting a water supply in our village. The boss of the works told his labourers about communism and the mighty Russians that will liberate workers and make them equal.

Partisans made a few isolated attacks on Italians and then they ran away. In retaliation Italians burned the village where the attack happened. We were afraid of partisans' actions and of Italian retaliation.

My first memory of partisans was when they surrendered a group of sleeping Italian soldiers and killed 11 of them. This became known as one of their great victories.

Soon after Italians moved to Cerknica and our territory was proclaimed liberated region where partisans assumed full command. One night they surrendered Hiti's house in Begunje;; they tied up the father and in his presence stabbed and shot his oldest son Janez. They took one wounded son with them and pushed into the Mihcevo brezno, but the youngest son escaped. The news of this atrocity made people very scared and insecure. They did not know how to protect themselves so they went with the priest Viktor Turk to ask Italian officials for arms to defend themselves against the communist bandits; to safeguard their homes and keep order.

In 1942 at the age of 17 I was one of the first village guards. My two younger brothers Ivan and Franc and my father joined later. Soon I became a soldier who followed orders. How was I expected to understand the global forces and ideologies that drove us towards our fate? My Catholic upbringing would not allow me to join communists who denied God. My parent's upbringing was against those who banned private property.

After the establishment of Village guards, Italians moved to Cerknica. We were on our own. We patrolled the village to ward off partisans' attacks.

Partisans had experienced Russian revolutionaries to lead them. They had clear ideological guidelines. They had to provoke the occupier so Slovenians, scared of Italian retaliation, would join the communist movement.

Village guards had no training or leadership or planning. We were caught between two giants: communism and Nazism-fascism. How could we succeed in resisting both? Someone should have told us that our fight was futile.

On the night of 18 September 42 partisans from Krimski odred surrounded the village guards in our house and demanded our surrender. My friend and I were in the second storey of the house and did not surrender because we knew that we would end in Krimski Jama. Partisans' leader Alojz Popek, broke in and came up the steps so my friend shot and wounded him. Popek survived and later became a national hero Vandek; he died in Zuzemberk..

Partisans burned our house so we had to move to the ground floor. We kept shooting at them until they disappeared

When engineer Vojška became our leader we moved to Begunje. We returned home to work on the fields during the day. We slept in well barricaded homes. My job was to be on night patrols. I hated that. I was restless.

At the end of 42 I volunteered as 17 years old to join the assault battalion in Vrhnika. After a couple of weeks training we were sent to attack partisans in Notranjska and Dolenjska. We rarely came face to face with partisans because they moved away.

In 43 we were told that Italy capitulated. I heard it on the radio that Italians removed Mussolini. We suddenly faced German machine guns. They disarmed Italians and Village Guards. We had no idea where to go from there. They marched us to Sentvid in Ljubljana. I was sent to Stalag 3A prisoner of war camp. After 3 months I applied to go south as Italian volunteer soldier. I only wanted to get closer to home.

A friend Anzakov France came to see me and he told me to go home with him and join Home guards. Home guards sent me to train in Dolenjska to become an army officer.

Partisans in Yugoslavia made isolated attacks on Germans. When they killed a German officer in Serbia, Germans killed a thousand Serb civilians; for one German soldier Germans killed one hundred Serb civilians.

Serb villagers patrolled the railway and other strategic points to ward off partisan sabotage. Like Home guards in Slovenia, Serbs cooperated with the enemy to save the lives of their families. Everybody was afraid of German retaliation.

Yugoslav regular army general Mihajlovic told Churchill that he is not going to risk the lives of his people by provoking Germans until the allies come to help liberate them.

When partisans killed a German in Slovenia, Germans in retaliation killed ten Slovenian civilian hostages.

Ideologically village guards and later Home Guards considered themselves a part of the regular Yugoslav army although we had no connection with Serbs or Croatians.

General Leon Rupnik was at the time the only civil authority in Slovenia. He was captured by Germans and became a prisoner of war. He explained to German administration that Slovenia was in a state of civil war and he asked them for permission to defend themselves.

On 22 September 43 Rupnik was sworn in as a Chief Administrator of Ljubljana province. Village guards became Home guards and as a regular militia they were properly armed for the first time.

Partisans led by Stalin's revolutionaries aimed for communist revolution. They did not worry about the lives lost in German retaliation but we, Home guards, believed that the price paid for isolated partisan attacks was too high for our small nation.

On 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 10 000 Germans, 13000 Slovenians, 4000 Serbs and 4000 White Russians with many women and children, wagons and possessions began retreating towards Austria as the Red army advanced towards the west.

In Austria British soldiers told us to lay down our arms. We believed that we will get them back before they sent us to regroup in Italy in two weeks time. Allies did not return refugees from Italy.

Damjanovic who was deputy to Yugoslav General Mihajlovic ordered his 12000 soldiers to move south of Italy. We hoped to join Mihajlovic and Polish Anders Corps and together liberate Yugoslavia from communists. We trained every day. We trusted English completely and never thought that they would send us to Tito.

Field Marshal Alexander explicitly said that nobody should be forcibly returned.

We put up tents on the fields of Vetrinje and began digging holes for toilets and prepared places for cooking. British guards gave us food they confiscated from Germans. The first transport from Vetrinje left on 21May45. One of the refugees escaped and returned. He told us that partisans were waiting for us on Yugoslav border and that English will bring us to them. They arrested this messenger for spreading communist propaganda. We wanted to keep our spirits high and did not allow ideas like that to demoralise us.

Our commander Vuk Rupnik and his wife were the last ones to be forced to go with my group of soldiers to Pliberk railway station on 30June45.

Vuk Rupnik produced a written document he previously received from his father signed by commanding British general stating that Rupnik's family would be safe and allowed to remain where they were.

While British officers forced us towards the station Vuk's wife took a knife threatening to stab herself if they would force her on the train. All this changed officer's mind so Rupniks were taken to Klagenfurt to have this document verified

The thought of an escape was never far from my mind. A fellow officer suggested that we escape from the train but the soldiers sat themselves at the door saying: You led us into this, now you would like to desert us. That was the end of escape plan at that time.

We travelled by truck south still sure that we were going to Italy but in Klagenfurt we turned east. We realised that we were going to Yugoslavia. As we stopped in Pliberk railway station we had to line up. English soldiers told us to move away from the trucks and then March to the railway station's platform. We were shocked and stunned into obedience. Nobody resisted.

I asked our curate Polda: why don't we all rise against our captors? I hoped that at least some of us would save ourselves. But where would you go, said Polda. The allies sent us to communists and communists want us dead.

A Serb partisan pulled my officer's epaulet from my shoulder saying: What use are these to you now? I asked him to pull the other one off as well. I would have been ashamed to tear it off myself in front of other soldiers but I noticed that some other officers did. The officers were killed first. Maybe God sent this Serb soldier to get rid of epaulettes for me because that saved my life.

English soldiers left and partisans locked us in the wagons. Serb and Croatian partisans were fairly friendly to us. They let us go to the toilet and get a drink of water. They never tortured us but they warned us that we will get it from Slovenians when they bring us to Celje.

In Slovenia partisans came to check us at every station. They confiscated anything of value. They even took some of our clothes and shoes. I cut my shoes so they would not want them. I had nothing else because my luggage was lost or was stolen when we went through the Ljubelj tunnel.

As we marched from Celje to Teharje camping ground the crowds jeered and called us names. We were starved, tired, thirsty, demoralised and disillusioned. Some walked barefooted and in their underwear. The guards ordered us every so often to lie down and kiss our Slovenian soil. We had to chant loudly: We are Rupnik's servants, we are traitors. We are murderers.

Partisans rode horses among us; if we didn't chant loud enough they whipped us. People shouted at us: You thought that English will take you with open arms but now you are in our hands.

I noticed that some women and men at the back of the crowds were wiping the tears but they were probably too frightened to say anything or help us.

In Teharje camp we had to put down our belongings. There was a high barbed wire fence and gravel on the ground. We had to dig latrines but I was too weak from sleeplessness and starvation so a partisan hit me with a gun. After five day starvation we got our first meal, beetroot leaves boiled in water without salt or fat. Since then we had one meal a day of the same beetroot leaves boiled in water. On the tenth day they gave us a piece of bread.

Sometimes partisans coming from their lunch threw their leftover food over the fence to us to amuse themselves. They laughed as we scrambled on the ground for crumbs of bread. That's what hunger does to you. There was no pride left, just the urge to survive remained.

We were divided in three sections A, B and C. I was put in a group C and I identified myself as Drago Legisa born 18 January 25 in Devin near Trieste.

My younger brother Ivan was put in A section with the underage and those that were with Home guards less than two months. They were treated better and had more food. One day my brother threw us a tub of margarine over the fence. Another friend threw a bag of tobacco which we eagerly divided among ourselves.

Most Home guards that were returned to Yugoslavia lost the will to live. A person's mind and spirit is driven by the body and the body needs energy to function; the body needs nourishment and rest in order to keep the mind and spirit alive. Home guards were starved, constantly thirsty, they slept on the gravel, they lost the war and some even began to doubt their beliefs, they were afraid and in total despair.

People often ask why those captured do not fight back but a person needs energy to act. The apathy settles in and the misery of it all drains you. It is easy for people who eat proper food, have toilets, bathrooms and sleep in their bedrooms, to say what they would do. They did not walk in our shoes.

After weeks of starvation, torture, degradation and fear Ivan Korosec approached me with an escape plan. I was enthusiastic. Lojze Debevc told me that 28 of us were told about this escape plan. Finally only 14 were strong enough to try.

We planned to overpower the guard at the end of the compound where the opening to section C was but another guard joined him and they talked. We had to abandon the original plan and around 1 am I filed a hole in the inner fence and eight of us got

through to where the guards were patrolling. On a given signal we began throwing stones and shouting commands to confuse and surprise the guards while we tried to cross the outer barbed wire fence. The guards ran away but soon partisans began shooting after us. Curat Tone Polda, and Tone Opeka were wounded. I heard later from Jozef Gliha that Polda and Opeka had to crawl through the hole in the fence in and out while partisans beat them to death.

The rest of us split into two groups of four. Niko Korosec, Rade Pavlic, Jozef Skrlj and I went together.

Eventually only four of us survived; two went to Austria and two to Italy.

Niko Korosec and I looked for the empty farm houses to find some food. We also begged for food. A woman up high in the mountain near Zidani Most sent us next door where partisan greeted us with the gun. I tried to explain that we are escapees from the German POW camp. While the partisan held a gun on me Korosec slowly moved towards the forest. Another partisan shot after him but he escaped. They tied me and took me to Zidani Most police station.

I gave my particulars as Zvonko Legisa from Davin near Trieste. I told them that I was visiting my uncle in Ilirska Bistrica when Germans captured me and took me to Stalag 3A. After I escaped I stayed at some farmer's place in Velikovec.

They gave me food and then took me to Lasko where I stayed for a week. A plumber took me to work with him every day. I remember seeing German soldiers cleaning the old brewery under partisan's command. After a week they took me to jail Stari Pisker in Celje for five days. I ate a lot of barley (ricet) there to recover my strength. I asked why they were keeping me since I was a returned POW. At headquarters they interrogated me but I insisted on my new identity. They said how come I had a Notranjska Dolenjski dialect. I said that we spoke like that at my uncle's place in Ilirska Bistrica.. They gave me release papers with which I was to go to Ilirska Bistrica and report to the police there.

As I came to the train station I noticed an officer. I offered to help him with the luggage and went with him towards Zagreb. The security guard asked me why I am on Zagreb train. I said that all the bridges towards Ilirska Bistrica were destroyed so I intended to return home through Susak and Reka.

I walked to Jelsane where my friend Jozica told me that it was dangerous to stay there and that I should hide under the train that would take me to Trieste. In Trnovo I found the home of Ivan Bicek where I lived while I trained as a Home guard officer.

Mrs Bicek took me in. I told her my story and she took pity on me. She only told her brother's wife about me. For 3 days they fed me and washed my flea infested clothes before they showed me the way towards English soldiers in Lokve.

As I walked there at night an armed man arrested me and locked me in a room. After he verified my release papers with his command they told him to let me go.

I went to confession and told the priest about my predicament.

The priest said: As a Christian I am obliged to help you but bishop Rozman was wrong for supporting home guards.

The priest told me how to get to Davin near Trieste where I knew Legisa family. They told me that I wasn't safe from partisans there either. They told me to go by train to Monigo camp near Treviso. Legisa took me in a wagon pretending to go to his fields but he stopped close to the railway station minutes before the train for Treviso stopped.

I spoke some Italian and on the train I told the conductor my story. He told me that in Treviso was a camp for displaced persons called Monigo which was under UNNRA's jurisdiction. The authorities questioned me. They sent young single people to Servigliano where they could go to school.

By this time I was so mentally and physically so exhausted that I had no will to continue with studies.

Franc Plesnicar who was a member of Black Hand, was a capable organiser and he brought my father and Lojze Debevc to Monigo. Lojze met helpful people on his way. His future wife saved his life and he immigrated to Argentina where he became successful and has a wonderful family. His three brothers were killed, one of them in Teharje.

While in Servigliano Leon Rupnik came to visit but refugees told him to go to Ustashi. He went disappointed. The Minister of Yugoslav government in exile Dr. Miha Krek also visited.

I was unhappy and very restless. Yugoslav officials came to invite us back home and I applied in the hope that I will get to Trieste from where I wanted to go to Switzerland. In Trieste I told them that I changed my mind about going home. Italian police arrested me and I went from jail to jail before I ended on the island Lipari. I noticed the sign on the wall ZAP Zivijo Ante Pavelic. Heil Ante Pavelic. I realised that this was the camp where Ustasi were kept. I never sympathised with Ustashi.

I wrote to Dr Miha Krek in Rome. I told him that I was mentally emotionally and physically destroyed and needed work to begin a normal life again.

Krek made it possible for me to travel to Eboly camp where all anti Tito soldiers were held. From there they took us to Germany where they interrogated us and split us into black, grey and white groups. Black was for those Tito demanded back, greys were questionable.

I was in a white group and they sent us to a civil camp in Bocholdt on German Belgian border. Belgians looked for coal miners and I began working 1000m deep below. They paid well and I saved most of the money.

Germany was still very poor at that time but you could buy anything in Belgium. Someone told me that I could make a lot of money if I bought a suitcase of cigarettes in Belgium and took them to Germany to sell. I was to buy Leica cameras for the money and bring them to Belgium. I spent all my savings for cigarettes but custom officers arrested me, confiscated the cigarettes and put me first in jail and later in a detention centre in Brussels. I was there in 1948 when I read in the paper that Tito and Stalin argued. I hoped that would be the end of Tito.

In Belgium I shared a flat with France Kogovsek who was a good cook. One evening he made lovely pancakes before I went on my night shift. I ate most of them. I became very sick. When I returned home France also did not feel well. He told me that he was short of flour so he opened a pack in the cupboard of what looked like flour and added to the pancake mixture. It was DDT.

I was happy in Bocholdt because there were families and many girls. During the war I missed female company and the uplifting emotional experience of a relationship. I had little experience of social, sexual or emotional life until I arrived in Belgium.

I enjoyed my stay in Belgium. My work was well paid, good company and social life made it easier to forget the horrors of war.

I met Toplisek family. Anica Toplisek and I fell in love and agreed to be married in Australia. I got permission to immigrate to Australia before her. She was a virgin when I left.

I arrived in Australia in 49. The authorities sent me to work on the NSW railway. I worked with a gang repairing railway bridges and cleaning the locomotives in Dubbo. Later I passed the exam and became the fireman on a passenger train.

I camped along the railway with a co-worker Duro Poljak. The authorities supplied us with tents, portable beds and showers. Duro was a good cook. In the evenings we talked and learned English. Each evening we learned to spell 15 words.

We read now how after the war migrants boosted Australian culture and economy but we didn't feel much appreciated then. We were allocated to do the dirtiest, hardest jobs. We were young willing and able. We brought new skills and talents to make Australia a vibrant country it now is. The newcomers had visions of a better life; they were determined to build a better future for their children.

Australia is much like America, populated by people from all over the world who weren't satisfied with the mediocre but strived for excellence. They came to the land of opportunity and rejuvenated the country with their culture and skills.

In Australia I felt alone and forgotten. At the beginning I was so depressed that I wanted to escape anywhere. The social, physical and cultural isolation matched the desolate countryside and struggling Australian economy. The thoughts of Anica helped me forget the misery, deprivations and suffering. Without the memories of Anica I would have been lost.

I was counting the days for Anica and I to be together again. When I got my first pay I bought some stockings and sent them to her. She wrote back not to send her anything because she was pregnant with another man and was going to marry him. I was totally devastated. I lost the lifeline that kept me going. In my anger and disappointment I wrote her a nasty letter saying things I should not have. I am still ashamed of writing that letter and I feel that I have to apologise to her. Anica came to Australia with her husband Albert Korencan but I never saw her again. Some things can never be repaired.



In 1950 I was transferred to Sydney and started work as engine cleaner in Redfern. Everything changed for the better in Sydney. I enrolled in English classes and learned well. I met Australian girls and life became more bearable. At weekends we went to the pub and to the dance if there was one.

Slovenian friends were a great comfort to me all my life. In the barracks where I lived I met Franc and Danica Mirnik. We became lifelong friends. They invited me to go to the pictures with them. They arranged for Lidijana Bizjak to be there as if by chance. Lidijana and I liked each other and she eventually became my wife.

There were many migrant boys looking for a wife and I was afraid of losing Lidijana. To find a girl from

home was difficult because there would have been about twenty single boys to every single Slovenian girl. When Lidijana introduced me to other boys as her boyfriend I could see that the boys were disappointed.

Lidijana was twenty one and she wanted to wait a year before we would marry. I was 27 and I counted the days until we married on 6 April 53.

My partner Jure Tomazic and I saved 2000 pounds each and we borrowed another two thousand to buy the lease on a big house with the mixed business shop underneath. We opened a delicatessen, grocery and milk bar.

My brothers Lojze, Jozef and Ivan came during the 50s and we lived and worked together. Lidijana looked after men and the children. In her spare time she helped in the shop. The business wasn't very successful mainly because there was no parking place for the customers. Eventually we sold the business for 4 thousand dollars.

My brothers went to work for Snowy mountains scheme and I started to work for Goodyear tyres where I stayed for 18 years. When our son Bojan started high school Lidijana started working in Driclad and remained there for 12 years.

I bought four blocks of land on the outskirts of Sydney. When my brothers returned from Snowy Mountains they paid me for their share of the land

In Slovenia communists took three quarters of our land. My mother had to produce food for herself and her seven remaining children when my father and the older boys were in the war and later in exile. I used to send them food parcels from Australia. My father helped from Argentina. We invited our father to Australia in 1972 but he said that all he wanted was to go home. He died at home in 1974. I was afraid to go home until 91.

Horrors of the war followed me. For years I thrashed around uncontrollably in my sleep night after night until I woke up in a sweat. Partisans chased me, I could hear people calling me names and trying to hurt me. Fear would not let me sleep. In the midst of it was the guilt that I never finished school and never passed exams. There was my father paying all that money and I failed. I sat for those exams night after night in my nightmares.

When I woke up I felt comforted because my wife was next to me and our sons were with us. We have a very loving relationship. I dedicated all my free time to my family. Sometimes I neglected my wife so I could be with my sons. I took them to football matches where they were very successful. My boys were a source of great happiness to my wife and myself.

When my son Bojan finished his university studies my nightmares ended like by a miracle. I regained a peace of mind. I sleep easy now.

In the end I am happy that I leave the world a little better and fairer place then what I found. The greatest satisfaction in my life was always my family; I focused solely on the wellbeing of my family and they made me happy.

Both our sons were good sons, excellent students, good workers, great sportsmen and it is a pleasure to be in their company.

Would I again join the village guards or Home guards?

Knowing what I know now I would avoid war altogether. When we asked Italians for arms we had a chance to apply for work in the west. With a hind sight that is what I would do.

When Italy and Germany invaded Slovenia in 1941 Slovenians were terrified. Nobody in Slovenia collaborated with the invaders. The government considered their options. How could a tiny nation resist the power that conquered Europe? The leaders knew that it was suicidal to fight Germans by ourselves. They tried to save Slovenian lives and homes while they waited for allied help.

Communists took advantage of this most vulnerable time in our history for communist revolution. From 22nd June 1941 until 17<sup>th</sup> July 1942, communists killed 1500 prominent Slovenians who were suspected of opposing communist revolution; they killed them for no other reason but so that they could assume leadership. Their killing had absolutely nothing to do with the German invasion. 1500 prominent citizens killed in a year is a lot for a nation of a million and a half people. They had 25.000 Slovenians on their killing list.

The fear of death created antirevolutionary movement.

The occupier, according to international conventions and practise, is bound to keep peace and order in the occupied land. If the occupier can't keep the population safe, a domestic force under his control is necessary.

I still believe that Home guards and village guards were right. We defended Slovenian civilian population against Italian-German retaliation and at the same time we tried to stop the spread of communism. We did not want bloody revolution on our soil. Our aim was to save our nation and wait for allies to help us win the war against Germans.

We were caught between two world forces and tried to fight both evils: the communism and Nazism-fascism. Our resistance was doomed to fail.

Our fight was just and our idea was good but our effort was futile because in the end the greater powers decided Slovenian fate. Even before the war Slovenian leaders predicted that this would happen. This was also what Home guards believed.

Stalin's Red army joined the western powers in the fight against Hitler. The allies washed their hands off anticommunists just before the iron curtain fell and cold war began and the west did not want anything more to do with communists.

I blame English for returning us to partisans; they share the guilt for the mass massacres of refugees. We were betrayed and became sacrificial lambs in the pragmatic solution of refugee problem. The west had to make concessions because Russian Red army suffered huge losses and they were pushing towards the west. To keep communists back and to secure peace they compromised and sent refugees into certain death.

In the end pragmatism won over justice.

There would be no fratricidal war and mass murder after the war if communists did not use the muddy waters of the war for political takeover. There would not be a split of Slovenian nation to this day.

I blame VOS entirely for formation of Village guards and home guards. VOS planned the political takeover. They killed influential Slovenians before the formation of home guards or village guards.

I regret not having proper friendly guidance in my academic and political life because I would have liked to study law or accountancy.

I liked Kocbek Christian socialism line and believe that Kocbek had good intentions but I cannot understand how an intellectual of Kocbek's calibre could believe it possible that cooperation with communists would bring about Christian socialism.

I would accept socialism that allows more flexibility. The Swedish model of socialism allows people to prosper and be different.

My beliefs did not change but I would not go again through the suffering I endured because in the end neither communists nor home guards achieved anything.

The rule of the jungle applies also to human apes. It is most evident during the war. The stronger wins the fight, writes the laws and the history. It also indoctrinates its young to believe that the ruling elite are just and good.

What did the revolution achieve? People changed. Many became savages.

There is a constant struggle for the power and the glory. The victorious live in fear of losing it, the defeated want to win it. I realise now that in 1945 fear made Slovenian communists murder those who opposed them. They were afraid to lose the power, the wealth and the glory. I do not hate the idea of communism; it was only the greed for power that made individuals commits mass murder in peacetime Slovenia.

The revolution was celebrated in Slovenia for years. The parks and market places were named in the memory of the revolution. Since the fall of communism people don't want to hear about revolution. They insist on the war of liberation from the Germans. This is a new lie.

Last year they erected the monument for murdered Home guards in Rog. They wrote: Here we lie killed that's what the country ordered; don't forget us. This too is a lie. At least half of the Slovenian population was anticommunist and would not order the killing of thousands of their young sons. The sign should read: Here we lie killed because communists ordered our murder so they could secure their power.

I believe that all living things are in constant state of war. In every competition there are losers and winners yet we compete and try to get ahead of others from the day we are born...

In 1991 the minister of the independent Slovenia came to visit and he assured me that I had nothing more to fear by going home.

My feelings were indescribable as I looked at my Slovenia again. I visited every corner of my country, every friend and school mate, every school and all the places I longed to see for almost fifty years. I relived my youth and regained hope that Slovenia will become a just and fair home for all Slovenians.

The hatred, anger, guilt and fears evaporated. I even visited people I fought against. Most were still convinced that they were right and that we were wrong. That was to be expected since they learned all their lives to believe that. They have also been constantly rewarded by the government for their beliefs.

They told me that the killers who murdered home guards in Rog were drunk Serbs and Croats. Maybe it was true but in Teharje they were all Slovenians.

In Slovenia communists took three quarters of our land. My mother had to produce food for herself and her seven remaining children when my father and the older boys were in the war and later in exile. I used to send them food parcels from Australia. My father helped from Argentina. We invited our father to Australia in 1972 but he said that all he wanted was to go home. He died at home in 1974. I was afraid to go home until 91.

I have never witnessed personal retaliation of home guards but no doubt there were despite our strict judiciary orders. We were not to punish without a court or to punish the family of the partisan.

The rule of the jungle applies also to human apes. It is most evident during the war. The stronger wins the fight, writes the laws and the history. It also indoctrinates its young to believe that the ruling elite are just and good.

What did the revolution achieve? People changed. Many became savages.

There is a constant struggle for the power and the glory. The victorious live in fear of losing it, the defeated want to win it. I realise now that in 1945 fear made Slovenian communists murder those who opposed them. They were afraid to lose the power, the wealth and the glory. I do not hate the idea of communism; it was the greed for power that made individuals commits mass murder in peacetime Slovenia.

In 1991 the minister of the independent Slovenia came to visit and he assured me that I had nothing more to fear by going home.

My feelings were indescribable as I looked at my Slovenia again. I visited every corner of my country, every friend and school mate, every school and all the places I longed to see for almost fifty years. I relived my youth and regained hope that Slovenia will become a just and fair home for all Slovenians.

The hatred, anger, guilt and fears evaporated. I even visited people I fought against. Most were still convinced that they were right and that we were wrong. That was to be expected since they learned all their lives to believe that. They have also been constantly rewarded by the government for their beliefs.

They told me that the killers who murdered home guards in Rog were drunk Serbs and Croats. Maybe it was true in Rog but in Teharje they were all Slovenians.

Bloody revolution was celebrated in Slovenia for years. The parks and market places were named in the memory of the revolution. Since the fall of communism people don't want to hear about revolution. They insist on the war of liberation from the Germans. This is a new lie.

Last year they erected the monument for murdered Home guards in Rog. They wrote:

Here we lie killed

that's what the country ordered;

don't forget us.

This too is a lie. At least half of the Slovenian population was anticommunist and would not order the killing of thousands of their young. The sign should read: Here we lie killed because communists ordered our murder so they could secure their power.

I believe that all living things are in constant state of war. In every competition there are losers and winners yet we compete and try to get ahead of others from the day we are born...

How do I see Slovenian history and politics now?

Perhaps the biggest and most lasting crime of the war for Slovenians was that communists paid with our land for the return of the refugees.

Drnovsek and Kucan government continued the old line but under Jansa I hope things are moving in the right direction.



I was born Lidijana Bizjak on 13 March 31 in Predmeja near Ajdovscina as the first of five children. My father was a policeman and on 4th April 1940 he got a job in Anhovo which was in Zone A under Italy. We had to move to Anhovo and my childhood ended. All the beautiful memories were left behind. Italy attacked England on 9 April 40. I remember students chanting on the radio: We want war.

Dad worked for us until in 43 Italy capitulated and he went into hiding. He had no idea what happened to us and he looked for us through the Red Cross.

Mum had to go to work on the farms to provide food for the family. As the oldest I had to look after the four younger children.

I remember how we were all scared. OF was written overnight on all doors and partisans came and recruited young boys. A friend of mine was 14 and they took him to pick up a wounded German soldier. As he held him up a partisan shot him. My friend was terrified and he ran away. He came to hide in our cellar and mum would give him food but in the end partisans caught him and shot him. They buried him in a shallow grave near the river and later we found that the fox ate one of his legs.

Once a Home guard came asking for some eggs. He held a gun on me but I told him that we had no chooks and no eggs. My brothers and sisters begged on their knees to let me go.

Mum found work in a factory and after the war dad found us but his sister told him that it was dangerous for him to return to Slovenia.

Primorska on the border of Italy felt oppressed by Italians. I grew up with the idea that Serbs were our friends and protectors against our enemy Italians who did not allow us to speak Slovenian. I was brought up in the belief that being a part of Yugoslavia made Slovenians stronger and better able to withstand Italian oppression. Slovenian priest Izidor Zavladov secretly gathered Slovenian children in the presbytery and taught us scripture in Slovenian language. He told us to be proud of being Slovenian. He said that we will go through hard times but we must never lose faith in God. Italians did not like our priest but we adored him.

During 1946 communists killed Izidor Zavladov because he would not join their organisation.

Gradually I realised that our Yugoslav savours killed people who disagreed with them. I was picking firewood in the forest with my friend one day when we met a group of partisans. They told us if we told anyone about seeing them they will kill all our families. We became afraid. We heard the wailing during the night when partisans killed my friend and her fiancé because he was an Italian and she was Slovenian.

In 84 when I visited Slovenia for the first time I asked my friend's brother about it and he cut me off: We don't talk about that.

People were still afraid to talk about it.

I noticed that there was a great Serb influence in Slovenia in 1984. Music, language and even swear words and graffiti were Serbo-Croatian.

Primorska which always sympathised with Serbs became the first and strongest opponent to Serb influence after the war.

When I was in Slovenia again in 1991 I was amazed how attitudes changed in short six years. Everything Serbian was out and everybody spoke Slovenian again. People were angry because Serbs held key positions in Slovenian politics and economy in order to assimilate Slovenians into a Yugoslav nation. Serbs who came to Slovenia were ordered not to learn Slovenian but try to make Slovenians speak Serbian. Even in Australia most Slovenians accepted this rule. Sometimes a group of Slovenians all spoke Serb if and when there was one Serb among them. Somewhere along the way we must have learned to believe that this was the right thing to do.

## ***Helena Leber***



### ***Helena na obisku pri Cilki***

A very small part of the world, in the frame of mountains and the sea, is the valley of Slovenia. We can hardly remember that it took thousands plus years to become Slovenian citizens, yet, 1991 will be written forever as a rebirth of the country that once was very proud as it hopefully will be again from then on.

I remember the day that I immigrated to Australia in 1958; my father said to me as I was leaving: Lenka do not forget in the far away strange world that you are Slovenian. I, as a seventeen year old teenager, never imagined what a deep meaning that sentence had. My father was born in 1912 and lived and died in the same spot of the world yet his birth certificate stated that he was born Austro-Hungarian. He later lived and served in the army as an Italian then became Yugoslav in 1945 and unfortunately passed away in 1990, just some months before Slovenian Independence. A lot of Slovenians have experienced this background particularly our Primorska region (Kras). After two World Wars in Europe, a lot of things such as

borders, even traditions, as well as languages have changed. Prior to this era, Slovenian people shifted or migrated out of need to survive and for political reasons. The small area of Slovenia could only offer a meagre existence even through the small Adriatic seashore was our window to the world beyond. Even though you can travel from the very north part of the high mountain tops and borders, to the seaside in a matter of a few hours, Slovenian landscape is unbelievably diverse, from the shores of the Adriatic through the rocky regions of the barren land of Kras, you enter in to the greener pastures of Notranjska, to the beautiful capital of Ljubljana.

Towards the border of Croatia lies productive green land of Dolenjska, home of creativity and Cvicek and then very quickly towards the Hungarian border you see the hilly panorama of Stajerska with its vineyards and Prekmurje with its productive countryside and the stork nests on the chimneys. On this small piece of land grew a great many man and women scientists, doctors, researchers and in particularly poets and writers such as Preseren, Cankar, Jurcic, Slomsek, Trubar; artists like Gaspari, Jakac, Jama, Jakopic and Grohar; singers and musicians like ensembles Avsenik and Slak. On top of the hills are castles and churches telling about ancient history.

Slovenian people achieved recognition in various fields all over the world. In America you can find Slovenian names in astronomy and science. After the WWII Australia became a home to many of us; most of us escaped across the guarded borders; some of them lost their lives by taking that path. Many could not take the communist regime that took over in 1945; some of us had to leave our homes to save our lives because we were considered either too wealthy, or politically too dangerous or religious. Most escaped during the night; in a strange land in so called migrant camps we waited for months or years for the open paid passage to different parts of the world. We had no money or clothing so we became totally dependent on the generosity of those around us. After we landed on dry land after weeks and weeks of ocean travel; often residing up to 30 or more in one room at the base of the liner, we cheered to the sound of land ahoy Australian shores. Fremantle greeted us. What now? No knowledge of the language, the cultures or the political system, we were driven by train, trucks or buses like cattle to different destinations. Migrant hostels became our residences again for months or years until somebody somewhere needed us. We were not accustomed to the climate under the southern stars; we had to adjust to culinary differences; the smell of mutton was so strange that up to this day many cannot stomach it. Gradually they sent us to the farms, sometimes snake infested, abattoirs, forestry work, road works, factories, domestic work. There was a well known saying: if you are educated you get a new shovel while others get second hand shovels. So even doctors and scientists became shit shovellers, jam packers and cane cutters in Northern Australia. As the years went by we were followed by our religious leaders and others to help us along. Groups of Slovenians all over Australia

came together and in time formed Slovenian clubs and religious centres; they bought land, built the buildings by voluntary work and spent their own hard earned money. Church services and Slovenian schools were organised, ensembles, musicians and singers, and amateur actors filled the stages. Today Australian born Slovenians are holding positions in Australian government, medical world and research fields. Many businesses supplying the Australian and World market are the result of hard working Slovenian immigrants that came to this land with nothing. Some found luck in the gold and opal fields. As we are crossing, or approaching, the golden anniversary of our settlement in this red continent, one can look back with amazement that despite these many changes we remain proud Slovenians as well as dedicated Australians. These days Slovenian names can be found among Australian media, artists and writers as we are enthusiastically trying to restore the culture of our ancestors from thousands of years ago.

## ***Everything has its beginning - Stanka Gregoric***

Who am I? What am I? I like open books so I am opening myself to you. It stands in black and white that I was born as an only child in Maribor on 22 August 1938 after eight years of my parent's marriage. My father Stanko Žerovec comes from Mlin on Bled and my mother Cirila is a descendant of our first important poet Valentin Vodnik from Šiška in Ljubljana. My grandmother's maiden name was Johana Vodnik; she was born in 1871 in Ljubljana and died in Maribor in 1940. After the WWII I spent many lovely holidays with mum's sister in Vodnikova ulica in Ljubljana.

My childhood was spent without games and toys and overshadowed by the neurotic events of WWII. People from Maribor were struggling for survival amidst daily bombings and running into the bunkers for safety. I rarely put pyjamas on for the night because we were in constant readiness to flee. My life was threatened on several occasions. One day my mother took me on her bike to get milk in Razvanje; Americans were shooting at us "tifliger" because Maribor during WWII was a German city. There was not a tree or a bush to hide- I get goose bumps even today in that place. After a few shots the plane left; maybe the pilot realised that we were just a mother and daughter trying to stay alive.

Once we were suffocating in the bunker in Studenci near Drava; next time our train was attacked from the air. There were many more dangerous times so my childhood was anything but carefree. I attended German preschool and had to speak German.

In 29 bombings on Maribor during the 1944 and 1945 1518 ally's planes mostly called B24 Liberator dropped 15.795 bombs weighing 4750 tonnes. Bombs destroyed 47% of the buildings mainly around the railway station and near the bridges and industrial projects. There were 484 dead among them 60 children; there were 4200 homeless. Maribor was one of the major industrial centres of old Yugoslavia; it never fully recovered.

The allies considered Maribor as part of German third Reich although this region has never been formally annexed to Germany.

Slovenian ministry for defence had an exhibition on 20 4 2006 about bombing of Maribor titled Cilj Maribor-Target Maribor. It was said that bombing of this region should be counted as a war crime resulting from Nazi invasion.

I was brought up as a good Christian, I had to follow mum's strict rules and never be anything less than excellent at school. I had to learn ballet and play piano although I was much more interested in sport.

Mum died when I was twelve and my whole life changed. I dedicated myself to volleyball and gymnastics. As a good sports person I travelled throughout Yugoslavia. I was also given a scholarship to go to a teacher's college in Ljubljana. In 1958 I became an early childhood teacher. After the unhappy end of my five year old relationship with a soccer goal man I left Maribor and started work in Sarajevo.

As a director of a preschool centre I had to become a member of the communist party but I returned the membership in 1967 with explanation that I was disappointed with the morality of communists. As a result I lost the position and my accommodation. In 1974 disillusioned but with a spirit of adventure I applied to migrate. Australia paid my passage because they needed women. I barely made it because of my age; I was 36 years old.

My hope was to live in Australia without stress, mortgage and other pressures and to have a roof over my head. I was brought up with the idea of Yugoslav unity and I brought that idea with me to Australia. But not for long. With this philosophy one did not get far specially with Australian Slovenians.

In 1974 I became one of the editors, reporters on government radio station 3 EA now SBS.

As my English wasn't good enough I had to find employment in the factory Siemens and later with Telecom where I passed the test to become the assistant of an electronic technician. I suffered work related disability and became an invalid pensioner in 1982. My unemployment caused me to become depressed. I married my husband Zvonko in 1977; we holidayed overseas; we went to Fiji, Castaway Island, Hawaii, Waikiki Beach, Bali, Greece, Spain, Germany, France, Italy; we enjoyed travelling but we more and more realised that we had nothing in common; there was nothing for us to talk about; he was interested in horse racing and cards – he spent on horses so much money that he could buy at least twenty houses,.

I was lonely with my romantic dreams so I looked for happiness in shopping. I wandered through the boutiques.

I can't say that I had a bad husband because he let me do anything I wanted. He was from Zagreb but he did not mind my activities in Slovenian community. I had plenty of time and I dedicated it to my people. After I resigned from SBS radio I isolated myself for 8 years. I wrote articles for SALUK's anthology and at the same time I was a Melbourne columnist for Yugoslav paper Novo doba, where Slovenians had our page. I edited one issue of literary magazine Svobodni razgovori- Free dialogues, published by SALUK.

Year 1988 was a year of ideological change for me. I was in Slovenia when Yugoslav government arrested four Slovenians who opposed Slobodan Milosevic and demanded autonomy for Slovenia.

Earlier I wrote an article in Nova Doba against Milosevic ideology. The Editors of Nova doba punished me for writing against Serb ideology. Lojze Košorok who was the editor of Slovenian page almost lost the job with Nova Doba and I became banned as a writer.

In the first issue of Democracy in Slovenia they published my article Biti ali ne biti (Jugoslovan), to je zdaj vprasanje- to be or not to be Yugoslav, that is the question now. In 1988 I experienced a revolution of my convictions and became only Slovenian.

During the disintegration of Yugoslavia Slovenians elected me a president of organisation for the support of democracy in Slovenia; Ne political party Demos also supported us. Later I spread the idea of Svetovni slovenski kongres- World Slovenian congress and established Avstralska slovenska konferanca- Australian chapter of the conference.

I always wished to have my own newspaper where I could publish freely. The members of the ASK (Alfred Breznik, who was a Sydney president of the group supporting democracy in Slovenia and a businessman Dusan Lajovic; both men later became honorary ambassadors for Slovenia) helped me establish the publication Slovensko pismo- Slovenian letter. Soon after I established with cooperation and help Alfred Breznik and Dusan Lajovic an informative fortnightly paper Glas Slovenije- The voice of Slovenia which was published in Melbourne from 10 5. 1993 until June 1996. When I moved to Sydney my partner Florian Auser registered it and we worked together for six years.

During this time I hosted visits from Slovenian government and had interviews with dr. Dular, Milan Kučan, Janez Janša, Lojze Peterle, Jože Pučnik, dr. Dimitrij Rupel and others. Since Slovenian independence I focused on promoting Slovenian language, culture, tradition and government. I received awards and recognition for my efforts.

As the editor of the paper I had to deal with Slovenians of different ideologies and past allegiances but for me they were just Slovenians. I had no hatred and no wish to boycott anyone. I was forming my own views. I wrote as I understood the issues and the readers liked my editorials. It was interesting that I was damned by some as communist in Melbourne and as a right wing anticommunist sympathiser in Sydney. That told me that I am on the right road.

However, I can say that I sacrificed the autumn time of my life and much money for Slovenians.

### *Anita Bertoncelj*

While on holidays eight years ago I read a book called "Magdalena amongst Black Opals" written by Cilka Zagar who is a Slovenian writer, living in Lightning Ridge. I liked that book so much that I thought to myself: "If I ever go to Australia, Cilka, I am going to find you." This was only a deep, deep thought that rounded in my mind and later on I didn't think about that any more as life was going on...

It was always my wish to start a new life somewhere abroad. It was more a question of my "soul" and not in the sense common to migrants i.e. to have a better life with more money, bigger house and expensive car.

Our family used to live in a little country village Kotlje, close to Ravne na Koroškem in Slovenia. I worked as a high school geography teacher for twelve years and my husband who is an architect worked as a planner in urban planning field for almost ten years. We have two kids, now aged almost six and eleven; they were both raised up in a very nice natural area in their early years. Our house was a nice rented house near the forest and the mountains.

I like to teach, particularly geography, although I also finished sociology as my second subject. Obviously it is in my nature that I like the world, travelling and talking about what I have seen. Well, not only talking and teaching about the world, yet there was also my own need to write about it. Writing became mostly connected with our life events while we were living abroad. These were real stories that happened to me and to my family or/and to my friends, and all are from the time we emigrated from Slovenia, first to Mostar in BIH two years ago and then to Brisbane, last month. Until now, I must say, I am very happy we are here and that my goal is realized. My family never complained about my decision to start a new life in a new country, with a new language, new life style, new school system, new bank system, new medical and insurance system etc. There were and still are many hard beginnings in our new life in Australia, particularly for us two adults at forty who have had all life organised (till now) and had to find in a relative short time accommodation, new car, new driving licence, new job, new education... It was really a big thing to leave our nice and safe jobs in Slovenia and move to Australia without any job organised before and without relatives or friends that would accept us. Our friends in Slovenia told us they would move in Australia but only on the condition if everything is prepared for them.

My partner Sandy and I wanted to move somewhere and our first choice was New Zealand. We flew Down Under when our son Erik was three; we just wanted to touch/see/smell New Zealand. We rented a station wagon and drove around for three weeks in winter cold and wind; we saw the fences everywhere, because the

country is dominated by sheep and cows. Sandi was quite sad because the rain forests were mostly cut down and replaced by tree plantations.

Slovenian man who was supposed to give us some help just disappeared. We returned home with a bitter taste about the country, but on the other hand I was so happy and proud that we travelled to the other side of the Earth. It seemed that Sandi gave up on moving somewhere; but not me. No. The life in Slovenia was becoming less attractive and less fair and I became deeply melancholic about Slovenian society after Slovenia became independent.

We heard that Slovenians have their own Slovenian schools in Australia, Canada, and Argentina. I was hoping that maybe they need some Slovenian teachers. I tried to get phone numbers from some of these schools. The boss in Slovenian emigration office didn't want to give me necessarily phone numbers of schools: He said: Are you young educated Slovenians really going to leave your own lovely country? We want to keep you at home." He was a very important politician who saw the world all over and had his own sons all over the world, but didn't want to give me some of the phone numbers of Slovenian schools abroad. Finally, although very hard, I got these numbers and phoned to Slovenian school in Canada. A woman kindly said to me: "I am glad you called, but we have no Slovenian school; there are only Slovenian courses run by volunteers on Saturdays." I realised that what I taught about Slovenian schools abroad isn't true. I was disappointed.

What happened next was that Sandi and I split up. Erik was five years old and I was pregnant. I stayed in Kotlje and Sandi moved to Ljubljana. Although I had health, job and a rented house, I was very sad at the prospect of the future by myself and with two kids. I didn't have mum she was dead for so many years, father got his own new life with another woman and we have no contact since mum died; my brother and his wife gave me a cold shoulder; my aunt's husband said that there is no hotel at their place for us to stay in. I desperately needed good people around. All my relations deserted me during my most difficult time. I wondered how I was going to organize my life with two kids and what wishes and goals did I still have. Many events happened in those dark days, but words that one relative man said to me gave me a push to "have a go". He said: "Don't be afraid about thinking to move somewhere if this is your deep long time wish. You should just open your heart and ask God to send you help. He will do so. You will see." With these words he actually gave me the faith and courage. I was so deeply sad that I started to pray to God by myself inside myself. I gave God so many messages...

I was restless while pregnant until a baby daughter Kiri was born. After one year of maternity leave Kiri, Erik and I went to the seaside and then to Tunis, than back to the seaside. At home I saw people who I thought were my friends suddenly just pass

my house and would not stop and knock on the door. People avoided me; my neighbours wouldn't speak to me. I cried and felt alone and lost. I put an advertisement on the local TV that I am searching for somebody to live with us for free in our big house. That somebody: to be like "our grand mum". She wouldn't be lonely and we would be nice to her. I wanted to give a chance to somebody and to us to have a warm atmosphere. But nobody answered...

Finally, after some time people I knew helped me to get an old woman, a very nice person from Gorenjska. So Lojzka came to my house; we were happy and she was happy as well. Then came Martina who heard I am searching for someone and started visiting me, mostly just to encourage me with my plans.

While I prayed to God I also kept asking people if they know somebody from Slovenia who is living in Australia. I wanted to find out what chances I had there as a teacher with two kids. This way I heard about Maja, a young girl who told me that she is going to move to Australia with her boyfriend soon. She had a father and step mother Marjana who used to live near Sydney. Since then I became connected to this family.

Marjana lived in Australia for years and knew Australian life. By internet correspondence we became friends and after two months knowing each other through internet, she wrote me: "You have enough time, money and health to visit me together with your kids. I want you to make a little trip around Australia. Please tell me, where we shall go." Unbelievable!! As I read that message I was surprised and grateful to Marjana and to God. I really didn't expect such a response and support. I didn't expect invitation. We were "talking" about Australian lifestyle and about possibilities to live there as a teacher, yet I didn't expect an invitation. And yes, I was crying; I felt much happiness.

In April 2002 when Kiri was 11 months and Erik 5 and a half we flew to her place to Australia. Marjana was very happy we came. She also had problems in her family. She said: "Let's go and make a little Australian trip in my huge car. Where shall we go?" Of course I knew where. Once, a long time ago..., I told to myself: "Cilka, if I will ever go to Australia, I will find you." And yes, we settled our four kids, my two and hers two and drove to find Cilka Zagar. Marjana said: "I am working in mines, but don't know any opal mines. Let's go."

I still remember how happy I was while driving to the desert even though I didn't really know if Cilka still lived there. While driving to Lightning Ridge I became more and more excited and happy. Actually, I remembered the landscape Cilka described in her book. Long ago, in that book I read on the beach, she wrote that she works at the post office. So, when we arrived to that little mining town, I really jumped out of the car. I was very energetic, filled with adrenaline, blushing while I ran down to the post office. Some women there told me that there is no Cilka Zagar and that they

have never heard about her. I was sad and disappointed and got back to the car, however, as this was our first time in Lightning Ridge, we decided to look around a little bit. We all entered a little shop, which seemed to be a tourist information center. But it wasn't. It was a beautiful jewel boutique and in it a handsome corpulent man in his fifties, with a red face and a kind of naughty smile. His fingers were pretty chubby and he wore a huge opal ring on one of them. "How come you traveled such a long way to come here? Are you going to be a miner?" I explained him the reason and he answered: "Of course I know Cilka and Joe. They still live in this town. I will tell you how to find them." I was so happy that I bought some earrings from him and gave them to Mariana as a gift. Then we took the road the way he suggested by foot and found a little house. A man who happened to walk by showed us Joe, Cilka's husband who was just trying to park his car. I immediately walked up to him and introduced myself. Of course I told him I would like to meet Cilka. And yes, he was glad and surprised. He stuffed us in his car and drove us to their home. Cilka opened the door. She had straight black hair, was a bit chubby, not very tall and was smiling at us. We were also smiling because we had found her. So my deep wish from long ago came true. We spent a couple of hours at their home and the next day we left. I felt fulfilled, yet still hardly believed I did it: I realized my dreams.

We drove all the way to the Brisbane. Mariana had an aunt Jozica who lived in the Brisbane suburbs. The aunt lived in an area close to the beach. I remember that I found that place very beautiful. I saw a lot of flowers and birds, heard unusual bird sounds during the nights. The aunt was also very nice and she lived in a house with a swimming pool. What an amazing thing for our four kids to be traveling around Australia.

Not far away from her home, there was an interesting beach point with mangroves and a big, big "hairy" tree on the peak of a little peninsula. That tree was especially interesting. Apart from being huge it also had long, long branches, many leaves and many, many roots which were hanging down to the ground. I sat on the tree and observed the landscape...

I came home back to Slovenia and told Sandi I would really like to live in Australia. It is true I was surrounded by Mariana's family and their hospitality and we had done a little "same days" travel around Sidney and towards New Castle-Blue mountains-Lightning Ridge-Brisbane. At that time I found this country (as I was always willing to move somewhere) safe, clean and the kind of place to raise my children. Sandi said: "Let's do it together." We reunited and decided to work to get permanent Australian visa. It took us three years that we finally graduated at this little emigration university at the end with Tony's help; he is a migration agent. In the meanwhile Sandi got a job

with the UN in Mostar (BIH) and had to leave Slovenia before us. The rest of the family followed him after six months.

The very last day and literally the very last second, when I was trying to lock our rented house where we were living in for twelve years, to pass the keys to its owner, I received a mobile message that we got an Australian visa. Amazing. We were working to get the visa for three years and I received that message at the time I was locking the house. Wasn't this God's will? I sat in the car and drove us to Mostar, to Sandi.

Herzegovina's era was wonderful. It was of course much more wonderful in Tito's times and not really after last war times when we were living there, but anyway, people there are still glad, alive, temperamental, they like to talk, they like to take time for themselves and for their neighbours, they enjoy life even though it is (money) poor. Of course they have post-war destruction all over and inside the people's mind (they can't forget the war events and never will), they don't have money, jobs, the opportunity to be involved in the world economy; they have a deem view for their future, they have mine fields all over, corruption, crime, huge unemployment and fear about the future. But people and the atmosphere are unique. They have the tradition, the warmth, the joy of the society which is mixed with the hope for the future...There is joy to live and to go ahead in the future. Herzegovina has something..., that particular sense that Australia doesn't have. That's why I understand these people who immigrated to Australia and miss their home of origin desperately.

I used to stay at home with kids who were going to the state school; I also started to write Mostar stories. At the beginning I wrote just some e-mail letters to my friends and later regularly to Nasa Zena. I also started to paint pastel paintings. Actually I discovered my secret talent for painting in Mostar. After one year and a half of living in Mostar we moved to Australia.

We applied on the grounds of skilled migration; I am a teacher and Sandi is an architect. As Sandi is very familiar with internet, English language and also with special words (the language and the way of thinking in the field of the immigration politics) we didn't think we would have any problem to make it on our own. Sandi was also a leader of the family of visa procedure.

We had to collect all the necessary papers and certificates of our study, including all marks of the subject we had at the university, the numbers of lessons of each subject, all assessments collected at the university connected by practise of the study, excursions, exercises. Everything for both of us. It was a huge problem to get all of these papers from my Faculty of Arts. The people there, the staff, were like mean by not giving them to me after many times of recalling and asking. With

Sandi's staff Architecture faculty we didn't have any problem at all, but with mine lots of them.

We also went to pass IELTS test. I needed to pass it with level 6 in all fields and Sandi 7. We passed it and were very happy. We posted all educational documents, language documents and essential family documents (birth certificates etc.) to our Slovenian verifier translator whose translation cost around 20 dollars per A-4 page. So we paid a lot of money just for the translation and then once again to the Office for just notarisation; we wanted to have originals for our own. In Slovenia you have to pay for the notarisation twenty dollars per page.

We sent all this documentation to Australian Department of emigration to get approved our professions and skills. Sandi became approved as an architect, but they didn't get my documents on time.

I became red in my face, ran back home, took original documents, went back to the translator and back to the Office for Notarisation, paid again a huge amount of money and sent it again. At least the Australian Emigration Office got my documents and sent it to the NOOSR office to see if they can approve my qualifications. While my documents were on their way to this certain office the IELTS demands were raised for foreign teachers; they demanded language knowledge level 7. They didn't want to understand I sent it before the change in IELTS levels. The lady told me that I was simply "too late". She received my post two days after they changed their IELTS rules. We were sad; Sandi was angry; we felt lost.

We heard about Slovenian man Toni who is working as an agent to help people who want to emigrate to Canada, New Zealand or Australia. As we were sitting in a huge room he said: The only chance to get additional points to get permanent visa is to sit down and learn English to reach level 7.

Again, I became red in my face and argued: "I don't believe this is the only way. I am willing to learn very much, but I can never learn English that high in the next six months. I am going to work every day but I don't have/know anybody to even talk with me in English. Well, I simply don't believe this is the only way."

The agent became surprised by my anger. I was surprised by the situation and that this was the only solution he suggested.

That night we didn't sleep well. In the morning, the next day, Sandi said: "I have an idea. We can ask for the assessment at the Wetassess as you are also a geographer and not only a teacher."

So, the next day we phoned to an agent, and he agreed. He admitted that this was possible. We sent him all the papers he wanted, we went to the translator the third time and to the Notification office as well. We posted documents the third time, but

this time to the agent. After that everything went on quite fast. We received an assessment for my profession and then we had to pass the medical examination, sent to the police statements and personal letters as a proof we are together longer than our eldest kid.

On 5th January 2007 we arrived in Brisbane. When there was a question about buying airplane tickets I said to the person at the counter: we will buy the cheapest tickets to anywhere in Australia. It is true; we don't have any relatives or close friends in Australia except Marjana who is living in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia and almost in a desert. We were open to any city or any coast. The ticket seller said that flight to Brisbane gives the cheapest solution, and we bought those tickets.

Immediately after our arrival, we got our first two weeks and a half long temporary stay at the Brisbane hostel, called-funny Somewhere to Stay in West End. This was our first Australian nest from which we were making further decisions, observing opportunities about finding a normal place/(house/flat) to live in; we began job searching, buying a car etc. We didn't know anybody except Tony a migration agent who is living in Gold Coast. We were also very close to meet one Slovenian family, but finally they gave us a massage they don't have time for us because they are too busy... Too sad, but true.

I had an obligation to pass a little present for one Mostar family who is living in Redcliffe, so I phoned them. And they were so much kind as people from BIH are. Kind and generous. They came to our hostel and organised a barbecue for us. It was two or three days after our arrival and we were very glad that someone gave us a kindness and a positive support for our new future.

However, instead of staying at the Brisbane youth hostel for only a few days, we stayed there for three weeks! Thank God, the place was very nice, bohemian, with lots of young people from all over the world; there were music events, restaurants, trees and flowers everywhere; you wouldn't believe you are in the huge city. The hostel is a huge old wooden house with balconies, it has a swimming pool and you would think you are staying in the camping place, because of so many flowers and trees, shade, birds, sounds of birds, and birds again, lizards, voices of the nature of animals in the middle of the City. We went 'on a hunt' to get a nice place to rent but you wouldn't believe it!! It was very hard to get something not very expensive and nice for us. They have a special procedure to get something to rent. You have to have a job, a references from the rentals before, electrical and phone bills, all personal information and certificates as possible, our friends' Australian addresses and phones; beside this you should have a car immediately to drive to the places you are interested in as fast as possible to be there first. Then you apply for an inspection together with the agent to see the flat/house inside; this is a must!! before renting

and it is not enough if you like just by seeing it from outside and through the windows; and after all you should fill a form that takes you at least 50 minutes. Anyway getting a house to rent was as hard as passing an exam at the university. We even enclosed our bank account which showed that we have enough money; yet we didn't pass through the competition with others. Also because we didn't have a job and previous references. We got that house we are living in now because we have paid for it for three months ahead. The cost of this house is 250 dollars a week. The same house in the city would cost 350 dollars a week. But the house was empty. This is a normal thing Down Under. It is very rare to get a full furnished house. And we were not ready to spend our money for a luxury immediately!! So after buying a used station wagon Toyota Camry, we bought essential things like Ikea and mattresses. For the first time in my life I have a new one!!, pillows, sheets, kitchen staff, new chairs and one table). I enrolled kids at school and bought them school things and uniforms etc. But we still couldn't come to our house because it was available to move in at the end of January. So, we even couldn't organise ourselves and our lives before that date. We needed to wait in "Somewhere to Stay" hostel. In the mean time we were going to the South Bank of the Brisbane River every day and swam there; it is free and open for everybody and it is a very beautiful place for kids!! People are coming every day from everywhere; we were visiting the main Library to have an internet contact with friends, we visited the state museum, galleries another children's activities because it was a holiday time; January is a main holiday month. There was a question in our family: shall we stay in the hostel for the last four days or shall we make a trip. Finally, we decided to make a trip to Lightning Ridge to visit Cilka and Jozé Zagar. She is a Slovenian lady who is a writer and lived there for 39 years with her husband Jozé on opal fields. She used to be a school teacher but she still helps in school, she is also an official translator. They were very kind to us, first Slovenians that we came in touch with. We drove through a dry inner land, spent very interesting time with her and her husband and miners searching for opals. We met Stefan and Dominik. We were swimming in artesian basin and drove home at the beginning of the school when the house became available for us.

After two weeks we settled in our first rented house - a unit, we made a short trip around our area. We wanted to see where we actually live. And again I faced an amazing thing: we were living in the place nearby my "hairy tree". It was the tree I used to sit on and enjoy the view of landscape five years ago.

Kids adapted to school very well. I found Australian children very calm and disciplined; I was surprised because they don't yell inside the school area or anywhere else as in Slovenia or Bosnia; Also, they invited Erik to play immediately; Erik made friends immediately. He can speak and communicate without any problems, but for school demands of course, he doesn't understand much and school

staff said he will get a special teacher to support him. Sandi and I are already working with him which is good for me too. Our kids go to Birkdale state primary school, daughter Kiri is in grade one, Erik who is 11 in grade 6. They like school although they say that it is better to stay at home. We find the school well organised, safe and friendly even I would say there is a very different school system as we are used to from Slovenia and in BIH. They don't have much homework; it is more on parents to teach the kids work habits. If not, nobody cares and students pass levels study years even when they don't work much and haven't much knowledge.

In a way our life is already organised; on the other hand we still have to find jobs. There are lots of advertisements for Sandi but he didn't search it seriously before getting settled. I will stay at home; someone has to pick up our kids at school at three and hug them; I will also improve my language and prepare myself to pass a language test necessary to work in any Australian school. Sandi and I are going to apply for a driving licence; it is a must after three months of living here. We are non-stop happy here even though we have hard times.

People like to say that an Australian lifestyle is very simple, but I find it very complicated with all these bureaucracy things we would never ever think it is possible. To complicate a little thing so much - they are experts. Everywhere we go, we make sure we have with us: all!!!! personal documents, including library card, medical card, European and Slovenian driving licence, telephone and electrical bills, as much addresses as possible...you never know when they will order you to show up something. And again: What I really don't like is that much bureaucracy and all awful paper work for every little thing.

In the future, we will probably move out from Brisbane. I must get the recognition of Teachers College in Queensland and pass the language IELTSA test to reach the state educational demands to becoming a teacher. So, it is a long way with a lot of learning and good luck. I hope that God is by my/our side.

People walk and run a lot for fitness, they have barbeques, but they are quite reserved and not as talkative as me. I even don't know and haven't seen my neighbours which is a strange thing for me. It seems that food means to the people a lot too much... You get lost in big shopping centres easily. They are offering much many more kinds of food than in Slovenia or in any of the European country.

### **August 2007 Settling down Under episode**

I am writing these eight months after we immigrated to Australia with great joy. I am still not perfect in my English but I have learned much about Australian way of life.

I was personally happy and satisfied to give a new beginning to our family. I have never been very much connected to Slovenia and have always maintained that the

whole world is my home. On my travels I found beauty everywhere. I felt overwhelmed by new scenery and people. Moving somewhere meant to me so much that I was prepared to be patient in the new country. I believed that there were no barriers our family couldn't overcome by our own strength. As we had already organized our family life in Slovenia, I thought we could do it again in a new country.

Sandi and I are highly educated and healthy; we have healthy and very adaptable children, so we thought we are prepared enough for a new start in a new country like Australia. After three years of hard work on visa demands, we finally got an Australian permanent skill visa and I was happy we at least emigrated in January 2007. Our migration agent was to come to the airport to meet us but then cancelled the meeting. The meeting would really offer us some hope and optimism. Nobody seemed to have time for us. We heard and read how easy and simple Australian life is; that many jobs are available and that one can get a job just around the corner. We also heard how Australia needs teachers and urban planners and how many jobs are advertised. People said that Australia needs massage therapeutics, cooks, waitresses, electricians, miners, different engineers, doctors and more and more. Maybe there is really a big search to get all this work force, but in Redlands, where we live now and around Brisbane Metropolitan, there is no job for migrants at present. Most migrants have trouble to get a job unless they arranged for it before their arrival which is a very smart thing to do. Both, Sandi and I still haven't got jobs in our profession. I met many well educated migrants particularly at TAFE who didn't get their professional jobs sometimes for many years. Now some of them really work as cleaners, taxi drivers or became pizza makers and are very disappointed; they have to get approval and recognition from Australian institutions to accept their study and years of experiences. Usually they need to get an Australian certificate by an Australian "standards", so they are forced to study again although their study overseas has been already done and they have been working for many years in their profession in their country. Further education cost much money, time and energy so many migrants just give up and find their way to survive by working manual jobs in service or in the hospitality industry. Very rarely somebody's qualifications are approved immediately. Yes, some of these people aren't young any more. There is a 52 years old woman from Russia with 24 years of experiences as a doctor, but she sits with me at TAFE because she needs to pass language tests and also further medical tests to achieve full educational recognition. She is sad and insulted but still determined to become a doctor in Australia. I am a teacher, massage therapeutics and a pastel painter, but none of these skills became recognised in a way to offer me a survival. I graduated at the Faculty of Arts and taught for thirteen years in Slovenian High School but I need to send a twenty years old study program from the time I was a student to the Queensland Board of Teachers. I have to prove that I had enough

pedagogical hours in my syllabus; if I do not prove it I have to study again. I also need to pass certain English tests with its very high level and pay much money to participate. These tests can be very difficult and all my school mates believe they are difficult on purpose to fail and apply again. Then you always have to pay an amount of nearly \$300. Despite my Massage course in Slovenia I cannot be registered in Australia until I pay a certain amount of money to certain organization; they told me I need to pass an Australian course. Everywhere I go, I have to arrange the meeting, and within the meeting... I always have to pay a certain amount of money. Even when only to check something: the teeth, the cat, everything. Maybe this became a common practise in Slovenia too, but I hadn't experienced that there yet.

Sandi is highly educated and high profiled in the urbanism field, he worked for the UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina but he hasn't found a satisfactory job here yet. He sent numerous applications all over Australia without success. It seems strange for him too since they said how desperately they need urban planners. There are advertisements everywhere and Sandi filled each application form fully focused on its requests; he was happily waiting for a call but many times they did not even respond. Sometimes he was told that he was over qualified after they interviewed him; sometimes he had a feeling that they have already chosen a person for the job. He was just used as a figure in the job market process.

At present he is working as an architect and is happy with the work and the position but is still waiting for a job as an urban planner; perhaps in some dry or rainy remote national park area.

Once I met a teacher at TAFE whose sincere thoughts meant to me much at that time. I still remember her words: "You know, Anita, the most important things to get a job in Brisbane is to know the right people and to have studied at the same University as the person, who can help you to get a job. You know, Brisbane is like a big country village, where everybody at my age knows everybody."

At the moment I work in Child Care after school lessons. I am an assistant and float around Redlands from school to school. This floating is the most interesting part of my work because I meet many different schools, staff, children and parents. I have an insight into the Australian school system and education but the truth is I can't earn enough money to take care of my family. I work only three to four hours per day which is enough only for buying some food and fuel (and mobile charge). My involvement in family economy is minimal compared to our needs although we live very modestly, easy and simple. We don't buy fancy clothes (I have them a lot!) and we don't spend in restaurants. Our cars are second hand and we live in a little unit which isn't too expensive for being close to the beach. We are still aware we are new migrants therefore we are still beginners and have no ambitions for wealthy life.

What we would like is to live a real simple life and be able to have trips into the nature. We are still open to move around Australia.

From my perspective life in Australia is very complicated especially for the beginners. It is far away from simple life style we expected. Everywhere you go, you have to fill in forms. This has happened to us immediately after our arrival and still does: filling in papers, papers, papers. When we were searching for a house/unit/flat to rent: the whole procedure was extremely connected with information, numbers and paper. The same was with the process of getting a driving licence, Blue Card, school enrolment, getting the First Aid Certificate, organizing internet and other communications, papers connected with Centrelink and Australian Tax, Child Care enrolment during school Holidays. Everything is connected with filling in forms. Twice we tried to avoid papers by accepting certain services through home land phone. But unbelievable: it took me one hour and a half on the phone to the administration officer. They also wanted Sandi's data. It was just about getting a phone number for my new mobile I bought in the shop as I need it for my work, but the officer wanted again: to get as much information as possible to just give me a simple mobile number. The same thing happened when I bought a used car and wanted to pay an insurance against the third person. They took me another hour and a half of standing by the phone to get it. Why were they doing this so long on the phone? After they wanted to know each detail about the car and myself, they were reading rules to me, the policy and legislation and after all that both of us happily finished the procedure. Sometimes I say: "Even though I grew up in a socialistic country known to be very bureaucratic, Australia is still much more administrative."

I heard some Slovenian people say that they are afraid to return to live in Slovenia because of the bureaucracy. Now I think I know and understand why they think so. They were already so much overwhelmed by the bureaucracy here that are afraid that in Slovenia is worse. But it is not. For a new migrant, starting a new life in Slovenia is easier than in Australia. At least people in Slovenia are more connected than they are here and are able to arrange things more quickly. Slovenian procedures at government institutions such as councils, social workers, banks, kindergartens, schools, insurance companies are much faster and easier and you spent less money and time to make things work. The only exception I don't know about is the procedure of building a house as I had never built any house anywhere. Here, at Centrelink people are changing all the time, they are really kind, but after getting your data, they send you home to wait and wait until you might find out that they have made a mistake in their papers and all procedure will be repeated. And you will go there again and again wasting your time and money. It is very hard to get someone's help personally. All staff also does not know all the information, it happened that I had to search for the same information from another council. And I

got it there-in another council. Social relations in Australia are many times really very impersonal business but in Slovenia sometimes too personal. I think everything is made harder and more time consuming that it should be.

In my opinion one can really become scared about how to survive in this system. Why? Simply because of the bureaucracy and particularly when one is a migrant and doesn't speak perfect English. Furthermore, I feel sorry for the Australian elder people, who aren't up to date and don't know how to handle the computer, yet it's easier for the Slovenians because their life style isn't that much computer demanded. You can survive in Slovenia without computer and without a car.

On the other hand, strict rules are everywhere and sometimes I find them too tough and strange. Australians are very kind and they are likely to feel and act comfortable, but it seems they don't trust each other much, so through time (decades) they created so much bureaucracy, so many rules and so weird legislations. Maybe it is because they received many immigrants from all over the world (and still do) that they had to write all these rules about the behaviour in all walks of life. Many migrants don't know much about the system before their arrival. I am sure there are successful stories, but I think migrants should know essentials to be better prepared before the migration. They should know more about Australian way of life. And here I go:

Australians seem obsessed by safety. I work in after school Child Care. Safety notices are wherever I go. I understand high safety requirements in Child Care but maybe Australians are too frightened, nervous, and unnatural. Therefore children can't just run around and climb on the trees as Slovenian children do, although staff is very much limited due to their position and work. Of course we are not supposed to offer children affection and knowledge since I am there mostly to organize the food and safety.

Here are some of the important rules that surprised and embarrassed me:

Don't run towards toilet and back because you can get your leg broken.

Don't climb on the tree.

Do not try any food from your school mate.

Egg, tuna and vegetable sandwiches must be separated.

Use gloves all the time, disinfection liquids and certain cloth for certain things to use.

Only closed shoes required everywhere.

Never ever think about going with the child alone to the toilet even if he is very little and needs help. Take two children or the second staff to be with you, otherwise can happened that the child or his parents might sue you that you did something to him while being alone with him.

Never take a child on your lap since this can be understood as sexual harassment/abuse.

Never leave a child in the car even for five minutes because somebody can take it or call the police.

Never help anybody who is calling for a help on the street or in the shop, as he may say that you hurt him badly while helping him by moving him.

Never whistle to any woman, as this might be understood as sexual harassment and you might pay penalties.

Yes, I wrote just some breath-taking rules that were explained to me. There are many of them and every time I became shocked and scared a little bit. What if I will do something against the rules and they have so many. Shall I live in fear? As long as I am surprised and astonished by so many events and circumstances I will still feel unsettled here Down Under.

Our children like school and school system and have learned English language quickly. They do sport a lot. Even the school system is very different to Slovenian one, I often get messages from many migrant parents I should work with my children at home as well. Not just here and there, but regularly to give them as much knowledge as possible. It seems immigrants don't trust the school system in Australia much so they encourage me to work maths and English language with both children. They say children don't get enough knowledge, not as much as they got in their countries of origin when they were little and where they came from. These people came from former Yugoslavia, India, from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Filipinas... They say an average Australian isn't interested much about anything, he isn't curious, doesn't read much, doesn't search for worldwide information and is only able to talk about easy subjects. For these reasons Australians might give an impression that they are easy going and not complicated people. People don't have much knowledge; even those with university degrees are very narrow minded. You get such experience easily in any shop, school, service etc. They are lost in wider outlook and don't know much. But they seems happy. And maybe, that enough. However, I heard that also

in Australia the times are changing. High educated workers are more welcome when competing for a job. It used to be easy to make a carrier through work experiences, yet nowadays they want more and more highly educated people. My work mates say the school system does not give them knowledge and doesn't force students enough, although I see many positive sights of the school system.

My children like to go to school and they get homework that is mostly based on using the knowledge that is given at school; they need to use their own resources to write an essay or a speech for the class audience. Much attention is given to build child's self-esteem regardless of nationality, race or age. University study is finished by the age of 21 and they can go on a hunt to get a job. I am happy as all through life people are positively encouraged about their future. They are raised up with hope, optimism and pleasure because they live in Australia. Maybe this is a reason, you don't find bad tempered people and Australians often use many positive superlative words in conversation. Words like: fantastic, marvellous, awesome, wonderful etc. make me feel embarrassed all the time as in my culture we are not accustomed to use them so often.

Newspapers are very fat/bulging but mostly filled with advertisements and puff as well as TV programs. They don't give much information about the world and are mostly short and connected with scandals. Therefore, in a way, I understand why the society is limited with so many rules, legislation and control everywhere. Their 'easy' life is connected with barbeques; on weekends Australians invite friends who bring drink and food. Also, when you are invited out for a dinner in a restaurant, you will pay it by yourself. Again, a habit, you should better know, before being too much surprised or disappointed by Australians.

On the other hand they are very relaxed about their attire and often go around barefoot. Many times I see them just like that even when it's raining and cold. They come without shoes when picking up their children at Child Care, shopping, at the petrol station, at the post office, 'take away' restaurants. I used to see some people dressed just in a pyjama when walking around in our local shopping centre. Such behaviour is very unusual for us, Europeans, and gives an impression of a very relaxed life style. But wait: Children aren't playing on the street or in parks without an adult and you can't see dogs and cats without somebody as this is not allowed. However, people seem happy and safe despite all that. They really look and talk with satisfaction. You hardly find a person unkind and even more, they don't grumble and complain about anything as they do overseas (particular in Slovenia); although I am sure, they also have their own problems.

We experienced two very stressful events in the time we are living in Australia and both were connected with Slovenia somehow. I rather don't want to talk about them anymore, because I always get headache... Three months after our arrival we received our stuff with the container. We paid for the service as it was charged by Slovenian trade service. But that service wasn't professional so we needed to pay the same amount once more in the port of Brisbane. Nevertheless, the container was lost in the port and we had to pay penalties for its storage at the port although this wasn't our fault. Sandi was jumping here and there every day, we both had nightmares and spent nerves, time and money.

Then just last week we had another bad experience. We were supposed to buy a little unit we are living in because I sold a flat in Slovenia. Many professionals entered our little unit to sign a contract and finally, and right at the end, before signing the contract..., when we just needed to get the information about the transferred money, we received a message from my rental agent in Slovenia that my flat wasn't sold as the client left to buy another one. Well, they didn't tell us anything about that until one day before signing the contract. We were shocked... On the other hand we were also grateful we got the information before signing the contract.

Who knows what the future holds for us but I hope we overcame the worst obstacles.

In August 2007 I had my art exhibition in Queensland and I was happy that people loved my work.



ARTIST Anita Bertonceli with her pastel on paper creation Golden Bride. Photo by CHARLES SONNEX

## Art to warm the heart

FOR Anita Bertonceli, painting is about bringing joy to other people.

"I have so much optimism in myself and I like to put it on paper to share with other people," she said.

"My pictures are very romantic."

Anita's diverse collection of pastel on paper works, which are now on display at Mellersh Gallery in Cleveland, use strong colours to bring out the beauty in everyday items, buildings and fantastical scenes.

The Thorneside resident said the

BY SURAYA SALEH

subjects of her art varied because she only painted when she was inspired.

"I could go for weeks without painting but when I'm touched by something it just flows," she said.

"I go around with my camera and I take shots because I have ideas for my next painting."

Slovenian-born Anita, who immigrated to Australia with her family in January, became interested in art 12 years ago.

She used to paint, make pottery and sew as hobby, but began working in pastel when she enrolled in an art class in Bosnia two years ago.

Framed pastels Anita created in Bosnia and some she produced since moving to Australia will hang at the Mellersh Art Gallery at 120 Queen Street, Cleveland until September 19.

Call 3286 1971 for more information and opening hours.

● More art news in The Guide, P 48 and 49.

Anita with one of her paintings.

## ***Vika Gajsek-Veda***

I was born in 1926 in Doljna straza near Novo Mesto along the green river Krka. My father was Czech and my mother was Slovenian but I feel Slovenian because I grew up in Slovenia. I respect Czech nation and specially my father who was well educated, honest and good.

I finished primary school before WWII. The war did not spare anyone but Slovenians suffered more because we had a civil war and a communist revolution during the war. After the war communists killed my two brothers, many relatives and numerous friends who opposed them. There was a dark cloud over our homeland. I had no chance to get a high education. As the oldest daughter I was my mother's right hand and had to help with a large family.

After a long persecution I found a job as a nurse in Ljubljana. I married in 1952. After the birth of my first child I had to stop working because I became pregnant again. In six years I had four children. With odd jobs I earned enough to feed the family. My husband's wages went into the building of our home in Stajerska. Luckily I bought many things for the house before I married. I knitted and sewed children's clothes. With the help of family and neighbours and with a small loan we finally came under our own roof after nine years. The old saying says that When home is built the man gets wild. Dom se gradi, moz pa znori. Our marriage which was never harmonious ended in 1971. I took my four children to Australia. I am enormously grateful to this beautiful, generous country for accepting us and paying our travelling expenses. We finally found freedom and peace.

I began writing poetry and stories as a sixteen years old girl; I wrote about the horrible events I witnessed but I was afraid to show my writing to anybody. It was dangerous to write anything against the regime that oppressed us. Unfortunately my early writings got lost. I started writing again in Australia so I can leave my children something of my life experiences.

In 1990 my children published a collection of my poems in a book Slovenske Korenine Na Tujem.

## ***Miriam Klemen***

I was born on 11.12 1950 in Hotize which is close to Slovenian Hungarian and Austrian border in north East Slovenia. I was the second of six children. My father worked as a seasonal labourer in Austria so he could save and buy modern machinery for our farm.

I was very close to my maternal grandmother and when I finished third grade of school I went with her to visit her son, my uncle, who was a priest near the Hungarian border. His cook left him so he asked us to stay and we stayed with him until he died from a stroke on New Year's Eve in 65. I was 14 years old. There was a lot of work to do on the fields and in the stables but I remember the time I spent there as most pleasant. I liked to wander in the forests looking for mushrooms.

My girlfriend had an aunt in Cakovac convent and four of us school friends decided to spend our holidays with her in the convent. We wanted to learn to sew and cook. Maybe we also wanted to get out of the jobs on the fields, however, all four of us became nuns. I remained a very happy nun for 15 years. I stayed in Ljubljana for one year where I also learned German at university. They sent me to Zagreb to study theology and pastoral care for four years. I taught scripture and took care of families in need. I found my calling and it made me happy.

In 1969 I came to Sydney with Franciscan Nuns of Immaculate Conception. Some of our sisters came to Melbourne before in 1965 and they organised the Slovenian school, scripture lessons, a crèche and a church choir. Father Valerian was enthusiastic and asked if he could get a couple of nuns to do things like that in Sydney. It wasn't hard for me to accept the decision to stay in Australia for five years. There was a shortage of young women in Australia at the time so Australia made it possible for us to only pay fifty dollars towards our trip. I arrived on 23 July 1972 and joined sister Ksaverija who was the housekeeper. Sister Ksaverija served previously in China and she told us about her interesting life. When sister Ksaverija and I joined Slovenian Church Centre in Merrylands they just laid the bricks for the church but there was still much to do. We had fundraising, picnics and working bees with one goal: the way of the Cross. People were very generous and enthusiastic.

Ten years with them were the happiest times of my life. I enjoyed teaching scripture to Slovenian children and going on camping holidays with Slovenian youth. I prepared religious radio programs and helped with the church services. The best part of my work was pastoral care. When a family lost a loved one or when there was sickness I tried to help and bring new hope to those families. I was happy to make a positive difference for people in distress. Being accepted and appreciated was my reward. I

enjoyed travelling and meeting Slovenians all over Australia. Everybody was hospitable and welcoming and interesting so I looked forward to meeting people. The convent was a sanctuary for me; it was like a safe warm pool compared with the cold ocean where the sharks of humanity are ready to pounce. I felt well loved, appreciated and safe. Like a bird cared for in a cage I wasn't prepared for the uncertain outside world.

This period of my life was also very much an eye opener for me because I was often in the presence of experienced and wiser older people. I feel privileged that I could listen to intelligent and good people who have had much greater experience of life.

Like most migrants born after WWII I have been indoctrinated by communist teachers in Slovenia. We learned what they had to teach; we all followed the line and learned to believe what they wanted us to believe. We had no literature or history that would tell us anything different. Only after I came to Australia I learned how communists really came to power. There was Dr. Janez who was a home guard. He escaped from the train that was taking home guards to their death after the war. He said that he warned his friends by saying: Don't believe that they are taking us to freedom; we are bound for the slaughter house. He jumped off the train and lived in Chinese Formosa until he died. There were other good people who escaped from communism. I realised that there are always two sides to the same coin; after seeing both I gradually formed my own opinions. Father Valerian in Sydney is the most neutral and tolerant person I ever knew. He always lived in hope that the other person would come to see and know the truth and form his opinions accordingly. Father Bazilij was more openly conservative and anticommunist.

Among the people generally were those who stood for something one way or another and then there were those that were easily swayed by the more powerful or popular. I remember how enthusiastically one Slovenian praised Whitlam's labour government but as soon as Liberals took over he wrote in Triglav bulletin: The fish begins to smell at its head, denouncing Whitlam as a rotten leader.

I have no time for people who go with the winds of popularity because these people have shallow roots and stand for nothing. I do not trust those who stand for nothing because I never know who they will follow next.

There were those who changed their beliefs like the two Slovenian brothers I knew. One was a partisan and became anticommunist and the other who was a home guard joined the group that favoured cooperation with communist Yugoslav regime. Then there were Lajovic brothers Dusan and Miso. Senator Miso was a real politician who tried to be everything to everybody but Dusan had stronger convictions and never changed his stand.

The leaders who do not tolerate diversity of opinions cause much division among Slovenians. Fortunately there are also those who see something good in everybody.

I cannot blame migrants who came from communist Yugoslavia for being at least partially brainwashed by the school they attended. I can only help them to see both sides of the coin and let them form their own opinions. I can only show the way by an example.

Yugoslav authorities followed our activities through their representatives in Australia. They tried to influence our people to favour them against those who escaped for political reasons. Sydney Slovenian association soon split. In Triglav club gathered those who favoured the cooperation with Yugoslav regime; they were generally younger and less active in religious activities. They were brought up by communist teachers and found it hard to make a total turnaround demanded by some anticommunist leaders.

I developed conservative but tolerant views; I hope that we would be more accepting of each other.

At the age of thirty my maternal instincts were calling and I knew that my biological clock was ticking: I realised that it was now or never. I told my superiors about my dilemma. They gave me twelve months dispensation to make up my mind. They also gave me an around the world ticket so I could travel and see my sister Toncka in Canada and my parents in Slovenia before I decided. I remember 23rd of June 1980 because on that day I made my decision to get married and have a family. I was with my sister then but I wanted to get the blessing of my parents before I told anyone. My parents more or less said that I will make my bed and I will have to sleep in it.

My parents were sincere, pious practicing Catholics and I learned to love the church teachings and traditions; to this day I do not feel right if I miss the Sunday mass. I am also very fond of all other rituals specially the family praying before meals.

In August 1982 I returned to Sydney and Leon, my future husband, took me to Queensland. In the meantime he brought his parents over. His mother was very unhappy because she had to stay for six months as her ticket demanded. I stayed with friends until the wedding on 10 October 07. I often remember a Slovenian proverb: a man who is good to his mother will be good to his wife. Leon wasn't kind to his mother. I was too much in love to see that.

After the wedding I felt let down; it became obvious that Leon and I were two very different people. I am energetic, hard working and athletic while he is reserved and likes to take things easy. I am an extrovert and Leon is an introvert. I am excitable and enjoy company while he is cautious and cool. I cried when I said goodbye to my

religious life and friends and Leo retorted: One would think that I am taking you to the abattoir. I felt that Leon was not sensitive to my feelings.

I soon began to feel that I was mentally abused by Leon's criticism. Nothing I did seemed good enough for Leon. I tried very hard because I was determined to make a success of my family. I wasn't allowed to have opinions of my own. He did not say anything while others were present but when we were alone he gave me a verbal lashing for disagreeing with him on any topic. I was used to speaking my mind before I married but he expected me to confirm everything he said and agree with all his opinions.

I like people and always try to make them happy but I could not make Leon happy. We never really sat down to try to work out our differences. Maybe Leon was as disappointed with our marriage as I was. We just could not make each other happy.

Leon was unemployed after the wedding so I had to find a job. Thanks to Anka and Tone Ambrozic who drove me around, I soon found a job in a Nursing Home in Redcliffe. I liked the job and still do similar work. At present I work for the frail old people who prefer to stay in their own home. They pay for care and are very demanding.

Our son Simon was born in 1983 and Marko in 1985. I decided to work night shifts in a nursing home so I could spend day-time with my family. Simon and Marko still live with me, they are good people. Both are working and helping me financially.

One day I came from work and our teenage sons Marko and Simon told me that dad left a message that he will no longer return to live with us. I did not do anything about it. After a couple of months he returned and wanted to talk. I told him that he really did me a favour by leaving, because I could never bring myself to end the marriage otherwise. We both knew that the marriage was finished.

I begged Leon to come once a week to have dinner with us so the boys would be with their father at least for a few hours. He refused to even have a cup of coffee with us. He said: Don't you think I have enough poison in my body? I asked him what he meant and he told me that a doctor told him that detoxification might improve his metabolism. I wondered if he thought that he was being poisoned. We all ate together and we had good regular meals but he really did not feel well.

I am grateful to Leon that he is not a vindictive person. He has never bothered me after our divorce. I hope that he finds happiness without me and I hope that our boys maintain a good relationship with their father. It seems to me that Leon never enjoyed life; he always found something wrong with people around him. Now I wonder why he was unhappy. I wish we talked more and resolved our differences.

Maybe I worked too long hours and did not spend enough time and energy on our family; we simply lost touch. I had three nights a week at home and I asked Leon to let me sleep the first night. He would come to bed late after watching TV and I told him not to wake me up. I often suffered from migraine headaches at the time. Sometimes Leon complained that I always had a headache.

After our separation Leon let me stay in the house with our sons and he found accommodation elsewhere. I wanted to arrange the property settlement through the mediator but when Leon moved in with his herbalist lady friend, they decided that we take a solicitor each to arrange the property settlement. This cost me eight thousand dollars. I wanted to keep the home for my family but I had to pay Leon half of the value of the house. I tried to get a loan from the bank which was difficult since I was already fifty and now single. I worked four jobs simultaneously so I could prove to the bank that I was capable of repaying the loan. I became exhausted, weak and stressed. I told Leon that he could collect his personal belongings and he took many things that were of sentimental value to me. Since our divorce I worked very hard and have almost paid off my house when I got caught in another net.

All my life I lived with people I trusted completely. It never entered my mind to doubt people. I have after all surrendered myself with my vows of chastity, humility, fidelity and obedience. At the beginning of my convent life I rebelled against daily praying sessions but I got used to them. The hardest vow to keep was the one of obedience. Sometimes I wanted to rely on my judgement in daily chores but eventually I relented and obeyed. I did as I was told even when I felt that my way was more sensible. People have always been kind and good to me so I learned to take them at their face value and trusted their words without thinking. I am naturally friendly and enjoy being helpful to everybody. As I am very energetic that meant that I always worked harder than those around me.

Leon and I separated in 1999 and got divorced in 2000. My mother died in 1983. In 2003 I went home for my priest brother's fiftieth birthday; my sister Toncka who lives in Canada also came with her family so we had a family reunion. When my sister left for Canada I was alone with my father watching television when he had a heart attack. He died in hospital three weeks later on 20August2003. I felt very alone after I lost my father.

I felt especially vulnerable and in need of friendship and support.

While I was still married I worked for eight years as a housekeeper for Judy's family 4 to 5 hours a day beside my night shift in the nursing home. Now Judi and her doctor husband moved to Melbourne. Judi's daughter introduced me to a Pilipino lady Elizabeth White. Elizabeth had a grocery shop in Brisbane; she first engaged me to do some housekeeping for her but later she asked me to manage a fruit and veg part of

her shop where I also barbequed chickens. Elizabeth wanted me to travel every day 75 km from my home to work with her in Paradise Point; she was very pleasant and friendly; she promised to open a shop closer to my home for me to manage.

In 2003 I decided to resign from my nursing job. Elizabeth's husband died and she invited me to work for her full time. I worked in a nursing home for twenty years by then and my back was aching from heavy lifting so I welcomed the change in work as well as Elizabeth's friendship. She kept saying that we were like sisters and that I was like a member of her family. I felt well liked and appreciated. Elizabeth opened another shop in Brisbane. I worked about fourteen hours a day to help her establish her crape cafe and carvery shop. My wages were less than in previous employment but I enjoyed the new venture and really felt like a member of the family and a part of Elizabeth's business. On the average I was paid considerably less than ten dollars an hour although I managed the two shops and did most of the work with cooking and serving and ordering supplies. I felt that Elizabeth and I worked towards the same goal; it never entered my mind that I was being used or that I could ever be betrayed by Elizabeth.

I worked for Elizabeth for three years when she took over two more shops. Ten days before the opening she told me that she needed the bond money on those two shops. She asked me to lend her \$150 000. I felt happy to be able to help realise Elizabeth's big new venture because I felt very much a part of it and a part of her family. I mortgaged my home to help Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's bookkeeper wrote the agreement in which Elizabeth promised to pay interest on the loan plus make one thousand dollars a month repayment on the loan. Elizabeth also agreed to repay the loan in full when she sold the shop. The magistrate registered the agreement. Elizabeth promised privately to repay part of the loan in six months and the entire loan in the next six months.

We opened the shops and the business was doing really well. We worked very hard and long hours; there was a sense of euphoria with the success.

In December 2006 both shops went in liquidation, Elizabeth declared bankruptcy. I learned that although the takings in the shop were good she did not bank them. Elizabeth disappeared and I never saw her again. Insolvency office was not allowed to give me her address but they said that they would have to disclose it to the court. She is receiving war veteran pension after her husband but I don't know how to get her address. I have been advised not to spend more money for the solicitors and the court because the court could not get the money from her if she has none.

I am in contact with Elizabeth's sister who returned to Philippines because apparently her mother was sick. They also own shops and they apparently invested hundreds of



Miriam and her sons Marko and Simon visiting Cilka Zagar

thousands in Elizabeth's business ventures. I asked them for help but they tell me that Elizabeth recently informed them that she bought a new unit and a Porsche car. They are not aware of any financial problems. Elizabeth may have put her money into her daughter's account. Her daughter apparently also inherited money from her father and invested it in her mother's business.

I am at present just keeping my head above water working over ten hours a day to make interest repayments. My two sons are helping me with the repayments and the maintenance of our home so I would not like to sell my house and deprive them of their home. I do not know how long I will be able to work as I am not in good health and at 57 I am not young either. I hope that this black cloud over my head will somehow disappear one day. I hope that what goes around comes around; that one's good deeds get rewarded and the bad ones get punished.

## Bert Pribac

*Bert Pribac wrote the following autobiography and he wishes to have it published as he presented it. Bert Pribac writes that he learned at school not to use the word I so he writes in third person when he writes about himself.*

*An Australian Librarian, a Slovenian Dissenter and a Poet Perhaps..(As presented by himself)*

### Contents:

1. Landing at Broadmeadows ( a poem of some sort)
2. A concise life story written mainly by myself
3. The BIBAM project
4. The slovenski Oktet tour of Australia in 1975
5. A dissenter all the way
6. Some Literary achievements of Australian Slovenes
8. The Magic circle... and Contrasts (2 more poems)

*Landing at Broadmeadows*

*I came to Australia on a Boeing 707  
late one evening at the end of March of 1960,  
together with my wife and a crying baby  
on our hands, with almost no luggage,  
with some little change only in the pocket,  
and I barely escaped a kidnapping attempt  
in Munchen in Germany,  
a few days before boarding the plane for Oz land.  
We were disinherited and exhausted, destitute.  
Our soul was empty, our spirit low.  
We all needed a long, long sleep and rest  
that first evening on Australian soil.  
They put us up for the night  
in barrack Number five*

*near Broadmeadows somewhere..*

*I don't remember having dreamt at all that night.*

*The next day they put us on a train*

*for Bonegilla in the middle of nowhere.*

*Yet, I still remember the moon that evening*

*so large over Broadmeadows*

*like an orange barrel*

*and so threatening close.*

*This was not another continent only,*

*this was for us another planet.*

*And the wind blew a mixture*

*of sea fragrance*

*and the smell of strange trees*

*and everything was otherwise*

*so dry and empty*

*like my dispossessed mind*

*but the scent of gum trees*

*gave us a glimpse of hope*

*of better things to hope for,*

*of a difference perhaps.*

### ***A concise life story written by myself and with comments from other people.***

Bert Pribac was born in the hamlet of Sergaši near Koper in Slovenia on January 16<sup>th</sup> in 1933. As an eight years old boy he was caught in the turbulence of WWII and later in the traumatic events of post war Yugoslavia. And he understood what was happening. After all, in addition to speaking his native Slovenian dialect, he was able to read and write proficiently Italian at the age of four. Quite a story yet to tell perhaps.

As a fifteen years old boy he was enrolled in an intensive 6 month course in journalism, after which he began writing full time for a local weekly newspapers in Koper; the local chronicle events and sport events at first. When in 1955 at the age of 22 he finally finished high school, he began university studies in comparative

literature in Ljubljana and completed them in 1959, except for his degree because he was forced by politically adverse circumstances to move out of Slovenia<sup>1</sup>. He arrived in Australia in 1960 as a refugee and started first as a hospital cleaner and then as a mail officer until in 1965 he passed his English Matriculation exams. In 1966 he started to work as a library officer at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

Bert spent the first six years in Melbourne and later 36 years in Canberra. He worked also one year at the Wollongong Public Library. During his employ as Chief Librarian for the Federal Health department (from 1972 till 1988), he obtained in 1977 an Australian Public Service Fellowship to study for his master degree in librarianship at the UNSW in Sydney which he completed early in 1979. At the time of his employ with the Federal Health Department he acted also as a biomedical information adviser to many Australian health institutions and also to the World Health Organization. He left behind over 50 reports and articles on library technical and management issues. Especially relevant was the Bicentennial Bibliography of Australian Medicine and Health Services or BIBAM, a work of considerable historical value, and current use.

As part of his job he travelled several times all over Australia and abroad<sup>2</sup>, especially to China and the Philippines. In 1980, on a WHO Fellowship he visited also the USA, Canada, England, and New Zealand, some European and some Asian countries and Brazil.

Because of his journalistic and literary studies background, Bert dabbled also in poetry and published his poems in magazines in Australia and Slovenia. He published several poetry collections: *Bronasti tolkač - The Bronze Doorknocker* (Melbourne, 1962), *V kljunu golobice - In the Bick of a Dove* (Canberra, 1973), *Prozorni ljudje - The Transparent people* (Ljubljana, 1991). Some of his poetry in English: Winds from the Brindabellas appeared at one stage also on the Internet, was read on the SBS and at some literary happenings in Canberra, Melbourne and Perth.

After his early retirement in 1988 because of a major MV accident in Marulan, he only undertook occasional library work; for over one year also at the Australian

---

<sup>1</sup> Under the threat of an ultimatum of being deprived of his scholarship, then being refused a visa to travel to France, unless he spies for the regime among his colleagues at the University and reports to the secret services or UDBA on some cultural and religious personalities.

<sup>2</sup> I was travelling on an Australian official passport and I was granted intelligence clearance from Australian authorities for my travels overseas and later for my employ at the Parliamentary Library in Canberra.

Parliamentary Library. He became though more active in his literary work. In 2002 his book Slovenske spravne motnje - Slovenian Reconciliation blues was published in Ljubljana. For his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, a collection of love and religiously erotic poems Kiss me, Koštabona, poljubi me were published in Koper. The translations of some poems of Australian poet Dr. David Brooks were also published in 2003 in a collection entitled Hoja do jasnega rtiča - Walking to Point Clear. Bert translated into English also the libretto of the operetta Planinska roža - Mountain rose by Radovan Gobec.

A large anthology of his more relevant essay writings, many from his migrant experience in Ozie land, entitled Črni krokar na mojem oknu - The Black Raven on my window sill is being now prepared for publication. And on encouragement from his wife and sons he wrote down in the last few years (In Slovenian and some also in English) almost twenty delightful children's bed stories he recounted to them over the years, with the title Trinajst plus štiri otroške zgodbice iz Šavrinske Istre in Oz dežele - Thirteen plus four children's stories from Saurin Istria and the Oz land. Over the years he translated into Slovene (from a French edition of F.Toussaint) the famous Rubayati of the Persian poet Omar Khayam. These translations are being published in September 2007.

In 2007 he completed the translation into English of almost all the poems of the famous Slovenian poet Srečko Kosovel (To be published next year, hopefully in Cambridge). He says he has still many plans for the future but God only knows how much time he will be given to do it.

Bert returned to Slovenia for the first time in 1974 just for a couple of weeks to visit his ailing mother. He was in bad shape at that time also himself. He returned again (after his MVA) in 1988 for several months. While recuperating, he became then involved in the Slovenian independence movement. He also married again and then soon returned with his new family to Australia, but in 2000 they all came back to Slovenia, while he still tried and tries to commute between the two countries.

Recently he retired to his native village of Sergasi in Slovenska Istra. He says that while he is waiting for (non)eternity, he reads as much as he can and in between he tend his vineyard and orchard full of figs and olives. As he often says, he dreams in four languages proficiently and Australia appears in his dreams every night.

Bert has three sons, he has built four houses and planted many, many trees. His oldest son Friderik or Fred, a scientist with the CSIRO (and prominent musician on the folk scene), lives in Hobart, Tasmania. Together with Friderick he still owns a block of land in Tasmania over the hills of Lachlan, just in case.

Bert's views and experiences of migrant life in Australia, especially as related to the Slovenian migrant community and himself personally, are scattered all over the many

interviews and articles for the Slovenian media. A good selection of these comments and interviews are intended, as already mentioned above, for his planned book "A black raven on my window sill". Some happenings could be glimpsed from this text.

And for about 30 years or so, while he lived in Australia, he also wrote in Slovene and in English about 1500 pages of diaries which have been now almost fully typed into digital format. These may require some editing before publication. Probably some selected passages only will be published, most likely under the title: A Diary of a Disintegrating Fundamentalist in view of his religious and social explorations.

### 3 The BIBAM project.

In his professional career of librarian, especially of medical librarian, as already said, Bert left behind over 50 reports and articles on library technical and management issues and in 1988, together with the late Professor Dr. Bryan Gandevia of the RACP, the 4 volumes BIBAM or [Bicentennial] Bibliography of Australian Medicine and Health Services. He remembers fondly also the other colleagues on the editorial board, like George Franki, Richard Travers, Allison Holster and Prue Deacon.

BIBAM was published by the AGPS in Canberra in 1988. Some testimonials about this great project in the history of Australian medicine, consider it to be Bert's greatest achievement in his Australian working life. In those years he and his team were responsible also for the first Australian online library catalogue named HEMLOC<sup>3</sup>.

Here below are some testimonials about the BIBAM project:

By George Franki BDS, of Waverton Sydney, 12 November 1999:

»Mr. Pribac, with Professor Bryan Gandevia, was the instigator of the [BIBAM]<sup>4</sup> project which produced the most comprehensive bibliography of a subject ever published in Australia. It was published in 1988 in four large volumes and recorded on a data base. Mr. Pribac was the technical planner and coordinator for this landmark work«

By Neal Blewett, Minister for Community Services and Health, in his Foreword, 1988:

»I have pleasure in acknowledging that the Bibliography originated from a suggestion by Mr. H.V. Pribac, then Principal Librarian in the Department of Health«.

By Bryan Gandevia, Chairman Editorial Board [BIBAM,1988]:

---

<sup>3</sup> HEMLOC: Health and Medical Libraries Online Catalog

<sup>4</sup> BIBAM: Bicentennial Bibliography of Australian Medicine and Health Services 1788 - 1950

»My regret in concluding this introduction is that it is not also signed by my colleague Bert Pribac, whose foresight and enthusiasm were fundamental for the project.«

And further: In fact, when in June of 1992 I left Australia on a longer trip to my native land, I visited Professor Bryan Gandevia in his mountain lair on Mount Victoria in the Blue Mountains, I felt almost guilty for leaving Australia with so much unfinished work or plans. Bryan consoled me with these words;

» Don't worry Bert, you have done your bit for Australia. Take your deserved rest. You have done something that many of us only dreamed of doing for many years!«

What Paul Hodgson wrote in 1999:

»Bert had a record of very significant achievement, having built up the Department's [of Health] library services from a very indifferent base to a level where they ranked among the best and most influential in Australia. He created a team of intelligent, motivated and highly professional librarians and library support staff. As a result of his successes in the library, the Department extended his responsibilities to include records management functions.«

»... I also saw him in action representing Australia in medical information activities in the World health Organization's Western pacific Region and he made a contribution in this area that was second to none.«

Paul Hodgson of Informed Sources, Deakin ACT, 10 November 1999

The Slovenski Oktet tour of Australia in 1975

That was a major event that I was asked to organize in 1975 on behalf of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and of which I am very proud. It came about because the then Australian Ambassador in Yugoslavia Mr. R. Booker heard them singing during a Christmas concert at Bled in Slovenia, and he was so impressed with their singing and invited them on the spot to Australia for the occasion of the opening of Qantas flights between Sydney and Belgrade. One condition was, that the Slovenes in Australia hosts them and arrange for their transport between Australian cities.

Because the Slovenian communities in Australia, being split at that time, could not agree on a coordinator, Mr. Booker asked for my services, because two of the singers were my colleagues during my University studies at the University in Ljubljana. They may have suggested it. They even sung for me in the hotel Evropa in Ljubljana on the night of March 31, 1959, on the occasion when my first son Friderik was born. My involvement with them came handy, because in Australia I was then already a mid level Australian Public servant and, acceptable as coordinator to most Slovenian societies and was thus granted special leave from my employer to organize their

tour. With a friend, a councillor at the Queanbeyan City Council and merchant Mr. Frank Bresnik, we provided the guarantees for their travel around Australia and on the insistence of the FA Department we also invited to some concerts the Yugoslav consular and diplomatic representatives in Australia. We never put up any Yugoslav flags, but only the Slovene national colours in the forms of coloured ribbons or bundles of carnations. And everywhere we went, we had full concert halls or Slovenian societies clubs, except in Canberra, where at the Slovenian Association, a few misinformed Committee men declined to have them as guests unless they renounced my coordinating role... etc<sup>5</sup>, upon which the Oktet, on seeing on the club's house announcement Board their decision and arguments, the singers refused to sing in the club's hall and said: »Without Mr. Pribac with us, we are not going to sing in this place!« and they left their premises<sup>6</sup> and instead they sung to full halls in the Albert Hall and at the Jewish Memorial Hall. Music critics of the main dailies in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and Hobart wrote enthusiastic reviews about their singing. Slovenes around Australia were crying of happiness on hearing after so many years of exile such beautiful singing from their native land.

Quite interesting was their performance at Padua Hall, the Slovene Church Centre in Kew, where the late Rev. Fra Bazilij was reluctant at first to accept them as hosts, but relented on finding that some of them were his schoolmates. He asked me, if any of them were members of the Communist party, to which I retorted that to the best of my knowledge, at least five of them were, but that he should not bother, because they are above all »dobri Slovenci« - good Slovenes and they will sing also in the church some Slovenian church songs, if he wishes so. To which he somehow agreed. But later on he entered into some bitter correspondence with me about the value of such tours in view of the Yugoslav political situation (about 30 pages in my archives), accepting though that they were a top cultural event, an opinion confirmed in 1991 also by Mr. Lojze Peterle, a declared Catholic, then the first Prime Minister of the newly independent Slovenia, who rightfully stressed that the Slovenski Oktet

---

The fact that I was coordinating their tour on behalf of the Australian DFA and never on behalf of the Yugoslav Embassy, did not convince them. There was probably some personal or political grudge and small peoples' envy against me and Mr. Bresnik that made them act in such a stupid manner. In fact, during those days, myself, my wife and Mr. Bresnik, we received telephone threats of bombs to be planted in the Albert hall unless we cancelled the concert and we had to ask for police protection.

<sup>6</sup> In fact I offered it to the Club and to the singers, that I could easily absent myself from the concert there in order to defuse the issue.

represented the Slovenian culture and name wherever and whenever it sung, and I should add: nothing else but.

### 5. A dissenter all the way

The tour of the Slovenski oktet, although most successfully organized, brought to the fore again all the adversity some people had against me. By then I was an active member of many Slovenian societies in Australia, first in Melbourne, then also in Canberra and in Sydney. Later on in Canberra, I produced for 15 years fortnightly Slovenian radio programs for an alternative Slovenian grouping named Karantania. But because of my declared antifascism, I was shunned and attacked very early by some Slovenian rightwing circles, who even intervened with the Australian migration authorities, to deny me at first the Australian citizenship<sup>7</sup>. Being always interested in spiritual symbolism and the fate of mankind, I also gradually and actively participated for many years in evangelical religious groups, first in Melbourne with the Church of Christ and then also in Canberra with the Christadelphians for both of whom I still retains my sympathies, but that made things worse with my Slovene compatriots. But because I accepted the evangelical views on religion and society, I was never quite at ease with the many narrow minded predominantly roman-catholic Slovenian opinion makers in the Australian Slovenian community. For many years, I was either ostracized, shunned by most of them or even viciously attacked verbally or even threatened physically by some of them<sup>8</sup>. I discovered gradually though, as I learned the language and the mores of my new found country, that I became more at ease and quite at home with the more tolerant Australian society, including its wonderful Irish -Australian Roman-Catholics.

Nevertheless, when Slovenia was separating from Yugoslavia in 1990, I joined the Slovenian community in Canberra at a great meeting in front of Parliament house where I was somehow the main speaker in front of about 3000 Slovenes another

---

<sup>7</sup> I was refused citizenship at first and when I complained to the Immigration Department , I was fortunately interrogated by H. Opperman (later Sir), who told me about denunciations originating in the Slovenian Community in Melbourne. Opperman, who became convinced of my integrity, then granted me Australian citizenship in a matter of days.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, during my stay in Victoria, a rabid group of six or seven Slovenian Nazi apologists had a meeting at Mount Macedon at which they decided to lure me somewhere and punish me physically for my for them unconventional view. I was advised about this with some urgency by an officer from Russell St. Police Headquarters. This was confirmed a few days later by a relative of one of the plotters who came to visit me in haste to warn me about their threat.

friends from Eastern Europe, Croatia and Australia. With some of them, I also made a successful submission to the then Prime Minister of Australia Mr. R. Hawke on January 15 of 1991, to recognize Slovenia, although, his foreign Minister Mr. Keating said only a few hours earlier on the ABC radio, that Australia shall not recognize Slovenia's independence until all its neighbouring countries shall. Keating went on the ABC radio the same late evening news to eat his morning words and announce Hawke's decision. And believe it or not, Mr Hawke was swayed in Slovenia's favour and persuaded his ministers to recognize Slovenia immediately because of a pun I made on his wife's and daughter's friendship with my former wife. That much I have been told the next day by his Secretary.

My Slovenian political and social opponents in Australia could not accept that I was one of the rare socialists dissenters<sup>9</sup> among them and that because of my traumatic experiences during the 2WW, I was a strong antifascist. I was a thorn in their side, being an articulate opponent and left leaning Christian. I was trying my best to have good relations with all of the Slovenian groups and I was called upon sometimes by simple working class people to defend them when they were singing Slovenian partisan resistance songs. But Fra Basil told me quite early that I can't be a true Slovenian unless I belong to the RC church, to which I retorted that I am a Slovene because I was born into the Slovenian tribe and not because I belong to any church or other grouping. The Slovenian Santamaria<sup>10</sup> or DLP adherents tried to ostracize me from the then Slovenian Association in Melbourne and in later in Canberra too.

Some of these opponents were quite rabid in their attitude towards me, trying to deny me at first even the Australian citizenship or later even promotion at work by

---

<sup>9</sup> In fact when the most famous Slovenian dissident Jože Pučnik, was jailed in Ljubljana for his view, I was leading a dissenting discussion circle at the University of Ljubljana and was spied upon. In view of the infiltrations and dangers we were in, I disbanded the circle, and managed soon after to escape with my newly established family over the border into Italy and then through Germany into Australia.

<sup>10</sup> I knew personally the late Santamaria of the DLP, having met him when I was a cleaner in St. Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne and he was there as a patient and upon finding out that I came from Istria, a former Italian province, he was friendly with me and declared me an Italian, which I resented. To me, his pro Mussolinian sympathies were quite evident from our discussions or his puns when I cleaned along his bedside: He was otherwise a pleasant person and we spoke Italian naturally. I found out that later when I was doing my Library course in Canberra, his daughter was my study and working colleague, a very amiable, competent and reasonable person indeed.

false accusations to my supervisors or even writing denigrating letters to the Australian Parliament.

I always maintained that I can have with them quite good genuine human and cultural relations if they were willing to accept my free and unconventional mode of thinking and if they were prepared to listen to my arguments as much as I was prepared to listen to theirs. And with many I achieved eventually good relations and friendship, even with some priests and community leaders. But that was impossible to achieve with some of them, but they rather branded me a Yugoslav spy among them, not being a Slovene at all, attacking my conversion to Protestantism etc. and heavens knows what else, which forces us into some paradoxical behaviour, into an incapacity to have proper human or social relations or collaboration. I don't ever deny that some of them were decent human being, even of genuine patriotic feelings, but in spite all of this, some of them were representing the darker concept of the Slovenian past and I opposed them for such extreme right wing attitudes. And that was my pain that I had to deal with them and that was their destined misery that they could not subdue me even with physical threats.

When I first joined the Slovenian Academic Society, a self select group of university graduates in Sydney, knowing that I had many friends among the alternative Slovenian groups in Sydney and Melbourne, an academic among them, a lecturer at the UNSW warned me: "Bert, if you are going to cooperate with those proletarians rather than with us academics, we shall ignore you when the history of Australian Slovenians shall be written." Well," I told him "I couldn't care a hoot for it. Because I like my peasant compatriots from the Karst, from Brkini, from Prekmurje: human beings like me and I shall feast and sing with them or whomsoever invites me in good spirit".

Now that this history seems to be written by various writers and some extremist denigrated me and my work again quite recently in the Slovenian Kolping Sorority Bilten, I would indeed prefer to be ignored.

### ***Literary achievements of some Australian Slovenians***

Bert wrote profusely at one stage also about other Slovenian writers and poets in Australia. This writing shall also appear God willing and weather permitting (as the English say it) in »The Black raven ...«.

A couple of glimpses will be given here below, but first:

Of his poetry work, Bert takes pride in his translations of Australian contemporary and Aboriginal poetry which over the years was read often on the Slovenian radio and which was published in Ljubljana in 2003 in two anthologies of Australian

contemporary verse Vesolje okrog kuščarja - The Universe around the Lizard and Konec sanjske dobe - The end of Dreamtime. These two books were greeted with very positive critical acclaim and have been almost sold out.

As of writing this contribution, he has finished translating into English almost all of the poems of Srečko Kosovel, a modernistic Slovenian poet perhaps as famous in Slovenia as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century bard from Vrba, France Prešeren.

But let us ponder a bit about the Slovenian migrant writings in Australia. First of all we must consider that most of the Slovenian migrants were poorly educated young peasant or working class boys and girls. Yet, we believed that it was important that Slovenia hears our voice and offer us recognition for our literary efforts but we only reached a small circle of people. Our writings were read by only a few friends, but we, the writers and poets, became opinion makers with our writing and publications, at least among our community in Australia and some friends in Slovenia. Slovenia ignored us, during the communist era, at least until the eighties, because we were not ideologically pure for them. We were also too distant; maybe we were not good enough. It is strange, that after Slovenian independence we became largely irrelevant. Many of our Ozie writers are not returning home or stopped writing because they became frail or the earth asked for their remains. Young Slovenes in Australia are becoming integrated into Australian society and there are some promising quills among them.

In Slovenia, ten years ago they used to publish in total about 400 to 500 books a year. Last years, only in poetry, 400 books were written. Yet during the last hundred years, Slovenian migrants all over the world published about 500 books. If there are 350 thousands migrants i.e. one sixth of Slovenians outside Slovenia they should have written at least 3000 books in a hundred years. My arguments is again, that the Slovenian migrants were almost illiterate, escaping Austria, Italy or Slovenia because of dire misery or political intolerance.

The late Milena Brgoč from Melbourne, in her Bibliography of Slovenian publications in Australia, counted almost a hundred publications before 1996 but since then, Slovenes in Australia certainly wrote a few dozen more books.

Since Slovenia became independent in 1991 some of our memoirs have been published. It became obvious that with a heavy heart we needed to tell about our exile before God or before destiny demanded our exit. Here I remember principally the writings of Ljanko Urbančič: Srečanja, portreti, dejanja (Encounters, Portraits, Actions, 1990), of Marjan Persič: Na usodnem razpotju (At the fatal crossing, 2001). I can't ignore Cilka Zagar's novel Barbara or Ivan Kobal's Men of the Snowy Mountains

and neither the memories of Ivanka Škof<sup>11</sup> Pod ognjem in pepelom (Under the fire and the ashes).

I would say however that our most active and best prose writer is Cilka Zagar, a teacher from Lightning Ridge. Her stories of Aborigines are beautiful, strong and true. Her novel Barbara has compelling and compassionate descriptions of ordinary people and events in the Kocevski Rog massacre after the war, that greatest stain on Slovenian contemporary history. I consider Cilka's political views though, to be slightly naïve and one-sided but still most interesting. And she is still writing.

Danijela Hliš also writes prose in English for Australian magazines and has published a bilingual collection of poems: Šepetanja –Whisper..

But our most mature poets and on a par with eminent Slovenian poets in the old land, are certainly Jože Žohar and Pavla Gruden from Sydney, authors of excellent poetry collections and editors of Svobodni razgovori – Free Conversations. Ivan Burnik Legiša from Adelaide can't be disregarded either, neither the late Peter Košak from Ararat.

We wrote principally, because we wanted to express our visions and tell our memories and experiences. Often we wrote because some things we had no one to tell to. It was a healing experience for us, a meditation with the numenical in us.

And below I added two more of my early poems, written in English. These poems indicate my early and later attitude to Australia and my exile.

*The magic circle on the ocean*

*Unconscious rocks,*

*polished by the unending tides*

*and caressed by the winds,*

*sands lying for ages*

*in the bed of the rivers of mankind*

*was our existence in the middle of Europe*

*and then a sudden terrible storm*

*a treacherous tide*

*destroying tribes*

---

***Ivanka Škof should not be forgotten by the Australian Slovenians after all, together with the late Jože Čuješ from Sydney, she designed the first curriculum for the Slovenian Sunday schools, or clubs' schools.***

*and splitting nations apart  
has forced us into a magic dance  
where the devil was leading the pipes  
and our coroboree  
was in the middle of the Ocean of despair  
from where we longed for a shore  
and we prayed for a boat  
to take us to this welcoming port,  
to this haven of peace,  
to terra Australis, still pure  
though not quite immaculate.  
We are here now, at peace at last  
yet we anguish in our hearts  
as we look across the seas  
at those of our kind  
who stayed in their old place  
whom the storm has spared them  
on their native soil and we ask ourselves,  
will they succeed to build again  
a community of equals stronger than before  
a mighty castle built on love  
which does not distinguish between  
colours and creeds and race,  
because we see from afar approaching  
another cyclone  
and wide and treacherous is the ocean  
for those who are divided  
by hatreds and ideologies.*

*Contrasts*

*And here under we are now,  
at the brim of the world  
after many wanderings, refugee camps  
and interrogation lights.*

*It seemed at first that we have fallen  
into a cobweb between giant and ugly stars  
and so in our loneliness and despair  
on strange foreign lands  
we have thrown our anchor again  
into the clouds of former lands.*

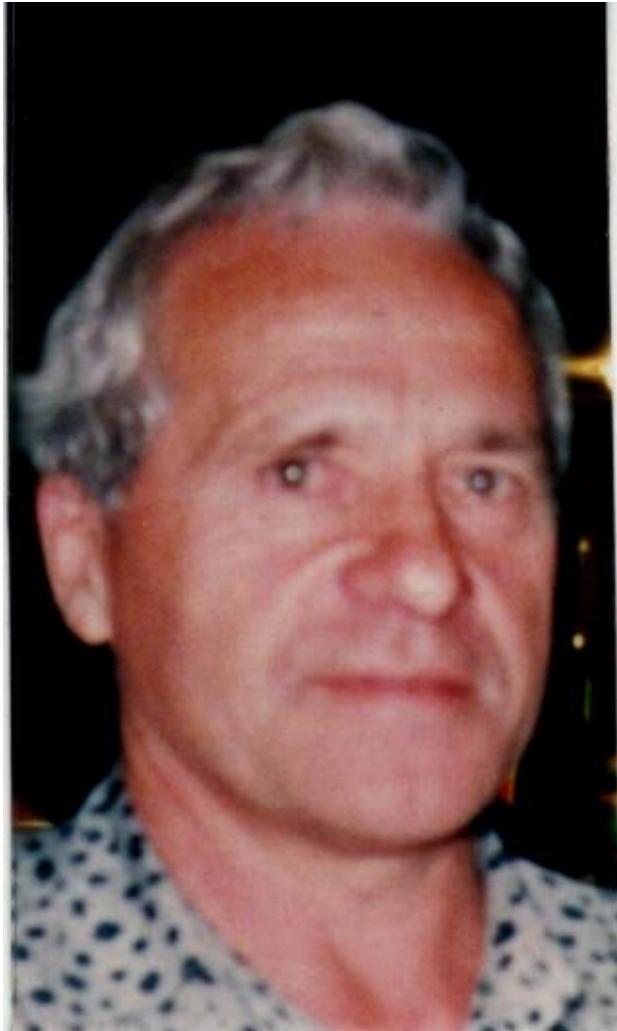
*As a vine transplanted  
into a foreign soil  
we could not at first  
push our roots into this ground  
or feel cool under the shade of the gum tree.*

*The sails of our heart  
were longing for the old home  
across many seas  
for the shade of the linden tree.*

*But we realized as time went by  
that our children,  
they will establish their roots  
and draw the juices of this new land,  
becoming one entity with it -  
across the vastness of the sandy dunes  
they shall plough fresh rivers  
teeming with life and for ages to come  
they shall count the coming and going  
of the southern cross.*

E-mail: [lapwing@siol.net](mailto:lapwing@siol.net)

## ***Stefan Hribar***



I was born on 26 12 1931 in Celje Slovenia. My mother Elizabeth worked as a domestic servant and could not take care of me so she put me in an orphanage in Ljubljana. I never knew who my father was. I guess I was too embarrassed to ever ask my mum who my father was. Later I learned that I had an older brother who was also put in an orphanage before me.

I am looking at mum's photos; I see a beautiful tall and slender girl with long curly blond hair. Sometimes I wonder what sort of life she had; she must have been unhappy to give away her babies; why didn't she marry and have a family? How and why did she die? Was she sad without her children? Did my father know about me at all? I guess I will never find the answers. Over seventy years ago life must have been very hard for a young unmarried mother. She did not have choices young mothers have these days.

I also treasure the photos of my friends because they are the reminders of me being young and having fun with them. The photos are the only souvenirs from my youth and my home country.

I have one picture of myself which mum must have given to me. I am among other children but there is a cross on top of my head indicating which one am I.

An older peasant Janez Zugelj from a little village Dobravce in Dolenjska took me out of the orphanage when I was very young. I grew up with his family until I was fifteen. I called him dad and his wife mum but I was never really a son to them; I wasn't a part of the family; I knew that I was a hired hand, a servant. I worked on the fields and with pigs and cattle. They loaded big loads on my young back to carry home from the fields.

Other children knew that I was a servant boy so they called me names and tormented me. They teased me and pushed me around because I was poor and had nobody to protect me. I slept in a stable with the animals. My bed was over the sewage pit. Sometimes I slept in the corner of the room where Janez Zugelj slept with his wife. He was spitting on the floor all night and in the morning I had to clean that. Towards the end of my stay on the farm I shared a room with the farmer's grandson. They even let me eat at the table.

My whole childhood was miserable. I often wonder how I survived as a barefooted hungry boy during the cold winters. My feet were black from dirt. Everybody slapped me if I did something wrong or if I didn't do enough. Everybody was ordering me around and nobody had a kind word for me. There were no games, no rest, and no friends while I stayed with Zugeljs.

While working on the fields I often had to run into hiding when German planes were bombing us. Partisans sabotaged the train and Germans retaliated against our village. They burned all the houses and we escaped into the forest. We made a shelter from tree branches and stayed in it for the best part of a year until the nearby bishop offered us accommodation in his stable where we spent the rest of the war time with bishop's cattle. Zugeljs had another little house near the railway but it was used by Italians and Germans. After the war we moved into this house.

During the war I attended school very irregularly. School was far away and I had to feed the pigs and cows and work on the fields. We had to learn Italian while under Italian occupation.

My new parents had two grown up sons and a daughter of their own. One son was with partisans and the other was killed as a Home guard. It must have been terrible for Zugeljs seeing their sons fighting on the opposite sides. They were themselves poor peasants trying to survive.

Zugeljs had a woman servant; she was the most vicious person I ever met. She hated kids and I was terrified of her. I buried myself in the straw to hide from her but she came after me with the pitchfork and started poking me until I came out. She was a mean woman who never married or had children of her own.

Zugeljs sent me to church and I didn't mind that because the old priest was good to us during the war. When I was 15, however, the new young Chaplain replaced our priest. I saw women taking best foods to him and he threw much of it in the rubbish rather than offer it to us hungry children. He asked me at the confession if I had a girlfriend and what we were doing. I had no idea about girls; I was very embarrassed and started to hate the church. Later I met church people who helped refugees in

Austria. Girls told me that they had to do favours for these men so they would speed their emigration.

After the war in 1946 Zugeljs received a letter saying that mum wanted me back; she found me through the Red Cross. When she came to take me I ran away in the forest to hide. They had police searching for me. I did not want to go with a stranger and leave the only family I ever knew. Mum found a place for me in Kreka Tito's institution near Tuzla where I became apprenticed as a fitter/turner. The school had about 300 students.

Mum's brother Rudi opened a bakery in Tuzla and mum also worked in Tuzla as a domestic help. Rudi was a nice enough, kind man; he had his own family and I only saw him a few times. I was never a part of his family. I have no contact with him or his family now.

I returned to Slovenia in 1949 and found a job in TAM car, truck and bus factory. I lived in a factory barracks and ate in the factory kitchen. I was hungry most of the time; there was food shortage and no bread to buy. My boss was a communist who had less training than I but I had to obey him. They asked me to join the party but I declined. I never wanted to be a member of any organisation. I like to be on my own.

Years later I visited the farm where I grew up but not because I liked it there; I just wanted to show them that I was fine, I had new shoes and fine clothes. I wanted them to know that I succeeded on my own. Of course the farmer's family were themselves poor and didn't show any excitement or happiness seeing me or my new clothes.

In 1951 I was called into the army.

Before I went to the army I visited mum; she worked as a domestic for a politician in Sarajevo. She had a flat next door to the minister she worked for so I had to go through the security procedure but once I was in the building I was allowed to stay with mum for a few days. I could not bring myself to call this woman mum because she was never a real mum to me. I felt embarrassed and frightened of her. I later heard that she was going with one of the security guards then; that's probably how she came to be shot with the pistol owned by the security officer.

I left my belongings with my aunt in Ljubljana and went to Osjek for military training. After two months in the army I got a letter that my mother died; she was 47. I wasn't allowed to go to her funeral because I wasn't sworn in yet. The swearing in comes after three months of military training. I never found out why and how mum died. I do not know where her grave is. Mum's sister in Ljubljana also died a tragic death soon after mum. Nobody ever explained to me about them.

The military training was terrible; we had to slide and walk and crawl in the dust and mud and rain. I was wet, dirty and tired in the evening but I was expected to be clean and ready the next morning. Once I lost my uniform buttons while sliding in the mud. I asked the officer where I could get new buttons and he told me to figure it out for myself. The only way I could get them was by stealing from another soldier. I had to do extra duties like cleaning toilets because I lost my buttons. We were ordered to go to sleep for a short time after lunch but as soon as I would fall asleep there was a call to assemble outside.

Later they sent us in groups to work on the railways, bridges and tunnels. Every Sunday afternoon we had a couple of hours free to go to town.

Uncle Rudi told me that I have a half-brother Tone so I went to see him when I came out of the army. Tone never came looking for me although he was five years older than I. Mum never knew where Tone lived; only Rudi knew. I lived with my aunt Toncka in Ljubljana at the time but they never met Tone either. He lived with Kos family; they were kind people and had no children of their own. When I next saw him he was married with two children of his own and had his own house. Before I escaped I went to see him for the last time and he had 5 children.

When I returned from the army in 1952 I found a job as a turner fitter at Ljubljana railway station. I have pleasant memories from the time I spent in Ljubljana. I often went swimming in Sava River with my new work friends. We also went socialising, drinking and dancing. We joined a folklore dancing group Tine Rozanc and we travelled all over Slovenia performing national dances. That was the best time in my life; that's how I met my first love Ivanka, who was also a dancer. Being with Ivanka made me happy for the first time. We had a son Bojan. Unfortunately Ivanka found somebody else to love. He was a student and had a car so she left me.

The railway station was my real education. I watched people kissing and hugging and saying hello and goodbye. I dreamed of one day saying goodbye to everything I knew until then; I wanted to start a new life. When Ivanka left me I decided to escape.

A friend told me that he knew the way over the Austrian border because he was a border guard while in the army. We tried to escape over the mountains but we got lost and became separated. It was a foggy, snowy night and I fell down a slope; luckily a tree stopped me from falling deep into the crevasse; I almost froze to death hanging onto that tree. I tried to make a fire to warm myself but everything was wet. I had a can of sardines and the oil from the can helped me make a small fire so I survived. In the morning I decided to return home. As I bordered a train in Jesenice a policeman tapped me on the shoulder. We know everything about you, he said. I believed that they caught my friend and he told them but that was just their way of interrogating me. The judge asked if I will ever try again and I said yes I will try until I

succeed. He told me that he will give me only one month jail because I had no criminal record but if I ever came before him again I will get five years jail.

Ivanka came to see me in jail and she laughed at me for trying to escape. Her boyfriend left her so we started going together again. I would not marry Ivanka because she betrayed me once and I could not trust her again. All the time I knew that one day soon I would escape. Ivanka later married an Italian widower who had three children and they lived like a big family. I met her every time I returned home and I spent time with Bojan. He is married now and he named his son Stefan after me. He also has a daughter Francesca. My son Ashley recently went to meet Bojan but they could not communicate much because Bojan does not speak English. Ashley does not speak Slovenian but he is a Slovenian citizen now.

When I came out of jail I got back my job and my room so I stayed there for seven months. A friend then offered to help me escape by train. I had to give him all my belongings as a payment for his help. He knew the train driver's wagon had a hole under the table just big enough for me to squeeze through into the underbelly of the train which was full of soot, oil and dust. I waited for the train driver to go with his books to the office and while he was there I squeezed in. I laid there for 16 hours until the train came to Munich. When everybody left the train I came out and tried to clean myself in the toilet. A civilian policeman tapped me on the shoulder and asked for papers. I did not understand German then but I understood when he said: Straight back to Tito. I was terrified.

I was sent back to Salzburg jail in Austria for a couple of weeks. Austrians were sending back many Slovenians especially if they found out that they had a criminal record, sickness or dependent children at home.

From the jail they put me in a refugee camp and I was allowed to go out to look for work. I registered to immigrate either to Canada or Germany. After five months in 1957 I was allowed to go to Germany. I had to sign a contract to work for eighteen months in the Essen coal mine. During that time my half brother wrote to me; he asked me to send him a motorbike. He probably thought that once you are in Germany you can pick money off the street. I did not write back and we lost contact since then.

In Germany I met my best friend Franc Narobe. While others spent their time and money drinking we stayed in the barracks and played chess.

After my contract expired I could go where I pleased. I wanted to go as far from Europe as possible so Franc and I decided to register for Australia.

On 6 May 1959 we arrived on a ship to Fremantle and then by train to Bonegilla. On the ship I met Vinko Jug. Vinko knew Martin Turk who was a friend of a Slovenian

boss Paul on the Snowy Mountains project. He arranged for us to do shift work in the Tatangara tunnel. I lived with other Snowy workers in the barracks. It was a boring, miserable existence. Occasionally we went to the pictures in Cooma or to the pub in Adaminaby. I brought a camera and projector with me from Germany and started making photographs; this hobby made life a bit more bearable. I worked and saved hard. I had to be strong and resist bad company if I wanted to save and become independent. Many boys went to Cooma or Sydney on pay days to spend their money on drinks and girls but I wanted to save my money.

Vinko Jug went to visit relations in Mildura. They told him about opal mining in Andamooka. Franc Plajbas bought a car and four of us, Vinko Jug, Franc Narobe, Franc Plajbas and I decided to try our luck on opal. Anything seemed better than labouring in the dangerous tunnel. Little did I know that opal would become my life. The wages on the Snowy were good and we saved enough money for this new venture. We went to Adelaide to buy picks and shovels, ropes and candles and off we went. We stopped at Andamooka Station and started to make a tent thinking that we reached our destination but it was just a farm 27 miles before Andamooka and it was called Andamooka Station. A farmer came with a dog and a gun to ask what we were doing. After a lot of explaining he let us sleep there for the night.

Andamooka was a barren, isolated little settlement of about thirty miners. There were Aborigines specking for opal in the dugout dirt, there were about ten Czech miners and some Germans. The four of us were the first Slovenians.

It was hot; there was no shade and no water. Eventually we got a cistern coming so we could buy water to fill our tanks.

We started digging shafts by hand. It was a backbreaking job and soon we became disillusioned, exhausted and rather sad. I was thinking of what to do when I got an idea: Boys we saved money on Snowy why don't we buy a compressor and jack picks.

We towed the compressor on a dusty dirt road from Adelaide and on the way a wheel flashed past us and flew into the scrub. We realised it was a wheel from our new compressor. The studs were not tightened properly.

Ours was the first compressor on the opal field. We registered a claim each in German Gully and began sinking. Frank and I worked together and Vinko and Franc worked nearby. We had no idea really what we were looking for. A Czech fellow Vladimir came every day to check what we were doing. He was an old miner so he told us what to look for and what to do. One day he saw that we reached the opal level and told us to stop. In the dirt he picked opal chips. I yelled to Frank to stop the compressor but he did not hear me so I switched it off. He came up, Vinko and Frank

joined us and we were very excited looking at opal for the first time. We made it; we were enormously excited and happy. The news of our find spread like a wild fire.

An older Czech miner introduced himself as Petnushak; he said that we uncovered a very rich vein of opal. He warned us that the buyers would cheat us because we knew nothing about opal. He also offered to clean and class our opal before selling. I wasn't too keen but others liked this friendly kind Petnushak and so Petnushak became our partner. This was our biggest mistake. We let him work my claim where we bottomed on opal; we started sinking new shafts. We found a slip going through most of our claims carrying pockets of opal. Petnushak cleaned the opal on a hand grinder. We sold the first lot to opal buyer Jim Collins for 6400 pounds. We split the money and felt very rich. You could buy a beautiful house for that money in those days. We competed who will dig more opals but once found, opals seemed to vanish. We realised that we had valuable stones so I became suspicious. Where are other bags of rough opal? We have been warned by other miners not to trust Petnushak but he seemed so kind and honest; he bought drinks for us in the pub. Soon we found out the reason why he kept us drinking. His friend Skrusny was ratting in our diggings while Petnushak kept us in the pub.

Petnushak began complaining about his health and he made several trips to Adelaide 'to see a doctor'. Petnushak paid sixty pounds to a man to take him to Adelaide. The man warned us that Petnushak was stealing our opal and selling it in Adelaide.

Petnushak even pulled a gun on him threatening to shoot him if he told us. This man also told us about Petnushak's friend who had a nightclub where they stayed.

Petnushak opened the suitcase full of opal and said: I don't ever have to work again. I have my boys working for me and they are getting opal every day. When the night club owner saw the opal he arranged for some girls to entertain Petnushak; in the meantime he stole most of the opal. The driver had an argument with Petnushak and returned to Andamooka alone. We rushed to Adelaide and learned that Petnushak put the rest of the opal in a bank vault. Being young and inexperienced we had no idea of how to get our opal back. We took him to court and that cost us 1700 pounds but before the case came up Petnushak sold most of the opal. After all the trouble we only got 2000 pounds from him. We were disillusioned and our partnership ended. We sold the claims and divided the money equally.

In 1961 Vinko Jug went to Europe for a holiday. Franc Narobe and I went to Sydney and rented a flat in Woollahra near Slovenian religious centre where young Slovenian migrants met. The church had a good kitchen; we also had music and dances. We played games like Italian bocce.

After an operation I started working in Sydney and I put a deposit on an old house in Homebush. After a few months I leased the house to Dobrsek and left with Slovenian friends Vinko Jug, Franc Narobe and Martin Turk for Lightning Ridge opal fields.

Lightning Ridge in 1961 could hardly be called a town because it had no proper buildings and no facilities. You couldn't get in and out of town when it rained because the dirt roads were slippery and boggy; the place was a dump; there was a shack in the middle where you could buy or order a few supplies. Later they built a Diggers rest hotel where this only shack store was. There was no bore bath or town water but one could buy water from a cistern in town.

We took two 44 gallon drums of water twice a week and we pitched our tents in Coocrain. There were four other Slovenians Less, Slavko Franc and Rajko mining at Coocrain at the time. We cooked on open fire under the tree. We started digging but found mainly green and blue opal. Everybody wanted red on black then. We dumped buckets of inferior green and blue opal which could bring us a fortune today. Later other miners found lots of red on black a level lower in the same claims we mined.

Opal dealer Harold Hodges had two trams which were converted into the only motel accommodation in town. Whenever someone found opal in those days they would invite the whole town for a BBQ and although we did not know anybody we joined them.

When I returned to Sydney Dobrsek told me that his German wife had a sister Elizabeth in Germany. Elizabeth came to Sydney and we married in a civil ceremony. I became a conventional husband going to work and tending the garden and doing everything other husbands do in the city. And all the time I wanted to be back in the wilderness of the opal fields. I longed for the open spaces, for the talks and laughter of friends around evening fires, for the peace of colourful sunsets. I missed the open spaces and friendly camaraderie of opal fields. I was lost in the city; I became a nobody among strangers. I missed the desert and my friends with whom I used to share my life. I knew everybody in Andamooka and I missed the place itself. As time passed I overcame the disappointment of being cheated and nice memories of Andamooka surfaced more and more often. I asked Elizabeth to come with me to Andamooka but she did not like to leave behind the comforts of city life. I sold the house in 1963 and then Elizabeth came with me to Andamooka. I felt free again and among friends. I started buying, cutting and selling opal. I bought a drill with my friends Gabrsek and Plajbas. I found in Andamooka what I was looking for but Elizabeth was less happy every day. For her there was nowhere to go and nothing to see. One day she said: I am not going to waste my life in this desert. I am going back to Germany. If you are not coming with me I will go alone. I paid her a ticket and took her to the boat and I never saw her again. The next day I applied for the divorce.

A few years later I met a drunk slumped over the bar. It was my worst enemy Petnushak. I wanted to smash a bottle on his head but my friends stopped me. He wasn't worth it. He was just a drunken rag. He called to me: You don't talk to me anymore, you silly so and so. Let's forget what happened so long ago. Come and buy me a drink. I bought him a whisky because I wanted to hear what really happened so long ago. How much did you really get from our partnership, I asked. I didn't keep the books but I reckon I got from 60 to 70 thousand pounds. And how much did your mate get mining in our claim at night. About 30000, said Petnushak slurring his words. He later returned to Czechoslovakia and I believe died there.

I tried mining in many places but I only found bits of opal. To survive I began cutting opal half a day and mining the other half. Eventually I began buying small parcels to make doublets and triplets. As my business grew I had to go to Coober Pedy to buy opal so I could fill my orders.

As a turner fitter I was used to working with machines and metals but I learned to cut opal by experimenting. Opal industry was new and there was no one to teach me. Opal was cut solid if it was thick enough; when the colour was thin I made doublets, i.e. I glued a thin layer of colour on the dark potch which is natural opal silica without colour. Opal is fragile and can be damaged by heat or impact. In 1963 I heard that some gem stones like sapphires had a top protection made of crystal quartz which is a harder material. I bought some quartz and shaped a cover for opal doublet. That's how I made the first triplet which is opal made of three layers. I went to Percy Marks, a buyer in Sydney, and sold him some solids, some doublets and some of my first triplets. He asked me for my business card but I had none so I gave him my address. A few months later I got a letter from a solicitor because Percy sued me. I had no idea that he previously patented the triplet making. I had to pay a fine of 700 pounds. I had no idea about the law and my English was poor but an opal dealer Bruno Mauser helped me.

Eventually everybody in Andamooka started making triplets and they became very popular all over the world. Solid milky red opal was cheap at the time so it was more profitable to make triplets. From a two inch milky red opal you could slice 120 slides to make triplets. Every solid opal is unique so it is hard to find a match for pairs and sets of jewellery but when you slice it the layers are the same or very similar; they are suitable for matching sets of jewellery like bracelets, earrings etc. The colour of triplets is much brighter and more beautiful than solid milky opal because the cabochon top makes the colour reflect from different angles. The quartz also protected the opal. At the beginning I shaped every cabochon quartz dome for every triplet but soon Japan produced calibrated readymade quartz tops. By 1965 opal triplets could be found in most jewellery shops all over the world. The tops were no

longer made from quarts but from ordinary glass. I bought my first glass tops in Germany. Glass is not as strong as quartz. I bought white glass from the company that makes eye lenses. I used it for those triplets that were individual free form but good quality.

Percy did not renew his triplet making patent because he could not stop everybody.

A Hungarian, Joe Bilke and his brothers invented the first opal slicing machine. Actually Bilke took a marble slicing machine and adapted it for opal. The cutting process was slow but there was a minimal loss of opal through cutting. Bilke offered to sell me a couple of his machines at 3500 pounds each but he said that I cannot see the machine until I paid for it. I insisted on seeing it first but he said that everybody could copy it if they saw it. A German friend eventually helped me make a machine but I was already too late to make big money because the world was flooded with triplets.

Bilke had a lapidary shop and workshop. They sliced opal and made triplets secretly day and night. They made three to four thousand triplets a week.

There is not much opal left suitable for triplets. There is also less demand for triplets. Since making triplets is more labour intensive than doublets and solids it is also less profitable. I do not make triplets any more. I rather create jewellery from cheaper pieces of opal.

In 1963 a Slovenian priest Dr Mikula used to come to visit us every year in Andamooka. He said that he is visiting every Slovenian wherever they live in Australia. He collected donations for a Slovenian religious monthly magazine Misli. He said that if I had no money I could pay with opal. He returned every year.

In 1972 I moved my business to Adelaide and bought a house there. I was a regular customer at the nearby chemist shop owned by Leo, a Serb friend. Ute worked there as a pharmacy apprentice. Ute and I married in 1972. Our son Julian was born in 1973 and Ashley in 1975. Ute came with her parents from Germany when she was four years old but we spoke German in our home all the time. I did not teach my sons Slovenian because I was away a lot and they stayed with Ute.

I planned to buy a plane because I travelled to other opal and gold fields. I began travelling to Asia and Europe to sell opal and jewellery. I travelled to Andamooka and Queensland opal fields to buy rough opal. I had flying lessons but I had a few bad experiences flying with others because of dust storms. I decided that a four-wheel drive is more reliable.

Ute was complaining that I spent too much time with opals and that I did not take the family out and spend time with them. She wanted me to sell the opal and invest in real estate but I couldn't part with my colourful gems. They became my life. Every

stone is unique; every gem has the power to enchant someone. Japanese like them green, Europeans prefer them red; the brightest and colourful are rarer and more precious; some are known by name. No two opals are the same and one is more beautiful than the other.

Ute became interested in alternative medicine and she studied at university. Later she opened her own clinic with homeopathic and herbal healing; she is also a pharmacist.

In 1985 Ute left Ashley a note that she will be away for some time. She went to Sri Lanka on business but she never returned. She found somebody else. She left the boys with me. After three months I received a letter from a lawyer saying that she wanted a divorce. By 1986 we sold the house by auction and settled outside the court. I paid for boys' schooling but they lived with their mother.

After the divorce Hans, a German opal dealer offered for me to stay in his house because he was going to move to Gold Coast. Before he left he met a woman and both stayed with me in his home. Hans knew all my opals well. He and I travelled together doing business around the world. I had a parcel of about 500 carats of top quality opal which wasn't for sale.

I travelled to Lightning Ridge frequently and eventually in 1990 I bought a block of land here. I became a wheeler dealer in opal.

Before I left Hans's place to go to Lightning Ridge, I put the parcels of good opal into a safe deposit box in the bank. On each bag I wrote the colour of the opal and its weight. I did not check the bags closely at the time I deposited them in the bank or when I took them out. A friend told me later that Hans told him that he has a good buyer for top quality opal. He asked me if I still have my good stones. I became suspicious and went to check my parcels. I discovered that the opal in my plastic bags was not my opal. It was of much poorer quality. It was of the same weight and similar colour but much inferior to the opal I deposited. I was in shock. Only Hans was capable and had opportunity to swap it while I lived in his house and travelled on business. I confronted Hans but he acted offended and denied it. I could do nothing. I was so angry that I wanted to kill him.

Ute and I sometimes visited a Dutch clairvoyant who was very talented. She was helping police in criminal investigations. She told us that one of our sons was exceptionally talented. She charged 80 pounds a visit and I saw her about once a year. I did not tell her anything; I just listened to her information.

After Hans stole my opals I went to her; I did not tell her about my problem but as soon as I sat down she asked me: how much do you think he stole from you? I said one hundred fifty thousand pounds. She said: It was much more. But don't worry, he

will get his. What goes around comes around. During the next year Hans's wife divorced him and took most of his money. She threatened to tell the taxation office about his dealings if he did not pay up.

I used to socialise while I had a family. I was the foundation member of the Slovenian club in Adelaide and we socialised there every weekend. I know most Slovenians in Adelaide but I lost contact. Their club has good programs for their children; they have schools and games and concerts and family celebrations.

We were competing with friends who will have a better house; we went for picnics and dinners but since my divorce I live alone. I don't care anymore.

Lightning Ridge is opal business; there is no social life, no closeness, no connection; people come and go and you never hear from them again. Everybody is here to make a quick buck and people are cheating each other all the time. I would like to go somewhere else but I can't decide where. I would go away but then I would have to start from scratch again. Anyway I would be alone and a stranger wherever I went. I am lonely here and I will be lonely elsewhere. I could buy a beautiful home but I don't need it.

I get tired of life. I feel that life does not interest me anymore. Everything seems futile. Sometimes I feel like: Why do I have to keep going?

I do not like going to people's houses because they might not like it. Some people like to meet new people but it is hard for me to begin liking and trusting new people. They are likely to ask for favours and money if they get too close.

I don't go out much. I have nothing in common with the drunks in the club. Most proved to be dishonest users and I don't need them. I know the history of many people; I know how their friendships and relationships were broken because of opal. I live in my workshop; I cook for myself; nobody complains about my cooking or about my lifestyle.

My boys tell me to enjoy myself and spend my money but I find more joy in work than in spending money. I grew up to work and save so spending is new to me. I created what I have from nothing and I believe that everybody should do the same. If you really want to do something you will find a way of doing it. Maybe necessity really is a mother of invention. Maybe I wouldn't achieve everything I achieved if I could rely on the family to do things for me. I would not be as strong as I am.

I don't like children just sitting and waiting to inherit from their parents. Life means developing skills and trying your best.

Once a week I like to go pistol shooting. 35 years ago I got robbed in Adelaide a few times so I applied for a gun licence. I was told that I had to join the shooter's club and since then I really enjoy this sport.

I watch the news and read the paper but films and stories don't interest me. I am happiest when I am making jewellery and cut gem stones.

I am never homesick because I never had a home; I am not even homesick for Slovenia because I lived in misery there. Most people were miserable during and after the war but most of them had families to share their misery with. I was on my own.

Times have changed and Slovenia prospered; now illegitimate children are as welcome as those who have two parents. Slovenians at home also have everything they want and need but they live their lives and I am not a part of that.

People often tell me that I have to teach them about opal business but I don't want to. Let them learn the hard way like I had to. Once I showed a lady what I do and on the way out she just said: Now I know everything. She never said: thank you. On the street she said to me: I know why you don't want to share your business secrets. You are scared that I would take over your business. People are nasty like that. I don't trust anyone. I stay on my own, I prefer being on my own. I don't want to bother anyone and I don't like anyone to bother me.

If I had another life I would spend it dealing with Queensland opal. It is more stable and easier to shape and mould. I could have bought a trailer load of Queensland boulder when people did not know much about it but now it is almost as expensive as black opal.

I always wanted to create something special. I did not have much formal education but I became expert in things I like to do. Opal industry is only a small part of a huge jewellery industry. As a fitter turner I was used to working with metals so I started working with gold and silver. I created my own ways of doing things. I read magazines to enrich my own ideas as I create master pieces from gold and silver. It takes me a long time to fashion a piece of jewellery and then I have casts made to fit the stones in.

Many people all over the world steal other people's ideas. When I sell a piece of jewellery I made someone can easily take out the stone and have more casts made of the piece. That happens in every other area of trade, of course, and nothing much can be done about it. I make individual setting for special free form stones.

There are always dangers of being cheated or robbed in opal business. If partners don't cheat you, opal cutters and dealers will. You are also always in danger carrying money and gemstones when you are doing business. I travelled all over the world but

I could never relax and have fun because at the back of my mind were always opals. Sometimes I left them with friends, sometimes I put them in the lockers or safe deposit boxes but I was never completely sure that they were safe. I was often in Frankfurt and there are crooks at the airport and at the railway stations waiting for the next victim. I understand many languages and I heard them talking about their plans. They had no idea that I could understand them.

I'd like to go for a real holiday and enjoy myself but there is always something holding me back. If I could only get rid of all my property and pack my bag. Belongings I love became my great burden; I want to unload and be free.

On 26 March 06 I went to Andamooka and stayed there in a motel with people I knew for many years. Heather and her boyfriend are running the motel and the post office. I hid two bags of opal behind a shower curtain before I went for dinner in a restaurant next door. There are cameras on the entrance and inside the motel so it seemed pretty safe because I was right there next to my room. I did not even check my bags of opal while I was there but when I returned home I had a shock. One bag had a lock on it and it wasn't touched but there was opal missing from the other bag. They stole over thirty thousand dollars worth of opal. What could I do? I had no way of proving what they did. There were cameras but they must have used them to monitor my movements so they could steal while I was in the restaurant. I was so upset that I could not sleep for weeks. I tried to think of how I could get my opal back but there is no way. I tried to ring Andamooka police but I could not even get anyone to answer. I was going mad about it.

I heard later that Heather and her boyfriend stole other people's money and opal. They knew what I was carrying; they knew all the people that stayed with them.

It is hard for me to trust anyone. Perhaps it is best if you own nothing; at least you can sleep in peace.

I only work now because I enjoy creating special pieces; I do not need to make money anymore so I can afford to be creative and spend time on things I like. I am carving opal. Creating these pieces helps me pass the time and keeps me sane.

I wanted to teach my sons to take over my business but they are not interested.

About twenty years ago a Swiss man and a Frenchman discovered the formula for chemically growing opal. They made perfect stones a little harder than opal. It is hard to tell them apart from the natural opal. They sold their secret to Japan under the name Gilson. Now many people tried to grow their opal but nobody else has been really successful. Lately they are selling a plastic version of synthetic opal which can be used for triplets or inlays. Gilson opal is sold from two to one thousand dollars per gram but this plastic version goes from two to twelve dollars a gram I used some of

their materials and it is magnificent. Most people could be fooled into believing that they have real opal while they only have plastic. When you are a reputable businessman you have to tell the buyer exactly what you are selling. There are fines of ten thousand if you sell something else for opal. Nobody can fool me though about any kind of opal. I have seen it all and experimented with everything.

There used to be quite a lot of matrix material in Andamooka; it can be very beautiful and often much nicer than real opal at the same price. I bought a lot of that material and treated it. Black matrix is the most expensive and does not need treatment but other varieties do. There is a soft porous matrix that can be treated in a few hours and there is a hard variety that takes weeks. It seems that every matrix dealer has a different recipe for treating matrix. Generally it is cooked in sulphur acid and sugar so the material becomes black and the colour stands out. Some people even treated it in used gear box oil.

Ashley who is 29 is a musician; he has piano concerts and travels around. He is also a composer and music teacher.

Julian who is 31 is a public servant interested in computers. He got a Slovenian passport and is thinking of working in Europe.

I was never interested in politics and religion. I am not saying that I don't believe in God but there are too many religions and people fighting each other for their God. I read the Bible but it makes me sick to read about people asking God to help them kill their neighbours. It has always been like that, people saying that they are fighting for their God when they were really fighting for themselves.

## *Ivan Cimerman among Slovenian Opal Prospectors in the Heart of Australia*

Man likes to look for eternity in moments: into the deepest corner of his soul he encloses a precious memory and into velvet padded little boxes he closes a ruby, a sapphire, or an opal – something rare, unique, precious. It is easier to fight the desert of everyday life if in the moments of hardest distress, poverty, and loneliness something permanently beautiful shines through the darkness. I've come across various searchers and collectors in my life, but none like the opal prospectors I met last July in Coober Pedy 852 kilometres or an eleven-hour bus ride from Adelaide.

Janez Ritoc, president of the Adelaide Slovenian Club gave me the names of some Slovenian prospectors, hardened veterans in search of luck; travellers and adventurers who came to this Australian desert.

My travelling companion, theatre director Zvone Šedlbauer set out on our journey to find his brother Boris, whom he did not see for nine years.

The devilish, industrious, modest and tough tribe of Slovenians can be found everywhere, and as if possessed by the devil, they have proved themselves in the hardest workplaces of the world: the gold mines of Colorado, Klondike and Alaska, U. S. A., in the coal mines of Aumetz, Merlebach and Sallaumines in France, in the coal mines of Westphalia and Ruhr region in Germany, in Belgium, Netherlands and God knows where else!

Now here in this wild dynamic place where people from all continents have come, people of all kinds-vagabonds, adventurers, rebels, clear poetic souls, the restless and impoverished, the granite strong, drunkards, cowards, and those who just pop up in these places, get scared of the sand and of the heat that can reach fifty degrees Centigrade in summer, and continue on around the world when the illusion lets them down. But not our people! Our people are like the cobras and scorpions who adapt to the severest desert conditions!

The bus is an excellent transcontinental, equipped with television, toilet and reclining seats. At the front of the bus is a lattice bumper of thick logs which reaches to the driver's nose \_ to protect the bus from kangaroos!

Bright morning breaks over a landscape covered with sparse bushes; twisted gum tree trunks, young eucalyptus, thorny bushes, "mulga" and thistles of all sorts in the colour of freshly-baked bricks. It was a long journey, from seven in the evening to six the next morning. Coober Pedy is only an intermediate stop: Stuart's Highway continues on to Aboriginal holy mountain Uluru, fantastically shaped mountain chain Olgas, Mataranka Volcanic Thermal Pool; where we have been rowing in canoes,

deep in Natimuk Gorge. We later enjoyed Kakadu National Park with all kinds of tropic animals; feeding crocodiles in East Alligator River; passing through Aboriginal Arnhem Land, on to Darwin, the main Australian town on the north.

### Coober Pedy – the Wild West of Australia

This mining town grew suddenly when in 1915 young Willie Hutchinson found extraordinarily beautiful pieces of precious stone, "floaters", on the surface southwest of the settlement. The news spread like lightning around the world, and newcomers of all kinds crowded this place without trees, water, or valleys, no streams like those by which the American Yankees in their Wild West built cottages, stables and houses and staked out pasture land for their cattle. Each of the men who arrived here had to forget every comfort civilization offered in the cities.

Zvone Šedlbauer and I share the same destination although different impulses drive us. Tone came to Australia as a director with Slovenian actors to direct Tone Partljič's satirical play My father, Kulak of Socialism, and now he is on his way to see his brother. I am on my way as a journalist and editor, searching for real stories, about adventurous Slovenian "janezes", opal miners.

Boris Šedlbauer arrived in a car bearing the sign "Explosives", symbol of opal mining. I looked for the information office or the police station, to ask where Slovenian miners Tone Predikaka from Ptujška gora, Avrelj Krmac from the village of Marezige above Izola and Albin Oblak from Škofije live. Boris showed me to a dugout where Tone slept. It was six o'clock in the morning! The settlement wakes up slowly. I climb the hill behind the houses. The dusty main street, Hutchinson Street, drags across the town. The most important buildings stand by it: the self-service grocery, the post office, a church which is dug underground – only a small steeple and a cross are above ground – and the Opal Cave, a hotel where one can spend the night and get breakfast for \$78. The heart of the settlement are the fifteen Opal Shops and jewellery articles made of opals of all kinds, cheaper and more expensive ones, the same as one can find in Adelaide, Sydney or Melbourne: broaches with opals, rings with opals, bracelets, necklaces. But the cunning desert lions don't shop here: they dig their own opals. The brick red hill all drilled with holes is the heart of a former opal-rich mine. Here you can see how hard working opal miner pioneers of Coober Pedy lived seventy or eighty years ago.

Working conditions didn't change much! Just the newest machines took over previous hand working.

There are restaurants for tourist and watering holes for miners from all over the world: the Italo-Australian Miners Club, the Greek Community Hall, the Opal Inn Dining Room and Lounge, the Desert Café. Cheaper than the Opal cave are the

Underground Hotel, the underground Umoona Mine, and Radeka's Duguot Motel, mostly used by students

About 6 km out of town you can visit an extraordinary dugout, changed to a museum and a flat, named CROCODILE HARRY'S NEST. It looks like an enormous molehill, all drilled through by opal tunnels. In the warmest "sleeping room" waits a bed, surrounded by women's' souvenirs and picturesque drawings with names and dates of the visitors on the walls. Harry Von Blumenthal made this museum with exhibits from his former life, and another, surrealistic too. This adventurer was once a famous crocodile hunter and movie actor. His dugout is a place which is known as a source of positive energy, peace and contemplation. Young girls from all over the world are roaming to this underground museum as pilgrims. They stay for a day or two, meditate and pray for their souls which are then more or less cured of bad influences of the civilization.

Slovenian pilgrim just can't imagine a winter, Christmas and New Year \_ without any snow! But here we are, near the Capricorn, Slovenian people, born at the feet of Alps in Middle Europe \_ under the Southern Cross, in the warmth of shining stars! Is here a real danger for us, born as snowflakes \_ to be melted!? We were lucky to arrive in the middle of winter on July 14th when winter is such that temperature in Coober Pedy reaches 26 degrees centigrade. In Australia you can see snow only in the Snowy Mountains near Canberra where many of Slovenian opal miners who live here now, once worked on the tunnels, dams and roads. They were building the biggest hydroelectric Australian system, named: Snowy Mountains Project in the years 1949 – 1974. Slovenian writer Ivan Kobal wrote about it in a book Snowy Mountains Project, Cradle of a New Australia.

When the sandy desert reaches up to 50 degrees Centigrade in the summer, it is best to live in a dugout, a flat earth cabin dug underground into a hill where they once dug for opals. Tone, Avrelij, and Albin live in dugouts; only Boris, the fourth partner of the group of opal miners, doesn't.

In the yard of Tone Predikaka's dugout stands an old caravan, and early in the morning I shake hands with Miklavž Reven from Hotedršica, near Logatec. He is a welder by profession and he was a construction worker on Australian dams and roads; he also worked on railway bridges, high upon in the Andi mountain chain in Chile. Now he would like to return to the village where he was born. But! Living his bohemian life, he hasn't saved enough money so he is now searching for the richest opal vein in his whole life. Good luck, Miklavž! But how will you prove to authorities that you are Slovenian by origin, when you return home? Miklavž is a war child; his father worked in Germany in 1939, when Hitler attacked Poland. His birth certificate was lost.

There are no records kept in Australia about one's working life. When you reach a certain age, you are entitled to a pension regardless of how many years you worked. And this pension is the same for everyone unless people saved and can support themselves.

Geologists claim that opals were formed during the tertiary period around 70 million years ago. Opal is a silicate formation similar in chemical composition to crystals, containing six to ten percent water (H<sub>2</sub>O), 2.5% Aluminium Oxide (AL<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>), 0.9% Calcium Oxide, 0.4% Sodium Oxide (NaO<sub>2</sub>), 0.3% Hematite – Iron, 0.19% Titanium Dioxide (TiO<sub>2</sub>), and some other elements. The richer and deeper the play of an opal's colour is, the more valuable it is. The prospectors from Coober Pedy find the most precious opals 30 meters deep. The opal fields spread over an area of 640 square kilometres. We drive among the hills of dug and drilled silicate rubble that seem like huge molehills.

Boris's car jumps wildly on the rocks and holes in spite of its double springs. Greyish-red fine dust is everywhere. Mobile cranes rise here and there above the dull plains with their boilers and long pipes through which waste rubble and sand come out from the depths of the opal pits. In the pits the tank-like steel-jawed diggers roar. A huge bulldozer was digging, driving and loading, making opal mullock hills. Warning metal sheet with: DANGER - LOOSE GROUND - KEEP OUT didn't keep me away from fantastic photo motives! We stopped by a 90 centimetre wide shaft above which stands an iron frame with a steel rope, down which the men descend every day. Helmet on my head, spoke between my legs, I descend into the depths, landing some fifteen meters down in a horizontal shaft. The shaft is neatly, almost symmetrically dug out in layers. At the front end of the shaft sits the "head worker" on a machine specially made for digging, with spiral steel jaw that bites deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth. The shaft is some four to five meters high and perhaps three and occasionally four meters wide. Fresh air is pushed into the pit by compressor. Care must be taken that the layers aren't under-dug, for the driver of the machine can be buried. The driver, Albin Oblak, sits on this small "tank" with caterpillar tracks. The "tank" must dig itself firmly into the ground so that the jaw can grab a new bite. There are Albin Oblak, Tone Predikaka, and Avrelj Krmac. The fourth member of the partnership is our guide, Boris Šedlbauer, who is looking after his brother and me. We would like to help too, but this is not a place for amateurs! The machine drones, the air circulates through vertical shafts drilled to the surface. We approach the jaws that grab for a bluish-violet opal vein hiding under the innumerable layers of silicate sandstone. Albin slows down the machine and waits. Through the dust the strong beams from the flashlights shows they have dug into a vein! We hold our breath: Dreams, realized dreams! But men were cooler than visitors. They check the opals falling in chunks from their thousands and thousands of years-old bed. They bring a

small can where other opals glitter already. I take a rough and unpolished, glittering blue-violet-gold rock covered with mud in my hand. And I talk to this glittering stone: So, you are the one who causes happiness and tragedy, murders, unfaithfulness, and silent, unexpected joy! Albin Oblak, who is responsible for cleaning and sorting, will take the stones home. Everything is veiled in great secrecy, and there is a silent agreement among miners not to tell anyone else about one's own finds! Opals attract thieves. Many have been caught by the police and there have been shootings too! There is a sacred "love" connecting miners with opals and danger; there is lust for wealth that will fulfil all their dreams. There is also an evergreen fear: 'Will some gang rob me and steal my precious stones? The fear and hope!

We are pulled into the bright day, my eyes sore from the light and the silent, mysterious lustre. Not far from us on a mullock heap kneels a group of six Aborigines noodling for opals. Dirty but with glowing black eyes they rummage out their daily bread from the waste materials of the miners. Those who don't have enough money for "real" opal mining seave the dirt on the opal mullocks.

Tone Predikaka from Ptujška Gora, Štajerska Region, Slovenia travelled the distances of Europe and Australia until he landed in Coober Pedy. Born before the Second World War, he was hardly old enough to become a soldier:

He tells about his war: In 1945 Yugoslavia was full of Chetniks from Serbia and Ustashi from Croatia, who did not want to join partisans and Tito. They wanted independent states of their own; they did not want to be a part of Federal association consisting of different Jugoslavs republics.

We were ordered to clean out the country of Germans and any quislings. Our commander ordered us: Don't dump any prisoners of war on my back, have done with them yourselves! Whoever isn't our ally, a Russian, an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a partisan, and is armed, kill him yourselves!

It was on May 9th when we marched into Ljubljana victorious and beautiful girls covered us with flowers and kisses. We were the liberators! Slovenian flags were everywhere! Oton Župančič spoke from the balcony of the old University building in Ljubljana. Girls plied us with drinks, crowds gathered, wild and ready to celebrate. Everyone was having a ball, everyone was dancing except me! My superiors placed me on guard at Liberation Square. Beautiful girls tried to seduce me but I had to stand guard with my machine gun, my mistress. I've come from the front where I've been sleeping with this mistress; she saved me and my war comrades several times.

Jesus Christ! People were simply lifting me up! I was twenty, for God's sake. Hey, tell me, are Ljubljana girls and women still as beautiful as they were in 1945?

Yes, Tone, even more beautiful, because today they are not frightened or hungry like they were during the Italian and German occupation.

I have been in Australia for 35 years. I helped my daughter Dragica to open a bar at Ptujška Gora; now I'm getting ready to retire.

Avrelj Krmac is from the village Marezige, above Izola. This is my home, says Avrelj, shoving me around the large dugout where he lives alone with his parrot and his opals. When we open a shaft, we must first prepare a hole wide enough to lower the digging machine. Only then can we start digging horizontally. A new opal vein usually runs in a 30 to 40 centimetres thick layer; the special colour of the soil betrays it. Between 1974 and 1979 times were very dangerous in Coober Pedy. Those were the times when rich veins of opals of a special kind and high quality were found in the 17 Mile area. In one vein only one prevailing colour in opal can be found or else multi-coloured ones of different quality and value. Normally a vein is one and a half centimetres thick, a richer one more, even five or eight centimetres. Coober Pedy is famous for milky opal with green, violet, blue and red iridescence. Andamooka Opal Fields, about 230 kilometres southeast of here, is known for bright, transparent opals that glow red, blue, violet on lighter backgrounds. Lightning Ridge in New South Wales, 750 kilometres from Sydney, is famous for its black opals, the most precious in the world. Black opal radiates strong colours, shining from the black base.

I came here twenty-four years ago. When I was digging my flat into the hill I came across opals for which I got about \$1.700. My friends and I only noticed them when we were clearing out the rubble! They were a particularly valuable kind, too!

The five large rooms belonging to this lone wolf opal hunter, a real underground palace, fill me with admiration for this bachelor from Primorska who is said to have emigrated because of a disappointment in love. An Italian girl Mirella told him: You are a very handsome man, and I love you very much. But you are so poor that I can't marry you.

Avrelj decided to become rich as quick as possible. He became an opal miner. When I visited him 15 years later he was still a bachelor with a new parrot, still digging for a rich vein. Just his hair became grey and the two shining sparks in his eyes disappeared.

You've got to be tough to survive on opal fields, says Avrelj. Some adventurers give up in days, others in weeks and months. To start mining you need money for fuel, maintenance and machines. I arrived with seven thousand pounds in my pocket, this was an enormous sum thirty-four years ago; I joined a good team! We bought a compressor and a digger. The settlement was just starting to develop. Three small shops were open, there was no inn here; we had to order supplies in the store every

week. Each of us did the shopping and cooking for one week in turn. We tried several times to invite good hearted women to marry one of us and cook for all of us. When potential brides saw this dusty place where snakes, scorpions and dingos live they escaped by first bus back to Adelaide.

Albin Oblak from Škofije, near Slovenian-Italian Border is the only one of our guys in Coober Pedy who is married ( to Audrey, an Australian). His pleasant dugout is large and neatly arranged.

We dug it with our own hands, says Albin. Other lucky diggers travelled to Europe to spend easy come easy go money but that's not for us! We would like to return to Adelaide, buy a little house and live there.

Albin shows me around their dugout of 110 square meters. Huge piles of silicate opal-bearing layers of earth are above us. In the bedroom there is a ventilation shaft covered outside like a chimney so that rain doesn't get into it:

When I was preparing this land, I dug a hole in the yard for an outhouse and saw chocolate-coloured earth the drill started throwing at my feet. Of course we widened the hole, tells Albin. An opal vein! My home is standing on opals! These mines were abandoned a long time ago, but not even the most experienced prospectors can precisely determine how capriciously the earth layers were broken up millions of years ago when the opals were formed. So, we followed the vein and dug out \$27,000 worth of precious stones! You see, there's a tree here now and flowers grow around it. They are the love of my wife Audrey who is a great support to me, the pillar of our home.

Albin cooks the steaks while Audrey makes a salad. In this friendly, cool dugout I feel that Slovenian vein runs all over the big globe with men who are brave, who take chances and dare to challenge fate. I wish to bring this veins home, enriched with experience, skill and knowledge, to work in our mines and to find opals in the hearts of their people at home. In their home villages the roofs are sinking. Fertile Slovenian land, together with abandoned houses, which for centuries belonged to their ancestors, waits for them. Poor and exhausted old peasants are selling for a poor price to strangers and tourists swarming like ravens from whole Europe!

Albin starts telling his story:

I left my homeland in 1955. There were five children in my family. I became a joiner. My sister and I remained alone in the world; all the others died. When I was twenty-one, I was working in Koper and I didn't have a real home, so I decided to find my fortune in the world. I headed to Trieste, to the immigration department, handed them my application, and got permission to go to Australia.

How that tore my heart! After almost one month's travelling by a ship, we came to our Promised Land waiting with her wonders, demanding and lonely, surrounded by wast oceans. I arrived in the Northern Territory and when I got fed up with joinery, I headed for Tennant Creek. There I worked as a carpenter for fifteen years. I was in a high, really high position – on the roofs, Albin smiles. It was hard and dangerous work

in  
wind,  
heat  
and  
rain. I  
was  
sick  
of  
the



Ivan Cimerman with Joze and Cilka Zagar

constant danger of roofing work. We were colourful company of Croats, Serbs, Italians, Greeks, and others. In Tennant Creek was one of the biggest gold mines. In house construction I earned about twenty-two pounds a week, and my food and flat were free, supplied by the mining company we worked for. In March 1971 I arrived in Coober Pedy where I found some other Slovenians, strong industrious guys. There were Tone Predikaka, Avrelj Krmac, Ivan Karnel, Ivan Parapat, Slavko Javšnik, Danilo Puš, Matin Turk, and others. Before my arrival I had sold my house in Tennant Creek so I could start with my own share at machine digging. I bought a hill and dug my own dugout in my spare time. I worked in the mine and usually came home around four or five. My wife and me, we live for each other, we don't have children. In this room I clean and sort out the opals that the four of our team found. We've got to

trust each other and stick together. You can't do anything by yourself, and you can't even think of working without the machine and enough capital to start.

After having heard all those stories I asked myself: "What keeps about 100 families in Coober Pedy together so long at this edge of the Desert? Is it only a chance for lucky ones to find exceptional opals, and become rich over night? Or is there something deeper, much warmer human bond, lasting long time after they return closer to more comfortable settlements or cities? Yes, this lonely desert place offers something warm and human. Something you can't find any more in big cities where business rules; where you get lost in the traffic of humanity; where unknown neighbours live in strange fortresses; blocks made of steel, concrete and glass ; where it is so difficult to find a real friend, or devoted wife. Speed, competition and success rule the cities! In Coober Pedy you can still find old fashioned friendships and honest neighbours, who will help you without being paid. Families live on the opal fields, and often women mine with their husbands. Children are quick at finding opal on the mullock heaps. Girls often work the mine with their fathers, and groups of young women form partnerships amongst themselves.

Strong and hard working women who live and work on the opal fields take care of everything while their husbands are digging underground. They help with their children's schooling, drive hundreds of kilometres for supplies, which they can't find in Coober Pedy, cook and clean – and still they are full of optimism and humour.

Men stick together; they share information about opal and mining. Albinos Promised Land demands from new coming opal hunter's strength, courage and pioneers' enthusiasm. Due to successful opal miners the fame of opal rainbow extends all over the world.

## ***Mirko Cuderman's Journey from OREHOVLJE to MT. MEE***

I was the oldest of three children born on 11.9 19940 in a small village Orehovlje belonging to the parish Predoslje with a beautiful church of St. Kxist. Our parish was a self-sufficient community with primary producers and trades people operating from their homes. I finished primary school before I became apprenticed as a fitter turner. Apprentices were the lowest rang of the workforce in my day; I had to work hard and I got paid about 1000 dinars a month when a pair of shoes was about 5000.

Our parish is famous because nearby is a beautiful castle Brdo; the place is so beautiful that Tito claimed it as one of his holiday places. He had the most beautiful places all through Yugoslavia in constant readiness for his visit. Tito was supposed to be the representative of the working class but he enjoyed the wealth beyond the imagination of working class; he had his own hunting lodges, lakeside castles, and beach residences with servants ready at any moment to grant his every wish.

People resented Tito's red engine roaring to Brdo because even church bells had to remain silent while he was in residence.

My parents were pious, honest, hardworking people; they did not talk about politics, because they were afraid of us children repeating their opinions in school but I knew that they were very much hurt by unjust communist regime. My brother and I once tore down placards with communist propaganda and we caused a lot of trouble for our family. People at home lived in fear. We realized that there were no prospects of a better future for us within Yugoslavia so we started planning our escape. My brother Nace was only 14 and I was 18. I would soon be recruited for the army and I did not want to go. Nace joined a youth mountaineering group to make himself familiar with the Austrian border which ran along the mountain peaks. In April 1959 we went to explore the area near the border.

Nace was naturally adventurous and used to the mountains but I was more timid, cautious type. When we first tried to escape I chose the wrong path lower down the slope and we had to return. Next time we came to Celovec railway station and boarded the train to Salzburg but police took us into the refugee camp where they interrogated us for two weeks before sending us home. We were too young and not experienced enough; we had no idea what to say to get the political asylum. Once back in Slovenia police put us in chains; they took us to Brestanica where we had to spend one month in goal. This whole experiment served us right because during our stay in the refugee camp we learned a lot about migration processes.

Next time I tried it on my own. Nace came with me to the mountain STOL and then he returned. Nace wrote to me recalling those frightening but exciting days of our escape. After I escaped the police came with a search warrant. They gave Nace a suspended sentence because he was under aged. Nace was later working in Berlin for over 15 years as a mechanical engineer and he now built a house at home in Sencur. I also have ten years younger sister Paula living in Brnik; she is married and has three sons. Her son Uros renovated our home.

In Celovec railway station I carefully bought a ticket to Salzburg. I had a plastic bag of personal effects because I intended to swim across the Salco River from Austria to Germany. My aim was to get to Nierenberg as I was told that in those days only American camp in Nuremberg was accepting refugees. Unfortunately due to heavy rain the river seemed too dangerous so I had to return to Halle and then I walked to Schulenburg bei Berchtengaden and then with the bus to Bad Reichenhall and from there by train to Munich. In the park there I met a friendly girl who suggested that I find accommodation in a student's boarding house. I had no passport so the police took me to the watch house. After two weeks of interrogation they returned me to Slovenia. On the way home I escaped from the train and was hiding on different trains to Beljak; from there I took a train towards Italian border which I intended to cross on foot. An old lady directed me to the police station in Trbizi. It was late so they told me to come the next day but I begged them to take me because I was starved and tired. My last meal was two days ago in a Munich jail. They put me in a dark cell and I slept until at nine next morning a young Slovenian girl greeted me in Slovenian. She was an interpreter.

They fed me and then interrogated me before they sent me to Udine and later to Trieste. I did not tell them that I came through Austria because I was scared that they would return me. I was in Trieste refugee camp Sann Sabot from 17<sup>th</sup> August until on 24th November 1959 I got a political asylum. Everybody in the camp lived in fear of being sent back. When they sent me to the camp in Napoli I finally felt free.

Life in the camp Forigrotta in Naples was quite carefree. I often went to town with my friends. We even climbed Mt Vesuvius but after walking the whole day we failed to conquer it. We had to return from  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way up because we had no more time. On December 7 1959 they sent me to Latino where my emigration process began. On December 22 I went to Australian immigration commission and got my visa on February 8. From Latina my friends and I often travelled to Rome to sell blood. We heard that Italians paid well to blood donors only you had to bargain with them. In my group I spoke English best so we went to American hospital where we were offered good price for our blood. I got enough money to buy myself a cardboard suitcase to take to Australia. In the shop I also noticed a large baby doll which I knew

my mother really wanted to decorate her bed with. You could only buy this doll in Italy so I bought it and posted it to her. Everything was bought with my blood money. We have all been happy with our trade although we knew that Italians cheated us and took more blood than they paid for.

While in Rome we visited Slovenian priest Dr. Robic Pavel who often visited us in the camp. I was surprised that he lived in a small modest flat. He was on the way out so he told us to cook ourselves something for lunch; he was going to join us soon. All three of us used our cooking skills to prepare the potato meal we used to cook at home. I had to cook this meal when I came from school so my parents had dinner ready when they returned from the fields. The priest praised our meal but when we told him that we sold our blood he scolded us.

That is prostitution, he said. You sold your body. We promised not to do it again. We remembered a huge jar which we had to fill with blood.

The priest Dr. Robic Pavel was very generous; out of his own poverty he distributed goods among Slovenians who were in a greater need. In this priest I first saw in practice the faith in God. This priest patiently explained our faith and the suffering of Slovenian nation due to communist regime. At the time I was enthusiastic about the poet Prezihov Lovrenc and I contradicted the priest with the words of the poet and with the words of communist propaganda we learned at school. The priest took no offence and I am still grateful to him for that. He had connections in Rome and he sent us there to see religious relics like the part of the original cross on which Jesus was crucified, the crown made of thorns, nails and the spear that pierced Jesus' heart. Other groups had their guides explaining everything to them and when we told them who sent us they gave us a Slovenian guide who explained everything to us for free. We walked all over Rome and saw much more than ordinary tourists. With us was Joze Zuzek who knew Rome well and we never got lost. Joze had good memory and he followed tram lines on the crossings.

Food was very bad in Latina camp. My friend bricklayer Lojze Markic often found work on building sites. Once he bought me a piece of spec and I am still grateful for that gift. In our camp were also Slavko Mrak and Cvetko Kabaj who got a job as a camp policeman; eventually we all came to Melbourne. I arrived to Melbourne on May 29 1960 on the ship Sydney. Dr Robic told me to find the Slovenian priest Fr Bazilij and I also recommended my friends to him. In the port of Melbourne I had a pleasant surprise from the Commonwealth Bank; it was a Welcome letter written in Slovenian.

From Melbourne we travelled by train to Bonegilla. I liked everything about Bonegilla; the food was good, there was freedom, lovely scenery, I still remember the magpies singing.

I met a Croatian priest who found a good Croatian family that gave me board; they also found me a job in Armitage Ware where I stayed for three years

I first bought a Buick 1936 car which I sold after a few months and bought a new 1960 Morris Major. Dutch co-worker Cornelius guaranteed my loan. I soon found new accommodation with an English family Ken in Jenny Howard in Fawkner so I could learn English; from there I moved to Brunswick and Fessenden and finally to Pascoe Vale to Car Hartman family. Mrs. Veronica Car also washed and cooked for me. All this time I was in contact with boys from Slovenian Baraga home where I spent most weekends. In this Slovenian company I met Anica Molan and we soon became engaged and on November 16. 1963 Fr Bazilij married us in St Patrick's cathedral in Melbourne. Anica comes from a good Slovenian family. Her mother Anica and father Vinko with her brothers Edvard, Vinko and Andrej were very much involved in Slovenian community in Melbourne. Just before our marriage I paid off my car so I entered a marriage union without debt, but with not much money.

After marriage we rented a flat in Glenroy Thurana Street. I also changed my job because I wanted to return to my trade as a fitter and turner locksmith. I started in Hilton Hosiery as a maintenance fitter. I later worked in Ford factory in Broadmeadows. I was in charge of the afternoon shift when they brought for repair the car of the American president L.B. Johnson because demonstrators splashed it with red paint.

Before Anica and I decided to build ourselves a home we decided to see what it was like in Queensland. We took with us two years old son Mirko and six months old son Vilko. On the way we stopped in Sydney where Fr Bernard gave us the address of Stanko Plaznik and Janez Primožič. It rained all the way but as soon as we reached Queensland border the sunshine greeted us. We considered that a good omen. In Queensland I started to work in Bulimba where I repaired small fishing boats but soon I became a fitter/turner in Shut Upton Water and resource Commission; later I worked for Martin Engineering on the big lathe. With the help of Stanko Plaznik I got our first flat in Moorooka; soon we bought two and a half acre of land with an unfinished house in Moggill where our third son Bernard was born.

With the help of Alojz Klekar I got a job on construction of the Bougainville mine in 1970. I had to stay and work there for at least six months to get a paid return ticket. The pay was excellent with full board included so that I could send all my earnings home to Anica. In these six months I earned enough to pay off the house in Moggill. On my return we sold the place and bought 20 acres in Park Ridge, Andrew Road and another old house which we sold and invested the money in the new house in Andrew Rd. In 1981 we sold that house and bought the land on Mt. Mee where we built a house called MIRANI; the name has the first three letters from our names

Mirko and Anica. I found work on a saw-mill as a boiler attendant in a nearby town Caboolture. I worked there until my retirement.

Now I have time to reflect on my past and my present. I am very happy about my decision to immigrate to Australia. I am repeating this every day: Thank God that I am in this good, kind, sunny country where I enjoy the freedom and kindness; where all citizens have the same rights and a chance to aspire to prosper and live free. I really thank God I am in Australia. The good attitude towards us migrants and the kindness of Australians impressed me from the beginning. In Europe we Slovenians were often treated as inferior foreigners. Here we are all equal; I specially appreciate the fact that there are no obvious class distinctions between the rich and the poor. My first employer did not even allow me to call him Mister but just Bill. It was hard for me to get used to that because I respected him; he came every day to work in clean white shirt with a tie and an overcoat but he came to talk with me. I was brought up to respect my superiors. I also had a fear of superiors. Here in Australia it isn't unusual for highly educated, rich people with high positions to socialise with simple workers either at work or in the church, hotels or in the public without making themselves look more important. Humility and simplicity seem to have priority and people appreciate common sense and sincerity; that is why I really like Australia. I think it is stupid to judge people according to their wealth, position, and nationality. I value the Truth although I am still learning about its real value.

All my life I was observing the injustices everywhere. When I first came to Australia there was a lot of talk about the injustices in South America and South Africa and South Vietnam. There was little known or said about the victims of communism. I felt that ignoring the suffering of nations under communist dictatorship was ignoring the Truth; nobody wanted to know about the millions suffering and dying as victims of communism. Slowly I came to realisation that wherever the injustices occurred there were witnesses to testify to the Truth. God who is the Truth makes sure there are witnesses. One way or another Truth comes out and prevails. Nothing remains hidden forever. Knowing that God is Truth and that he will finally judge the good and the bad, this is the greatest consolation for me. Knowing that, I am no longer anxious about the events around me; knowing that God will judge us all, gives me hope while I am looking for real life virtues and values. I really have nothing much to boast about but although I have no high education or knowledge God's hand guided me all the days of my life and I never lacked anything.

I was always satisfied with my new country Australia. In 1968 I lost my driving licence because I lost too many points and I rebelled against the police and politics but after my Slovenian holidays in 1979 I liberated myself from this animosity. On my return from Frankfurt I felt so happy to see the Qantas plane. I was disappointed with European way of life; arrogance of people, high prices and fear of authorities made me long to be back in Australia. Although I am very happy in Australia in my heart I still feel that I am Slovenian. I say that even to those Australians who disagree with me. The commandment: Respect your mother and father in order to live happily also



Cilka and Joze Zagar visiting Anica and Mirko Cuderman in their lovely home.

mean to me to respect the nation I was born into. My belief is to be loyal Australian with the heart of the country from which I arrived.

Straight away in the first year in Queensland I became involved in Slovenian association work and was elected president. That was the start of hard physical and mental work for Slovenian community in Queensland for me and my wife Anica. This work required many sacrifices and much self denial, persistence and determination. We finished the work we started. On our arrival to Queensland the Slovenian Association Planinka only had 800 pounds; they had no committee. The association progressed but the divisions appeared; they were caused mainly by the communist

regime at home. Some believed that not agreeing with the regime meant that you are against your nation. My stand within the association was always to be independent and reject the cooperation or interference of Yugoslav Embassy which wanted to infiltrate our clubs; they provided bribes like films and visits from singing groups. They intentionally split Slovenian communities all over Australia.

In 1969 Anica organised a drama group to perform on the stage. They prepared Finžgar drama: The ruins of life, which was very successful. We prepared the constitution for our association so we could purchase the land for the club. In the following years, when I was leading the committee we bought the land, community land called hribček, built the clubhouse hall with bocce playground next to it and our social life progressed satisfactorily despite the political divisions. We were united in the belief and hope that we are working for the good of our people and our nation. We firmly believed that the Truth and Goodness will prevail and that gave us hope and strength to continue with very demanding work. Communism was our common enemy and we were determined to be positive in our approach and work.

Anica and I with our three young sons dedicated all our spare time to Slovenian association; we were members of the committee for 16 years and involved for many years in the community radio 4EB in Brisbane as committee members and as radio programmers. Anica made over 200 Slovenian one hour weekly programs. For many years I published the community newsletter Glas Planinke.

We tried to present Slovenia to our children in the most positive light. They are not burdened with the political traumas we had to endure. They learned Slovenians language and participated as children in Slovenian festivities but now they feel fully integrated into Australian society and I am happy with that. I leave my children and their future in God's hands.

Slovenian Community here is at present still going strong. Most of us are retired and the future is in Gods hand. We have done what we believed was our duty to fellowman, our neighbours and our country.

Our home at Mt Mee bears the best and closest resemblance of Slovenia countryside. It is a place of natural beauty and peaceful nature. Because of all those privileges that we enjoy in this country Australia, I am constantly reminding myself of God's goodness to us.

## ***Romana Favier Zorzut***

From Goriska Brda-The Hills of Gorica to the hills of Bright



Much has been written about my life and work. Different people defined me the way they came to know me and the way my art touched them. One finds what one looks for in life. I also painted life as I found it; I painted what touched my soul; I looked for beauty and expressed it in my oils. I always liked drawing and painting; I was also fortunate that I met many artists who encouraged me and showed me the way.

Once a Dutch painter said to me: it is difficult to decide when the painting is finished. You can overwork a painting so that you might lose the depth of the message in the painting.

It is the same with life. I have to move on with ever new challenges; it isn't good for me to dwell on the past because the future has so much to offer. In the Wagner

Gallery exhibition in Germany the comment was made about my paintings that they are definitely not 'licked over'. It meant that they expressed natural beauty. I am not licked over yet either, I still feel that I have much to offer. I put my soul and my emotions into my paintings; I rather like to paint cheerful and beautiful and forget the dark and the sinister. On arrival to Australia I felt sad looking at desolate drought stricken country but gradually I found the hidden beauty in the peaceful vastness of the continent. Now my landscapes of Australian outback are as colourful and bold as those of my home country.

During Mother Teresa's visit in the 1970's there was an SBS program Scoop featuring 18 snapshots of the most interesting Australian and overseas Personality of the Year. I was honoured to be included with other great, important people representing a small country such as Slovenia. I am always mindful of the fact that we, Slovenian migrants, are all ambassadors for Slovenia so I was happy to represent Slovenia in a positive light.

I enjoy painting pictures and my patrons keep telling me how much enjoyment my creations give them. It is simply wonderful to get paid for something I love doing. I do not paint the likeness of things but how I feel and think about them.

I have always worked hard and looked after my health and this has made me a happy, better person for those around me.

I was born on 26.4 19930 in Goriska Brda. I am Slovenian from the fertile valley in Central Europe that produces an abundance of fruit and wine. My birthplace is so beautiful that Austria, Slovenia and Italy fought for it through the history. When I was born it was under Italy; after WWII it became part of Yugoslavia and now it is a part of an independent Slovenia. Regardless of who ruled us I always knew that I am Slovenian.

Goriska Brda being such a small area (50square kilometres) on Slovenian Italian border, has a more intimate atmosphere than Tuscany. My paintings represent my father's property, vineyards and fruit orchards and the area around the Adriatic Sea and the Julian Alps. At my Exhibition at the Crown Casino people purchasing my painting were impressed thinking it was Tuscany, so my ambition was to show them that Goriska Brda had more to offer than Tuscany.

The biggest problem for me was that I didn't belong to the 3 countries: Yugoslavia, Austria or Italy, which ruled my homeland. I specially resented Italy, which I was born under. I was deeply offended by Italians, that as a Slovenian, we were "Schiavi" or "Slavi", which meant to me that we were worthless; Italians never gave us recognition for our intelligence. We were always repressed as powerless slaves and

had to serve the ignorant masters. Nevertheless, we depended on Italians for employment. That is why I searched for a different future and chose Australia.

I owe my life and success to the 6000 population of Goriska Brda, for giving me the strength and encouragement to go into the world with lots of pride and honesty.

I finally received my recognition from Italians with an Honorary Award through the Spoleto Melbourne Festival of 3 Worlds in 1986. The Founder/Artistic Director, Gian Carlo Menotti, a successful opera composer gave encouragement to artists and helped develop their careers.

My mother died of tuberculosis when I was two years old so my Nona, dad's mother, took care of me. As I was an only child without a mother, everybody was protective and supporting towards me; I felt quite precious and well loved. Perhaps I grew strong and have an optimistic view of life because of the love I received in those first years of my life. I was always confident and had high self-esteem.

They told me that mum was a very pretty, elegant and artistic lady who learned dressmaking in Gorica and specialised in Paris for a year and then started her own dress making school in Vedrijan (Brda). I hope I inherited some of her talents.

My father was a gentle and wise man; he grew fruit and grapes. The sunny hills around my home are known for good wines and delicious fruit.

My father remarried when I was eight and since then my stepmother took care of me. I never felt loved by my stepmother the way my Nona loved me. Maybe my stepmother and I both competed for dad's attention.

I had to attend Italian school because our part of Slovenia was under Italy at the time. There were placards everywhere saying: we only speak Italian here. I only learned Slovenian from my family. We felt discriminated against; Slovenians had to do the hardest jobs for the lowest wages. In 1942 Italians forced dad into the Mussolini's army. He soon became American prisoner of war in Corsica.

During the war only women with children and old people were left in our village. I remember the time when white Russians came with their wagons and they camped on the church ground. We heard that the soldiers raped young girls so the church keeper woman took about half a dozen girls into the church for protection. Under the altar was an opening where the bones of dead priests used to be buried. The church keeper made us crawl inside and she lowered the confessional box over the entrance. We had to stay there without drink or food for three days until the Russians left.

When dad returned in 1945 he and his friends often discussed politics and music as they played chess. In 1946 I left home to live with my aunt in Goricia. I became a waitress and I also began a nursing course.

In 1947 our part of Primorska became a part of Yugoslavia. I remember my father saying: We had Italian gypsies lording over us now we have Yugoslav gypsies. It was the best when we were under Austria.

I remained in Goricia which was under Italy. My father's home and farm was now in Yugoslavia but we never felt that we had anything in common with Yugoslavs. Communist government nationalised our land but my father and his friends challenged the government saying: why should we work for the government co-op while our own land lies bare and abandoned. He won and eventually got the land back. I learned Slovenian in the church and with my family. Dad's brother was an orchestra conductor in Ljubljana

I crossed the Italian Slovenian border across the fields to visit my father. Yugoslavs caught me but they could not keep me because I was never registered as Yugoslav. At the same time I had no Italian citizenship. I became a displaced person so I joined an immigration organisation for displaced persons. When I went for a check up in Trieste a lady tapped me on the shoulder. That's how I met Ada who later married Cvetko Falez. Ada was a few years older than I and she looked after me like a mother. We remained friends for the rest of our lives.

I was nearly 21 when they offered me a chance to emigrate to either Canada or Australia. Dad's friends were going to Australia so I thought that it would be safest to go with them. Australian government paid my passage on the ship Farsi that brought me to Australia on 26.4 1951 which was my twenty-first birthday.

In Bonegilla they offered us girls a chance to train as nurses. Ada chose to go to Canberra but I chose to learn English and nursing. They provided the room and board for me; I had everything I needed but I lived under strict supervision of the hospital matron. I received one pound two shillings per fortnight spending money. I trained for three years.

That's where I met Mrs Favier who was recovering from hernia operation. She must have liked me because she invited me to her home. She had eight children and maybe she hoped that I would take one of her sons off her hands. Faviers were a gentle, cultured, softly spoken family; there was a piano in the house and singing and classical music. I felt very much at home with this family. I met Frank Favier. I am grateful that the fate brought us together because that was the beginning of a very happy life-long partnership. I have been very fortunate also to become a part of Frank's family. Frank's brother Monsignor Favier married us in 1953. They built a

Favier House in Canberra in honour of Monsignor Favier's memory which is part of the Catholic Administration Centre for the whole of Australia..

Frank's family had a good standing in the community. They have French ancestry but they never acted as if they would think less of me because I was Slovenian. I might have been the first of Slovenian migrants to marry an Australian. I never regretted it because Frank became not only my husband and the father of my children but also my best friend. He writes poetry for me, he is a singer and a writer. Frank supports and enjoys all my work. He is very artistic and capable at whatever he does. He can tend our large garden or cook a delicious feast; he provided well for our family and supported our endeavours.

Frank had a column in a Catholic Advocate before he joined his brother in a delicatessen shop. They employed four people and did well enough so I could stay home with our daughters. Also I did a part time night duty nursing; I was a homemaker first and did my art in my spare time. In 1966 Frank became a councillor for the Eltham shire. He represented Eltham to its sister shire Montmorency in Paris; when he went to Paris we used this opportunity to visit my family. Frank loved my country and my people; he even learned some Slovenian in the three months we stayed there. Frank loves my Slovenia and Slovenian people. This is a poem he wrote for me:

#### Brda's Treasure

*TO ROMANA BY FRANK FAVIER*

*Was it fate? When he saw that face  
Eyes that spoke of an inner place!  
A glimmer of a smile, he did but see  
Carriage erect, of proudness be  
In that crowded city, her steps did glide  
It's said "her home was Briski pride"  
It's flowing guard the laughing Soca  
She, and Brda, have much to offer  
Tales of seductive, curving valleys green  
Soft and graceful, in their silken sheen  
Shaped from natures caress did clothe  
A form so slender, yet composed*

*Gentle movements, the winds do stir  
As perfumed fragrances excite the air  
Slim tapered spines lead mysteriously above  
Exploring this is a treasure trove  
Breasted fruits are there to taste  
As wine and earth meet in one embrace  
Sip these nectars, rare supreme  
Vivacious, Paradise, she is so serene*

While in Slovenia people told me that they liked me because I never changed. I bought a snuff box for my grandmother. She could not see anymore but she touched my hair and said: You came from America but you don't even have a hat. I was as I have always been. The older generation knew only of America being a prosperous country.

Frank worked in the film industry as a script writer and producer for twenty years. He is a gentle unassuming man who, like me, finds beauty in everything around him. We entertained many interesting and knowledgeable people. Sometimes I wish that I had a better education. It was my natural intuition that gave me the confidence to associate with well educated people and I have always learned from them. I am grateful that many of these fine people became my friends.

Our first daughter is named Marisa because she was such a beautiful baby; we named our second daughter Noella because she was born before Christmas. They were both beautiful and talented girls. They grew in a protected safe family environment where people appreciated them. They learned to trust people but maybe we did not prepare them well for the world that is sometimes treacherous and deceitful. I feel that they did not find happiness in their relationships and that they did not find partners they deserved.

I was a wife and mother first until our daughters grew up but when they left home I took my art more seriously. There just were not enough hours in a day to do everything I wanted for everybody else.

It has been the saddest time of my life in 2001 when our Noella became sick; I painted to overcome my sadness; maybe in my despair I needed to create hope and vision on canvas. I also sold my best works to pay off the mortgage on her house because she could no longer work. We were devastated when Noella died at the age of 39 leaving two teenage sons. We felt betrayed and disappointed that after Noella's death we also lost the closeness with our grandsons due to their alcoholic father and

the restrictions he put on them. The boys were traumatised with the loss of their mother but now they visit us more often and we talk about their mother and how difficult her life was under those circumstances. Although we made a great financial contribution towards their home we feel that Noella's husband did not welcome us into his home and into the lives of our two grandsons.

I always wished that my daughters would find more happiness than I did but fate had a different plan.

I always had everything I needed; I never dreamed of being rich but I never lacked anything. I was always healthy and in control of my life. After Noella's death we moved from Melbourne to Bright because this place is the closest to what I had at home in Goriska Brda. It is my little Europe with colourful seasons, vineyards and orchards. We have autumn festivals when our many trees change colour and make me feel more at home. Nature always provided an intimacy and comfort for me. I always searched for a place where I could lay down my defences and enjoy the intimacy, harmony and wholesomeness of life away from the buzz of the city.

Over eleven years of living in Bright my daughter Noella and her sons enjoyed many happy holidays with us until her death in 2001. I needed my work to overcome the sadness and to express my feelings and thoughts. I completely immersed myself in painting. People enjoyed and praised my work. They told me that I sold it too cheaply but I wanted it to go out of my studio and make people happy. I believe in doing my best and not to worry about what people say. Art was always my friend. It was there for me when I was homesick and when I was sad. It gave me hope, it paid my bills, and it helped me overcome the unpleasant times.

A famous Polish artist Jablonski once said to me: now you know what it means to put your name on the wall; it takes great courage to do so.

Art gave me courage.

In Australia I also liked to be a part of a Slovenian community although it hasn't always been easy; I found it hard to share Slovenian phrases, slang and humour because I grew **up** under Italy.

Once a Slovenian in Sydney said to me: you are wasting your time having exhibitions in Slovenian clubs because these people will think that your paintings are just smudges of colour. I said that I appreciate all criticism. Sometimes I wish I spoke better Slovenian but people generally appreciate me for who I am. When I had an exhibition in Slovenia I spoke in my home dialect and people told me how happy they were that I never forgot where I came from. Many of the village girls went to Italy as domestic workers and they changed their speech and behaviour. I had exhibitions in

Slovenians clubs all over Australia; I contributed a painting for every Slovenian club house so a part of me lives with all our people here. Many Slovenian homes also have at least one of my paintings. My paintings compliment many Private Collections, Galleries and Museums all over the world.

When I worked in the Italian nursing home I met many Slovenians there. I spoke to Fr Bazilij about them. I also reported when one of them died. I told Father Bazilij how Italian nursing homes operated financially, how they got permits and what categories of care they provided. They had independent units for couples, they had supervised accommodation and then they had terminal section. When patients become terminal they need 24 hour care. The government financed half and the patients provided half of the payment. Italians also had to make initial payment of 5000 dollars which was later increased to 10000. Father Bazilij wanted to build a Slovenian nursing home, Mother Romana's home-Slovenian Hostel for the aged at the time. He always felt responsible for the needs of Slovenians in Australia. I suggested that he build the home at the Eltham Slovenian club because the children could attend Slovenian classes their parents could come dancing and socialising at the same time as visiting the older members of the family. My idea was to bring Slovenians together. Fr Bazilij said that Eltham would be too far for him to travel to visit the sick and the dying. He built Romana home in Kew. I was concerned that the home was on a busy road where inpatients are not allowed to go out because it is too dangerous. They are not allowed to lock the doors so the nurses have to watch them very carefully. Mother Romana's nursing home could not provide terminal care at the time. In the last stages Slovenians had to look elsewhere for a place. I told Fr Bazilij that the pension simply won't cover the expenses. He said that he could not ask Slovenians for contribution because they usually transferred their assets to their children before they came into the nursing home.

I am not a member of any club but I believe that it would be nice to have a place for all Slovenians somewhere outside the city; perhaps they should sell all the clubs and buy one beautiful, peaceful property out in the country.

I am enormously proud of our people and their achievements in Australia. I am also proud of Slovenia and our people at home.

I sometimes have the impression that Slovenian leaders in Australia think that they are better Slovenians because they escaped from the Yugoslav communist regime but I always feel that I deserted my people and my country when they needed me most to resist the system. I admire those that stayed and nurtured our nation and made it possible for Slovenia to grow and prosper. They brought up and nurtured the young generation of Slovenians who made Slovenia prosperous and kept the Slovenian spirit alive. If we all left Slovenia in protest against communism we would

have lost our identity and our country. I believe that we should not isolate ourselves from Slovenians at home. We escaped from communism but they had to find a way to survive within the system, they had to fight and challenge the system for the benefit of us all. They took the brunt of the political regime and still remained patriotic Slovenians.

Communism was bad for economics; it did not allow people to prosper and get ahead; their idea and their aim was equality. Of course those in power became greedy and wanted more all the time. They could not live what they preached. They might have had good intentions but the power corrupted them. People always want to push ahead. Still Yugoslav system wasn't all bad; it promoted art and culture, it offered education and advancement to everybody, it allowed people to become what they were capable of becoming; it provided health care and employment for everyone.

I feel that by escaping we migrants made Slovenia poorer, weaker and more vulnerable. I was happy and excited when Slovenia became an independent country. My daughter Noella was in Slovenia at the time and she said: I have never seen any people as united as Slovenians have been at that time. Noella wrote a poem which she published and put to music. I can't imagine how a young girl growing up in Australia could capture my thoughts and feelings so well.

### ***New Ground by Noella Favier.***

I came miles from the other side  
In hope for a new ground  
I worked hard and I was bold  
But nothing turned to gold  
It was written no men are alike  
I know you know I'm different  
And you were here  
A long time before me  
Men shouldn't leave their given land  
Only to be a stranger  
What life am I to lead?  
In a half way life of memories  
I have tried and I have learned  
I must I must return  
Return to where people understand  
That I am no lesser man.

The new system allows Slovenians to compete with each other and they again became greedy. Capitalism made some very rich while the weaker ones barely survive. I suppose there is not one perfect system because we people are never perfect. It is the same everywhere.

I say that perhaps at the time I left Slovenia there wasn't enough room for us all there but in my heart I still know that I was selfish in leaving my home and people. At last Slovenia has become known for its diplomacy, tourism, the natural beauty and its hardworking people.

My father was 84 years old in 1988; he was sick and alone on the farm. I went back home to care for him and the farm for over 1 ½ years. In the meantime, I painted 42 churches in the region 12cm x 20cm in size that impressed me with all the differences in architecture and spiritual feeling for the history of Goriska Brda. I felt that maybe I paid back something to my country. Dr. Ksenia de Lorenci bought the paintings and may publish them in a book.

Since I chose to come to Australia I also try to accept Australian culture and people. I feel at home with Australian people. Many Slovenians isolate themselves and never open their minds and hearts to the wider community. Most migrants never venture out of the safety that their own ethnic setting to connect with Australians. Frank likes to associate with different ethnic groups he finds Europeans a stimulating company. We are becoming members of the global village. Everything is global and English is taking over whether we like it or not. Slovenian language is disappearing at home; most of young people speak fluent English.

I found a home in Bright because the hills and the countryside remind me of home. Frank and I tried to recreate the orchard and the vineyard of my home in our spacious garden. The Ovens River provides its own music for our peaceful setting. Among my treasures are mementos of what made me who I am: the cane baskets my father made remind me of his love and of the man he was. I picked items of beauty on my way. My house is also filled with treasures Frank's parents left behind and these treasures offer some history to our family.

Here in Bright I say I am going home to Goriska Brda but when I am there I long to go to Australia that has been my home now for 56 years.

I always liked to draw and paint. I was overwhelmed by beautiful things in life and I needed to express in colour what I felt and what I experienced. I attended evening art school after I arrived to Australia but I learned most by experimenting. I like French impressionists but I haven't really followed any particular style; I always looked for my own style and originality.

My first Exhibition Monash University in 1972 gave me great encouragement to keep my own style and present myself overseas in 1976 for my first overseas Exhibition in Goricia, Italy.

During the last fifty years I painted about 2500 pictures, I had exhibitions all over the world, I received awards and people wrote about my work. It always was a great pleasure for me to capture on canvas something of what I loved, I hope my paintings also give pleasure to people whose homes they decorate. Giving pleasure is as important to me as it is receiving it. I enjoy painting pictures and seeing the pleasure and richness they give to the people who purchase them, be it in a public gallery or a private home. I also like to paint subjects that have pleasant memories/subjects that I express with an understanding for the general viewer.

I learned dressmaking and I love to make beautiful pieces of clothing; I love to prepare special delicacies in my kitchen and I love to work in the garden; I enjoy parties and meeting people, I appreciate every minute of my life. I learned to accept the things I cannot change and try to be happy with what I have. I sometimes wonder if I would be a greater artist if I spent less of myself on my family and more on art. Maybe if I did not have my family I would have nothing to offer. My family was also my inspiration. It is a pity that life is so short and by the time you learn how to live, it is all over. I am still very adventurous and feel there is more out there for me to experience and learn in the beauty of life

## ***Stephanie Jakovac***

“Stephanie J. – who are you?” I was asked that question once. Just because I don’t have a long line of heritage from one country, it doesn’t mean, I don’t know who I am. On the contrary, I feel so much richer to belong to more than one country. My maternal grandparents are Slovakian and my paternal parents are Ukrainian. Both grandparents migrated to former Yugoslavia during the WWI.

My maternal grandmother was married to a baron in Bratislava before the WWI. They had a son soon before the war. They managed a large property with 15 servants. At the start of the war, the baron was taken by the war and the Russians came to the property and her world was burned down. One of the servants, much younger man than her, fled with her and a baby boy to Croatia. This Slovenian servant became my grandmothers’ life partner and my grandfather. I was three years old when my grandmother passed away in Croatia, where we lived for a short period; I remember running barefooted after my mother, who was following the procession to farewell her mother to the graveyard.

I was born in Bosnia, where my parents lived for few years after they married. It was a December night with plenty of snow. Christmas, never celebrated in a socialist country, passed and the eve of 1954 was approaching. There was no transport from the village to hospital through the snow and the midwife could not be contacted. My parents put my 2 year old sister to bed and told my 6 year old brother to stay in the next room whilst a baby was going to be born. My father prepared for my arrival alone with my mother. He boiled a pair of scissors and prepared some clean cotton sheets. My mother was having contractions and hoped that all was going to be well. It was soon after the midnight that I decided to arrive into this world. My father cut the umbilical cord and I gasped for air. My brother knew I was born and he couldn’t help himself from peeping through a keyhole. As soon as he heard my cry, he opened the door to see his little sister.

It was a successful delivery and my father is forever proud of my perfect belly button. My parents, my brother and I have since had a special bond.

Few years down the track my parents moved to Slovenia. My father was a carpenter and my mother was looking after us, sawing our clothes and doing lots of other work. In little town of Jesenice, we moved from one place to another, always in search for a better accommodation. For a few years, we had a privilege living in a local theatre. My mother was a caretaker, as father went to work to Germany together with many other carpenters at the time. Here, in the theatre, I was introduced to a wonderful world of theatre, opera, concerts and art. I loved it. I often observed a stage manager as he produced the stage and props for stage display. My older brother was

attending a school for merchandising and worked as visual merchandiser. He loved painting and I would often stay with him in the room to watch him paint. After my primary school I decided I want to do art. So I enrolled in Visual Merchandising School in Ljubljana, a capital of Slovenia, and regularly visited many galleries.

My parents were people of faith and did not conform to a socialist regime. I took our faith seriously early on in my life. As a young child I learned how to stand firm in my faith and prove myself worthy of what I believed. In my secondary schooling, I was expelled from the school due to my religious beliefs. But I was determined to finish the school of my dreams. And I did. Despite the opposition and reprimands by the Headmaster.

In Slovenia my parents were indirectly persecuted for their religious and moral beliefs. They were Seven Day Adventists. My father went to work in Germany and my mother found it difficult to live separated from my father. When I was only 16, my parents decided to migrate to Australia, as two of my aunts lived there. They agreed that I stay in Ljubljana to finish my schooling. Then I would follow them. My younger brother, 14 at the time, migrated with them. My older brother was married and decided to stay in Slovenia and my sister was studying in Berlin to be a nurse. The family became fragmented.

When I finished my secondary schooling, I decided to study languages at the University. I wrote a letter of my intentions to my parents in Australia but despite my decision, my mother arrived to Slovenia, with a one way airline ticket for me. I was unwilling to go but my respect towards my parents prevailed. I travelled with my mother to Australia at the end of 1973.

The farewell was unbearable. I kept my departure a secret from many people. Only few close friends knew about my trip to Australia. I found myself leaving my first love which I found the very same summer, but I buried it deep into my heart and left without saying goodbye. Little did I know how all this was going to affect me later on. It was like life was playing a game with me.

I remember arriving to Brisbane into an intense heat, a big family gathering and an evening scent of frangipani in the air. How I missed my love, how I missed my friends and my dreams. I wasn't sure what to expect. Everything was new and so different. But I had an idea that I will go back as soon as I earn enough money. After looking for a job for awhile and trying a factory for a day and a half, I could not imagine myself in that environment. I soon found myself in a job as a Commercial Artist, designing badges. I liked it.

I was completely overwhelmed by a sense of freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom to practice your faith, freedom of choice. It was wonderful.

In the meantime, at a family event, I met and fell in love with my future husband. I got married after three years and eventually moved to Albury-Wodonga. We both enjoyed skiing and a quieter lifestyle. After six years of marriage our daughter Tamara was born and two and a half year later our son Simon. I kept myself busy as a mother, housewife and doing art whenever possible. I worked part time in graphic art. As the children grew and started school, my passion for art grew stronger and I decided to pursue it in a serious way. I started painting in a big way and exhibiting in local art shows. As my artwork sold well and was well accepted, I decided to exhibit as solo artist. In the years to come, my work earned respect by many discerning art lovers and I received many art prizes. I finally decided to travel back to Slovenia and have my first exhibition in Ljubljana. At that time, I was also teaching art in a private Secondary School.

It was June 1995. I travelled to Slovenia on my own and my family would join me two weeks later as I was invited to paint in the international artist colony. I arrived to Munich where I hired a car. I packed the little Golf with my paintings and drove towards Slovenia on a busy, speedy autobahn. As I drove through Austria towards the Julian Alps, I noticed the horizon of Alps, still very much fresh in my memory from 20 years ago. My eyes filled with tears as I was nearing the Karavanken Tunnel. As I passed through the tunnel, a valley spread in front of me. I stopped the car and cried looking at the valley below the hills. I realized how dear this view was to me and I couldn't wait to drive on. I arrived to the town of Jesenice and drove straight to my primary school. It all seemed like yesterday. I walked to my classroom and looked at the artworks on the walls. I tried to find my own. One of the teachers came to see who the stranger was. I explained why I was there. To my surprise, she said that my art teacher is coming soon to the meeting. I waited ten minutes and he arrived. He greeted me with a big, warm smile as he recognised me by my smile and voice. We talked and talked and he seemed to be so proud of my achievements as an artist. We talked about future exhibition in my hometown that he would organise later, being a director of an Art Saloon. I happily departed to my artist colony in Dolenjske Toplice. It was a week of great inspiration and new friendships. After the artist colony, I had a busy time hanging my exhibition which was organised by my school friend Bogdana. The opening night was fabulous and I left the paintings there whilst travelling the Europe with my husband and children. As we left Slovenia, I had a feeling that I did not have enough of it. I decided to revisit very soon. I seemed to be in awe of my country. My homesickness for Slovenia never fully healed. As soon as I returned to Australia, I wrote the following Love Letter to Slovenia:

“Twenty years has passed since I touched you last,

Since I embraced you with my vast view and deeply inhaled the fresh air of your forests and mountains,

Since I felt the warmth of your earth and indulged in the inebriating scent of fields with flowers that again and again enticed me.

I feel elated and ecstatic.

My eyes filled with tears as from the other side of border I recognised the horizon and colours of the mountains.

Impatiently I sped through the Karavanke Tunnel in anticipation

To embrace and kiss you.

I am alone and hardly can believe that I am in your embrace.

I feel secure and enraptured. I missed you so much. For twenty years I carried you in my thoughts and wonderful memory. I pined for you every day.

I sketched you in my mind, embracing you and dreaming about you.

Now I feel you under my feet, I breathe your fresh air and smell your sweet, intoxicating scent. Night is approaching but I don't wish to sleep, for I know that I don't need to dream.

You are here – I am here. We are alone. I know that you feel me and are receiving my greeting.

It feels like I never left you.

The old little house is still here. Deserted and lonely. No one has enjoyed the childhood here anymore. The door is open and windows have no glass. It is dark inside and smells of frippery. I am not surprised. The neighbour is still the same. Like he never aged. The old cherry tree is still here and the path leading to the forest where I used to go mushroom picking with my mother.

I continue very slowly past the old church all the way to school. I can hear the voices of children and it seems to me that I might recognize somebody. The empty rooms and desks are still the same. I am looking for my painting on the wall. Maybe I will recognize my name. Everything is here. Even the art teacher recognised me.

You kept everything, just like time has stopped.

You are wonderful. The meadows and fields are full of bees humming busily and inebriating with the sweetness of the pollen. I adore you and wish to never leave again. The old hay stack is still standing, where I received my very first kiss. Thank you for the fond memories.

I wish that I could offer you a gift. I am not thinking anymore. I am not daydreaming anymore. This is reality. I gaze into your eyes. You radiate warmth and love. I feel fabulous. You are reaching deep into my soul and you are not even aware of it. You are reaching deep into me and scooping my love and sweetness. I am not resisting. I know that I love you and you know it, but we are too far apart to feel the warmth and euphoria of love. There is only a sweet memory. I still feel your firm embrace. I still carry in my memory the sweet scent of your breath. I remember the depth of your gaze. I see you clearly in my dreams how you gaze at me and how our souls entwine into inseparable knot.



take a deep sigh, close my eyes to feel you once more and to embrace you. Life goes on."

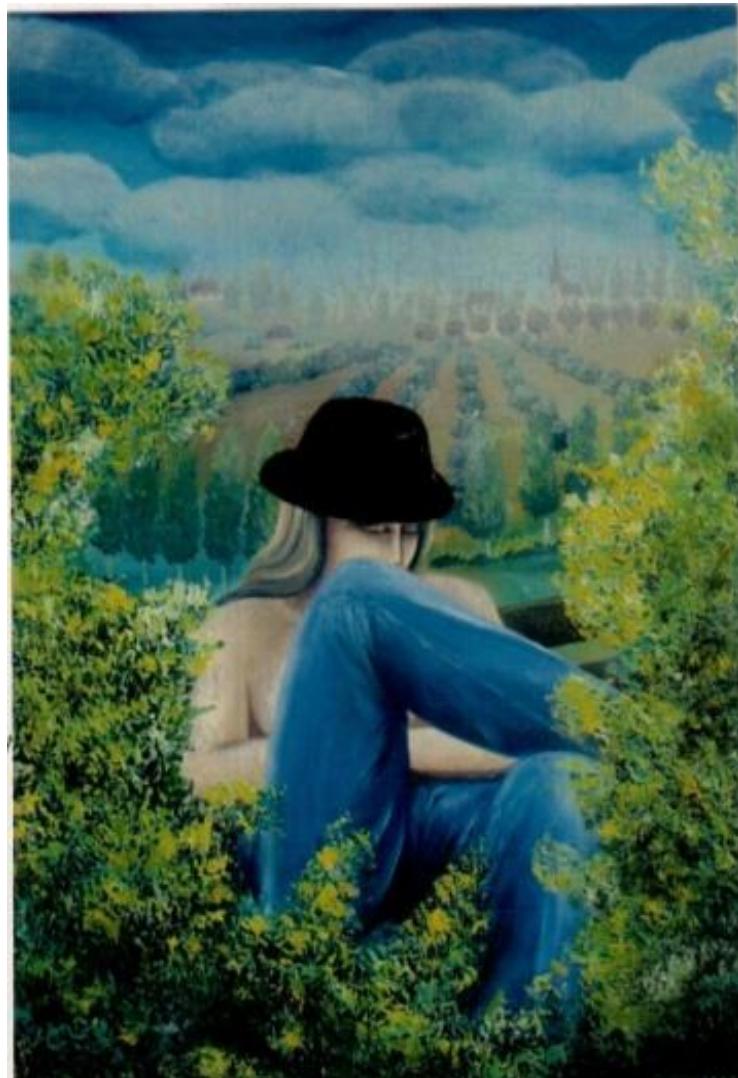
I posted this letter to my art teacher. It was read at my next solo exhibition I had in Jesenice two years later. All the visitors were wiping tears from their eyes as the intensity of the emotion grew.

As my art became more and more accepted and I gained respect, my inspirations also grew from my deep affection for my country Slovenia. In the year of 2000 I had to leave my husband in the agony and realization that I need to continue my journey on my own with the identity only I could connect to.

I decided to acquire a Diploma in Visual Arts and continue to paint and exhibit. My art was taking another dimension now, as I had to express my grief and disappointment and had to let go of my past. I was involved with refugees as a result of the Balkan war. That was another inspiration for a new series of paintings at the time. It seemed

to be once again a method of my debriefing and offloading. I kept selling my art, this time to public venues. I kept travelling back to Slovenia to artist colonies, to walk the streets of my home town, to breathe the air, to talk to people from my past. It never seems to be enough. It never seems to quench my thirst for my homeland.

My art has taken off to many different avenues. But it always keeps coming back to my soul for more inspirations. The passion that I carry is expressed with the colours I use, with detail and carefully arranged compositions. The eyes travel through the landscapes of flowers, landscapes decorated with mighty trees and mountains.



Occasionally they are filled with villages, houses and churches with terracotta tiles. The person in the black hat often intrigues the people. But only I know that it is a portrait of me, of my family and of people I know. My art is forever telling a story, a story of my life, of other peoples' lives. It is a tribute to my homeland, to Slovenia. It is a tribute to people who live on this earth. It is a tribute to my faith and to God.

I know that I will keep going back to my soul for more inspirations. I know that I will keep listening to people and observe their relationships from a distance. I will adore

the mighty mountains and trees and put them in the landscapes with flowers and add a touch of magic of human love and soul that wishes to connect to God.

I am grateful for many experiences that life offered me. I am happy that I can express them in such a way that other people can connect to them in their own way and gain another experience of their own. It is only through sharing of my experiences that my life becomes enriched and I can enrich lives of other people.

I have a particular style of painting influenced by Croatian naïve art and surrealism. I had 22 solo exhibitions and I feel that I have much more to express. Much of my art was about immigration, my homesickness for Slovenia; about ten years later I started to paint Australian landscape.

Those Blue Jeans is a self portrait oil painting after migrating to Australia. I sit in front wearing blue jeans which symbolise the freedom of expression to me.

In my experience it is not necessary to abandon the country you have immigrated from. I feel that I belong to both sides of the world.

My friend told me about a fair-haired person who told her that she is an Aborigine. But you don't look like an aborigine, people say to her. You haven't got much of Aboriginal blood. You might be less than a quarter of Aborigine. You are half German, people say. You have English in you. I grew up as Aborigine, the girl insists. I know nothing of German or English or Italian ancestors. Aborigines accepted me; they are the only family I ever had. If I am not an Aborigine I am nothing. I cannot be half of anything.

My story is similar to that girl's story; I might have Slovak and Ukrainian blood in my veins but I grew up in Slovenia as Slovenian; I learned to talk in Slovenian; Slovenians accepted me as their own. I feel Slovenian regardless of how much Slovenian blood flows through my veins. I carry Slovenia in my heart and in my memories. I experienced my first taste of love in Slovenia. If someone was to take away my Slovenian heritage I would have nothing left.

I suppose men loved me the only way they knew how. They wanted to break my wings in fear that I would fly away. I was flattered; they made me feel precious; they also made me feel that I had no right to be who I am. I needed their trust and support but I also needed my freedom. I needed the recognition of who I am. I provided the background support for their egos but my identity was crushed. I appreciate the intensity of emotion love offers; I am grateful for the spectrum of emotions and feelings in order to be able to paint the stories I painted. Wisdom and understanding are born in pain. Appreciation of the beauty comes also from knowing the ugly and the hurtful. I am grateful that life offered me such a variety of experiences; they made it possible for me to understand and to give pleasure to those who identify

with my picture stories. I know the meaning of love and of pain and disappointment. By having my two children, the biggest gift of love, I also know unconditional love. All these made it possible for me to give pleasure to people who identified with my art. Art is very important to me; it may not offer me a living but it offers me life. It is hard to earn enough with painting to pay the mortgage but I get by. Most artists lived in poverty but their lives were rich with creativity.

## ***My life-A Compromise. By Jaka Chuk***

As in a dream I see a mountainous country with snow capped peaks reaching for the sky. There are forests, creeks, waterfalls and lakes. Narrow gorges widen into valleys. The greenery overwhelms. Beauty surrounds me. This is my country Slovenia.

I am the youngest in the family of twelve. Our parents brought us into this world between the years of 1920 to 1940. We eked our living on a small farm on Crni Vrh above Idrija. To the west are the fertile Vipava Valley and the Adriatic with the port city of Trieste; to the East are forests and the mercury mine in Idrija as you are going towards the capital city of Ljubljana.

The good people Slovenians lived in these places from the times immemorial although they were ruled by other states. Both my parents were born under Austria; they brought up their family under Italy and died in Yugoslavia. This is a stark contrast in one life span. My parents and my siblings were forever grateful to the Almighty to have survived both horrific wars. Many of my school mates were not so fortunate; many lost their fathers and brothers; some became orphans. My generation knows well the consequences of the war. My parents died when I was very young and my brothers and sisters took good care of me.

Slovenia became a literate nation during the Reformation. As Lutheran faith swept over most of Europe, the Bible was translated into Slovenian and Slovenian Grammar book was compiled. During the Anti-reformation period that followed the Lutheran places of worship were destroyed and the books were burned. We returned to Catholicism but we used the same Bible for the next two hundred years. Slovenia has been a Roman Catholic country ever since. We go to church every Sunday.

Slovenians are proud and head strong people. We observe our traditions and inherent principles of right and wrong. We are proud of our language which was spoken centuries before English but at the same time we are keen to learn the languages of our neighbours.

My father was a veteran of the WWI; he was fighting Italians on Soca Front. He spoke German, loved the Emperor Frantz Joseph and strongly resented Italian occupation. My parents did not allow Italian language in our home. Mum was teaching the children Slovenian but stopped after my older twin sisters. She was surprised that at the age of five I taught myself to read and write.

Italians banned Slovenian language in all public life; only in the church could Slovenian be heard from our young priest.

Italians benevolently promised that they will give poor Slovenians some of their two thousand years old culture. They built and improved the roads over the mountains but that was for strategic and economic reasons because Idrija's quicksilver and timber were in great demand.

In 1943 Italy capitulated and soon Germans took over. Crni Vrh was a stronghold of anti communist partisan resistance; in short it collaborates with the occupier. Partisans retaliated by burning the place. Our supposed liberators burned us down.

The liberation on 5 May 1945 did not bring us much joy either although we welcomed the freedom to move. There was much to do to survive; we had cows for milk, sheep for wool and we grew potatoes and vegetables. The old money was no longer legal tender and the new was worthless. The ancient barter took over. The people were resourceful and helpful towards each other. There were few able bodied men so the work was done by old men, women and boys.

In September 1947 I was to go to school but there was no school building. We gathered in an old farm house; pencils were precious possessions but there were no books; we were happy to use butcher's paper. The school years were the happiest years of my life. I was a bright student and found it easy to express myself clearly. I also started to write poetry.

There is one dark memory though from that time. I clearly remember our headmaster announcing: There is no God, only old silly women believe that there is God. I became confused; at the age of nine most women looked old to me. I believed that all women were clever; most of us children also attended scripture lessons.

I remember the day when the pictures of Lenin and Stalin were taken off the classroom wall. There was just lonely Tito and two whiter spaces where his comrades were hanging only the day before.

No class today. We are no longer friends with Russia because they betrayed us, announced the headmistress. On the way home I stopped at the timber mill and saw that the mill workers also enjoyed the day off; they were drinking wine and talked and laughed excitedly. On the ground was Stalin's picture and the young man proceeded to pee on it.

My early education was full of contrasts between home and school teachings. The school was glorifying socialism while my parents were teaching old honest way of living. I kept asking questions.

I was a big boy and wanted to become a school teacher but my family was not agreeable with communist ideology so I received no scholarship. Grudgingly I enrolled in commerce-trade apprenticeship serving the public in a mixed goods shop.

The state as the only employer in the new regime, paid for me to go to the boarding school for four months a year as part of my apprenticeship.

I was a popular young man and my ability to speak out well got me out of a lot of trouble. In retrospect I think I was also naive and conceited. I enjoyed good company, dancing, reading and going to the movies. I was searching for foreign literature. I disliked politics and ideology.

Slovenians are a small nation with many good writers and translators. We lived close to Italian Austrian border so despite the restrictions from the regime we could hear news from the West through the media. The life in my beautiful country was stifling and I dreamt of escaping.

At the age of eighteen I received a conscription notice from the Yugoslav Army. I found myself in uniform deep in the fields of Croatian Slavonia. I was surrounded by young men from Kosovo, Bosnia and Serbia; the Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians and Romi were also with us but the only language we were allowed to speak was Serbo-Croatian; we learnt the Cyrillic script. Expressions of nationality, religious beliefs, other languages or opinions generally were not allowed. I deeply rejected communism and decided to escape into the big wide world.

After two years in the army I was happy to return home. Things changed in the meantime though; self serve stores opened and my old job disappeared, however in communism there is no unemployment. I was given a new job but it was hard to find accommodation. I packed pocket books of poetry by Preseren and Gregorcic with a few necessities and crossed the border to Italy. In the Trieste centre for foreign economic refugees I found people from Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries. The European migrant Assisted Commission gave me a choice to immigrate either to Canada or Australia. I chose Australia. The commission paid half of my 130 pounds Qantas plane fare and I had to sign to pay the other half in monthly instalments. The flight was fantastic but the view of Australia from the plane was shocking: everything was brown, light brown and yellow, no mountains but long straight lines like drawn by a pencil. We landed in Sydney on 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1965.

The Boing 707 carried 120 passengers, most of them were Italians; there were 50 Yugoslavs of which 27 were Slovenian single men. I still refer to them as my 707 friends.

An officer of the immigration department handed me a letter and I recognised the writing of my dear Australian sister-in-law Judy. She wrote that my brother Gus was waiting for me at the Albury airport to take me home to Ballarat. I travelled on a small plane over Sydney and was surprised to see so many small single story houses

on large blocks of land. On the way to Albury I was also surprised by strange olive grey coloured trees.

I vaguely remembered my brother Gus who is 13 years older than I. He left home when I was four years old as the war was coming to an end. Gus found himself in a German camp for displaced persons. He immigrated to Australia and worked as a signal man on the railways. He married a wonderful Australian school teacher Judy. They had four sons and lived in a wooden house owned by the Ballarat Railway. I recognised Gus from the photos; Gus came with his Volkswagen and at the front of the car was hanging a canvas bag. My 707 friends wanted to know why he carried a bag outside the car. Of course it was his water bag.

I slept soundly at the Bonegilla migrant camp but something like a child's cry woke me in the morning. I listened and decided that the sound was more like a drunken laughter. It was a kookaburra. Gus signed a paper promising to provide accommodation for me but the authorities told me that I can return if I needed a job.

On the way to Ballarat Gus and I talked and talked happy to be together. Judy and my nephews were waiting for us at home; the table was set with a welcoming dinner; it was John's birthday and Andrew's first day at school. The boys were surprised that I did not speak English. Gus never attempted to teach his children Slovenian. I also never had a day of Slovenian schooling so it was easy to find excuses why we did not teach the children Slovenian.

Judi was a fulltime housekeeper, mother and wife. Their youngest son Peter was not well so she has a lot to do with washing, ironing, making sandwiches and shopping. The large laminex table in the kitchen was a centre of activities always full of books.

In the large backyard was a shed, a hills hoist, a firewood space, a toilet and a garage. There was also a veggie patch, a chook yard and some fruit trees. The place was well maintained and the railway rewarded Gus for that every year.

Ballarat was the largest inland city at the time. It started as a gold mining settlement in the middle of nineteenth century gold rush days; a lot of gold was extracted from this ancient volcanic earth. When I arrived it was quite prosperous and surrounded by large farming towns. I found Ballarat interesting and dignified with fine Victorian buildings made of granite. The two large churches facing each other intrigued me. Are they too small for everybody to worship together, I inquired. They told me that one was Anglican and the other Catholic. I later discovered the Lutheran and Presbyterian and Methodist churches and so became aware of Australian diversity. I began to compromise and assimilate, tolerate, understand and accept new things into my life. I acquired new habits, accepted new food, and liked people who were very different to me. I came to terms with my new life. People did not have to agree

with me for me to like them and I did not have to agree with them. I found my compromise. I gradually learned to like my morning cup of tea. I get along. I put aside old attitudes and found a compromise.

My brother's family belonged to the Field Naturalist Club and the guide led us to the bush where I discovered lakes, swamps, hills, and abandoned gold mines. Everything was new to me and I wanted to learn as much as possible as quickly as possible. On our trip to Melbourne I saw a huge mob of sheep and asked: Who milks them all? They burst out laughing and still retell this as a joke.

My first job was picking grapes- sultanas in Mildura. It was hot and I got sunburnt; I also sprained my wrist lifting full containers onto the tractor. I earned good money so I bought my first photo camera. In the evenings we headed to the Gol Gol pub for a drink; it is over the Murray River on the border of Victoria and NSW. The atmosphere in the pub was fantastic and everybody enjoyed themselves after a hard day's work. Nobody told me why in Victoria they closed drinking places at 6pm.

My next job was at the potato processing plant in Ballarat and after the season finished I found a job at the ball bearing factory.

During a smoko break my work mates sat at the big table and talked in an expressive quick friendly Australian jargon; they laughed but I did not understand what was being said so I smiled.

My English was improving, Judi and the boys helped me and I spent a lot of time reading. Judi told me that I was a fast learner. At the time I probably didn't even appreciate how fortunate I was to share my life with an Australian family where I could learn about Australian way of life.

Gus enjoyed fishing and on our fishing trips we spoke Slovenian and remembered the olden days at home. I wasn't homesick but I wrote long letters to my siblings and nephews. There were no migrants in Ballarat and Gus did not know any Slovenians there. He kept in touch with one Slovenian couple in Geelong and another person in Melbourne whom he knew from Germany.

One day I went by train to Melbourne; Gus and Judy told me what interesting places I should visit. I enjoyed the city and the people were friendly but they walked straight into me and I had to avoid bumping into them. I walked into the park and sat on the bench; I felt the loneliest person there among the multitudes of humanity. Finally it dawned on me that I walked on the wrong side of the footpath; I had to learn to walk Australian way.

Eighteen months after my arrival to Australia my 707 friend Slavko invited me to join him; he wrote that he worked at Whyalla shipyards; he earned good money and lived in a single men's quarters. My English was better and I saved some money so I

headed to Port Augusta by train. Slavko and his friend waited for me with their Holden and we headed south. The countryside was lifeless and brown with no indication of farming.

Whyalla was a company town; BHP owned practically everything. To the West were Iron Knob and Iron Barron iron ore mines; to the north were iron works with blast furnaces and shipyards to the south. The single man's Tanderra and Tarrina quarters were a walking distance towards the shipyards in the south.

The town had a few pubs, shops and a cinema. The beach was shallow and the iron ore was exported on the Japanese carriers. Slavko was fishing from these long jetties with the conveyer belt running in the middle.

I started work the next day as a trade's assistant to Kevin, a friendly Australian plumber. I carried a bag of tools and followed him around.

Our quarters were a single story building with verandas on each side and a corridor in the middle. Each worker had his own room but we shared other conveniences. Nearby was the recreation centre with shops, TV rooms and a cinema. Men met and relaxed there. The food was plentiful but bland; the vegetables were boiled to the pulp but as a war baby I was used to eating anything put in front of me.

Everything was provided for us, there was plenty of hot water, and laundry was collected and brought to our rooms washed. All we had to do was work and save. Men regularly sent a part of their pay to the folks back home.

At the time Robert Menzies was a Prime Minister and Paul Husluck was the minister for immigration. The Labour opposition leader was Mr Calwell. They decided that all non English speaking migrants be called New Australians. This did not apply to people from United Kingdom whom we referred to as 10 pound Poms.

I enjoyed going to the movies and every film started with God Save the Queen. I wondered why since I came to see a Western or Elvis Presley. Everybody stood up for the queen but I remained seated. To me a queen of England was a foreign monarch and I decided to become a republican. Officially all Australian born people were British subjects and I drew a parallel with my own situation since the records stated that I was a Yugoslav citizenship.

Whyalla was a New Australian men's town with a few women who were rarely seen. Australian born were a minority. We just worked. I read a lot. Old movies were screened and alcohol wasn't allowed on the premises. Occasionally I paid 12 dollars for a return ticket to Melbourne where I visited churches, galleries and museums. I loved the city and just walked and looked at the shops.

In 1967 Referendum we were asked if Aborigines should be included in the national census. I taught it strange that Australians knew the number of their sheep and cattle but not how many people there were.

Friendships were forged mainly on ethnic lines. On pay days the illegal gambling of two up was on and Slavko took me to see it. There was a strange atmosphere with only one light globe above the circle of players on the dusty ground. Yelling and the general excitement were overwhelming but the police or company security broke up the game. The globe was trashed and people ran in panic.

Sex could be bought for as little as five dollars and no knowledge of English was required for it.

There were several of my 707 friends and life wasn't so bad. Slavko went fishing regularly.

I became a storeman and the open compound store stretched for acres next to the wharf. It was an open air expanse with lots of asbestos sheds for paints and other materials needing protection from the sun. The boss was very pleased with my work because I mastered the imperial measures and wrote legibly. After eighteen months I had enough of Whyalla; nobody stayed there for long.

In September 1969 I boarded the train for Perth. The countryside looked like the surface of the moon for most part. The patches of grey green told me that there must have been life somewhere in that great expanse of nothingness.

Perth was a pleasant city it was more like an easy, friendly country town then with few high rise buildings. I booked into a boarding house on St George Terrace close to the Supreme Court near the pub and the Swan River.

I took a trip to Fremantle and found a few very good Italian restaurants and many pubs. The tourist Bureau conducted trips to the country. Perth Show was on. I decided to find a job there. While I waited for the job in mining I worked as a storeman with Sandovers at Belmont and boarded with a Yugoslav family. I enrolled in TAFE for English and bookkeeping. I worked full time and went to school three nights a week. For recreation I read, wrote letters home, went for long walks to the beach. I tried to find the best in people and did not consciously seek the company of my countrymen. Females found me rather too serious. I was assertive but not bold. I was weary of Yugoslavs who were keen to engage me in politics. I considered their discussions a futile waste of my good time. I follow Australian custom of not discussing politics and religion because I don't wish to offend those that believe differently.

There was no Slovenian club but a large Yugoslav one. My landlords invited me to come along. There were many Slovenians and Croatians but I felt that there was an

underlying tension. I loved dancing but the girls were carefully watched and single men were asked about their girlfriends.

My Chinese workmate invited me to join his large family for the Chinese Luna New year and I joined them every year since.

I studied accountancy for three years; I rented a flat and started to work in an air-conditioned office as an accounts clerk

Early seventies was the time of great, fast changes. I became an Australian citizen and Mr Whitlam became a Labour Prime Minister. I participated in anti war demonstrations and gradually became a lefty Labour supporter.

In 1973 I bought a pair of old duplex houses in Fremantle near the hospital. The stone and timber buildings with iron roof were cheap at 1400 dollars a pair because they were in need of repair. My boss was rechecking my purchase agreement and commented: a good working man needs an address. My supervisor exclaimed: But why in Fremantle? Only Commos, wharfies, pimps and prostitutes live in Fremantle.

My savings dwindled quickly. The repairs of the houses cost me three times as much as the purchase itself. I took a second mortgage at 13% interest.

Fremantle was not a desirable place to live at that time. I made my biggest investment ever while people were leaving the town in droves. Old houses were sold to pay for the new ones.

The new lot of enthusiastic people arrived to town and we formed a Fremantle Society- a self help group of home buyers; we were referred to as local pressure group. We were the renovators, restorers and preservators because Fremantle needed a new lease of life. This was hard work but it was also my most productive and happiest time. I was proud to be a member of this closely knit community of planners, architects and good workers. We met at parties and celebrated together the finishing of projects.

Gus came to visit and he was sorry for me and appalled at the expenses and hard work my house required. He said: this will always be an old house. With the money you invested you could have built a new house.

I loved my independence perhaps that is the reason I never married. The way I lived would scare away any woman. I was studying in the evenings and working on the house after work.

After working for 15 years for the same employer, he moved to a far away suburb and I had to give up my job. I gave up the study just before the final exams which I still regret.

In 1980 I found a new job in Fremantle Arts centre where I worked for another fifteen years. I earned less in this job but I felt much happier. I became a jack of all trades working as a curator, administrator, cleaner and maintenance man.

I became a certified interpreter and translator for Slovenian and Serb Croatian languages. The phone interpreter service pays well. As an interpreter I go to courts of law, to the workers compensation tribunals meetings, to the third party insurance hearing and to the doctors.

This is a new challenge for me and I learned a lot about people through it. I hear lots of sad stories.

In 1982 I sold my two restored houses for 80 thousand dollars. I paid off my debts and bought another old house built in 1898 for forty-one thousand dollars cash. I still live in this good house now.

In 1995 I retired from my job in the Arts centre and used my superannuation to renovate the house. I stopped doing what I did not like doing and started doing what I liked doing best.

I live in harmony with people and the environment. I love my city Fremantle and consider myself a very fortunate man. I am indebted to so many people for this, to my family first but also to many strangers.

## ***Emilija Dovgan-Debevec***

What can I say about my life? I cannot boast that I achieved something important. Bad health did not allow me to do many things I wanted.

I was born on 7 January 1950 in Prem on Brkini as the youngest and fourth child to a subsistent farmer. Our small village lies in the hilly country and you have to either walk down or up all the time.

We suffered post war destruction and I had to start helping with chores at the age of five. I remember going shopping; we only bought oil, salt and sugar. Mum would pay when she sold farm produce. We were all involved in producing food; I remember taking grains into the water powered flourmill and watching our grains turn into flour. Mum baked big loaves of bread and she also made pasta. We soaked our washing and boiled the whites in ashes to whiten them. Once we received a parcel from America with clothes for me.

My job was grazing the cows for many years. I was with our cows morning and afternoon from May till November. Close to nature I daydreamed and observed the birds and nature. I liked to sing and read. By the time I was twelve I started to cook for the family. During the winters I was often cold watching the ice flowers on the window panes. I liked to go sleighing on the snow. I also remember going from house to house in funny fancy dress for Shroud Tuesday. I had to go to church every Sunday.

By the age of eight I began to help other children with reading. In fifth grade I wrote my first poem instead of a story but the teacher crossed it out.

After I finished school I began serious work with my father. We prepared the manure and ploughed the land, cut the timber, sowed and harvested the produce.

We killed two pigs a year. I covered my eyes and ears not to see and hear the squealing pig but I helped with the preparation of the meat that had to last for the whole year.

We had lots of apples; some we sold, some we ate; some we turned into cider.

I became a domestic servant for one of my teachers. Her husband was a dentist and I went with them to Switzerland where I stayed for two years. Later I became a housekeeper to an architect and his eighty years old mother. This man was very kind to me especially at the time of my father's death which was a great loss for me. His son and daughter were studying and came home only during holidays. After a year he

married and I had to find a new job. I worked in a restaurant where I became sick. I was very proud that my boss came to visit me in the hospital.

I later worked in hotels cleaning the rooms. My room was in an attic and every morning I stepped on a stool to see the mountains and the rising sun through the window.

I later worked in a hotel near Saint Moritz and became overwhelmed by the beauty of the place. I wanted to work in the kitchen and learn new things. When I went home for holidays I met my husband who was also on holidays from Australia. We began to correspond and eventually I decided to join him in Australia in June 1972. We got married and I started to work in the Arnott's biscuits factory. I realised that being a domestic help was better than factory work. I learned a lot more from the people I worked for and I missed working in the pleasant environment in the sun. In the factory I worked at the conveyer belt with electric lightning along with ten to fifteen women of different nationalities. They liked Turkish women best, they were diligent workers but I was afraid to make friends with them because we learned at school about the cruelty of Turks who plundered Slovenia during history. All the same we became good friends. Arnott factory employed 1100 women in two shifts. They had no crèche for children so one of Slovenian ladies looked also after Turkish babies. Later I worked in a paper factory.

Every morning as I was waiting for the train I saw a young woman with a sleeping baby in her pram. I helped her with the pram on the steps. She took the baby into care so she could go to work. I wondered if that woman's life was any better than that of my mother who took her babies and left them in the shade of the tree while she worked on the fields. At least my mother heard her babies cry and she could comfort them.

In May 1974 my first daughter Mojca was born and since then I stopped going to work. I am the mother of four. Many Slovenians came to visit and hearing Slovenian language was the sweetest melody to me. It helped overcome my homesickness. Once we had a couple of Slovenians sleeping in our dining room because they had nowhere to go.

When my youngest started school I intended to go back to work but because of bad health I could not.

We brought our Slovenian traditions to Australia. I preserved fruit and vegetables, made sausages and wine; I baked traditional cake potica for Christmas, I coloured Easter eggs.

While I was on holidays in Slovenia I noticed that Slovenians became modernised and are not as connected to the land as we used to be.

My children understand but do not speak Slovenian well. Three of them finished university studies and one is going to continue. I am grateful to Australia because my children were never hungry here and they achieved high education. I am also grateful that my husband looked after us well. I learned to love Australian plants and animals; the bottle brush in front of my home is in full bloom and in it are nesting colourful birds.

The life of first and second generation migrants is hard because we miss our extended family. This is our refuge and we hope that our children will find a better life here. It is our duty to be a good example to our families and other nations as well.

My hobby is writing poetry; I self-published two collections of my poems: Domovina-tujina and Nase poti. I write in Slovenian because my head and heart wants it this way and because I do not write well in English.

The child does not belong to parents alone

We are parents to all who need food and comfort

The child does not know what religion it belongs

Or what nation

The child is not aware of the colour of his skin

The child just wants to be loved

If we don't give to the child

Support and love

He will have nothing to give

What he will get from us

That he will return.

Oh that our children would receive love and food

That they never experienced hatred and war

So they will be able to sow only love.

A few days ago a woman in a sari passed our house and I greeted her. We talked about weather and before she went on her way she wished me God's blessings. I felt blessed and I also felt that the whole country is blessed.

I believe that people arriving to Australia should learn some English before; they should also have a driving licence. They should be settled in places similar to what they were used to. Australia is not good for dreamers like me. I miss the seasons and the places.

I feel the spring coming  
Early in the morning the birds are heralding it  
The tree lined streets are blooming and scattering fragrance  
Eucalyptus opened yellow, white and red flowers  
Wattles are covered in gold  
At home they have autumn now  
But when spring comes there  
I will return home in my dreams.

## *Josef Zohar - Time Where It Begins, Where It Ends*



Josef Zohar

I was born and grown up in Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia). In 1967 I was supposed to join the Yugoslav National Army. I did not want this. Naive and silly I escaped to Austria. After a few months I went to Australian Embassy in Vienna, where they accepted me as a migrant for Australia. In January 1968, I arrived at Sydney airport. I was 23 years old.

Mirjana Klancar, of same age and to be my wife, came to me from Slovenia in 1970. Shortly after we moved to Wollongong where our first son Alexander was born on 31 December 1971. Mirjana and I married a year later.

After a while, we went back to Sydney, where our second son Michael was born at Auburn Hospital on 31 July 1975. Since this story is for the memory of Michael, I will from here on mainly write

about him.

Michael was only two years old, when we bought and settled in a new home at Werrington, where he and his brother started Public Primary school and later completed nearby High School.

Michael was a beautiful and well behaved child growing up gently. He cared about his learning, was hard working and successful. Because of his interest in music our neighbour taught him to play a piano. After school he also regularly learned a classic guitar. We happily bought him a standard and electric piano, as well as a guitar. We liked listening when he played classic music on piano, or sang the popular songs accompanied by his guitar.

When Michael finished High School, he enrolled at The University of Sydney to study nursing. Though we did not like him to leave home, he decided to live in the City, close to University. He believed that would save him time, wasted by travelling every day to and from his University, time that he would instead use for studying.

Sometime later, when he visited us at home, we noticed that he began smoking and even using marihuana. We begged him to stop for his own good and told him, that marihuana may negatively affect his mind, disturb his studying and maybe even lead him to try other drugs. However, he believed that marihuana would not affect him in any negative way.

Unfortunately smoking marihuana and later most likely using other drugs, as some of his friends did, caused him problems in studying. Despite this, with his intelligence and hard effort he fulfilled all the requirements and received his Bachelor of Nursing degree in June 1997.

During his last year at University, Michael became depressed. This increased when driving from home in his new car he had an accident hitting a tree. Luckily, he was not injured, but his car was so damaged that it had to be written off. Once the insurance company covered his loan for that car, he bought another one.

Sometime after this accident he attempted suicide by cutting his wrist. At that time he was staying with his close friend Jessica who helped him with her emotional support. One day she told us that Michael promised her, he would not make another suicide attempt without speaking to her.

On our request Michael visited our local doctor and then a psychiatrist; he was prescribed medications for depression. Slowly he started feeling better.

As a male nurse, after practicing his profession in various hospitals, he took up his job at North Ryde Hospital. Working mostly nightshifts, he was earning relatively good wages. However, it seemed that he was not fully satisfied with that because, as he told us several times, he intended to go back to University to study and become a doctor. He also wanted to complete a computer course.

Later he returned to live with us. He brought home his belongings from Sydney: He had a bed, television, radio and music player, computer, hundreds of popular CDs, university books, documents etc.

On 28 February 1999, at our home, it came to a terrible, shocking tragedy. That morning, Michael with our grandson Jeremy (Alexander's son) went to the shops, where he bought several things for both of them. When they returned just after midday Michael told his mum that he will go to sleep, because in the evening he had to go to work at North Ryde Hospital. He asked her to wake him up about half past seven in the evening. Early in the evening, I was preparing to go patrolling on trains

and stations as a Security Guard; I was employed by Chubb Security. When Mirjana went to wake Michael, she called me to his bedroom: Josef, come here quick. I cannot wake up our son. I called and shook him, but he did not respond. He is blue, not breathing and looks like dead.

I could not believe that so I yelled: "Bloody hell, do not joke and be so horribly rude."

Still, I stopped shaving and went straight there. I had a quick look at Michael, touched his face, his hand. He was cold, blue and not breathing. I rang up 000, told them what happened to our son; I gave them our address and begged them to come as soon as possible.

I picked up Michael, carried him in the lounge room and put him on the lounge. I touched his wrist and jaw, checking for his pulse, but could not feel it. I knew basic first aid, so I gave Michael mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and pressed his chest to revive him. Though I did not see any change in his body, I continued until Ambulance arrived. The Ambulance Officers then put Michael on the floor and started with resuscitation. We hoped that they would revive him. While they were working for more than 40 minutes, I went to his bedroom. On his bed was a needle and syringe, which I did not see when I lifted him up. I then realized that he must have injected himself with heroin.

I showed that needle and syringe to Ambulance Officers, who put it in a plastic bag and told me to give it to Police when they arrive.

Finally they pronounced Michael dead. They called Police and another Ambulance to take Michael's body to Glebe Morgue for post-mortem examination.

Mirjana and I were in shock. We kneeled down around our son, crying, caressing and kissing him. Even our grandson Jeremy, who also liked Michael very much, woke up and came to see what was going on.

Jeremy, I told him, Michael passed away. Since you are now here, come and join us. He started crying with us.

When the Police came, they asked several questions, looked at Michael, made some photographs and took the plastic bag with a needle and syringe. They asked me to come to the Police station during the next few days, to give them a statement.

The second Ambulance arrived. They gently picked up Michael and carried him out. Mirjana and I walked behind. For the last time we embraced and kissed him, before they put him in the Ambulance and departed.

Even when son Alexander arrived home that night, we could not go to sleep. We were still crying and discussing Michael's past and his death. We assumed that he injected himself and overdosed with heroin. However, why would he do this, when

he had to go to work that night? Was this his secretly planned suicide? We will never know.

Michael did not leave any messages. Only some months later, I found among his documents a strange piece of writing:

### ***Thoughts***

*Death      Mum      Jeremy      Puschka (his kitten)      Pain  
Time (where it begins, where it ends)*

*Allison's death, Jason's winning of death. We are all vulnerable, as each other's dreams are hard to follow.*

*Everyone is primarily unconcerned about himself or herself. We are all selfish, self-indulgent and greedy for the things we do not have but really want. Even love, human touch, romance, only boil down to one's selfish drive for self-gratification. We can all care, however care is limited by patience of one. We all die one day, moment. Is it a celebration? It is the only escape I believe in. It would be peaceful, away from all the responsibilities of everyday living and endless mental confusion and turmoil...*



This is my son Michael

Maybe Michael wrote this when his friends Allison and Jason passed away from drug overdose. He probably misplaced this short writing and forgot about it, or decided not to continue with it. But, because it was addressed to mum, Jeremy and his kitten, may that have been intended as his farewell from them? We can only guess.

Two days after his death, we received Coroner's Order authorising the disposal of a body. We have arranged for his

funeral on 5th March 1999 at Pine Grove Memorial Park Crematorium, Eastern Creek.

Later we regretted our decision to cremate him. Michael was battling hard enough to successfully finish University, he suffered depression, and lost his life, had post-mortem examination, pathology, and then we let him burn into ashes. This was our awful parental decision that turned into our feeling of guilt.

When we received the report of Michael's post-mortem examination, it confirmed that drugs heavily affected his body, and that heroin's overdose caused his death.

Loss of our dear young son will cause us pain and regrets as long as we live. This tragedy started my depression that was increasing over several years; it became worse with other sad, hopeless problems and difficulties. I withdrew into myself, stopped contacting or visiting friends, and the suicide settled in my mind. Searching on internet how to carry it out in easier way, I chose instructions on self-suffocation, tried it, but could not end my life that way. It was not easy to end a life. I did not want to do it like Michael and some of his friends and hundreds of other young people do every year. I never tried any drugs in my life. So, the next easier, quickly effective plan was to hang myself. I bought a strong rope, chose a suitable tree and prepared a farewell letter.

Only about three months ago I was pressed to visit a doctor and psychologist; I started taking medication for depression. This treatment seems to be slowly effective, changing my mind, or just wiping away my plan.

For this, I do not blame my son, or anyone else, but just myself. I still feel guilty for his death and keep asking myself: Why was I not a better father? Why I did not stop him to leave our home and to live in the city? Why I never visited him there? Why I did not find out where and when he started smoking and taking drugs, to somehow help him out of this? On the tragic day at home, why I did not go to check what he does in his room? Why I did not revive him? And so on.

I suffer from losing my lovely son at his age of 23; that was my age when I arrived to Australia. I will not forget him. He is still with me. In our lounge-room, on the computer table I keep his photos, his University Degree and his ashes. I look at all this every day. When the time comes, all this will go with me into my grave, where we will be even closer together.

There, my dear son, I will try to be much better father. However, God has already taken your soul into the heaven, while mine will be thrown into the hell. Ah, so be it..

## ***Marjan Lauko***

I was born on 5 August 1926 in Pakrac, Croatia, into a Catholic family. My sister, Oliva, preceded me by four years and we loved each other, likewise both our parents till the end.

My father and mother come from Dravograd district so they are both Koroska people. After the WWI Koroska was divided into Austrian and Slovenian Koroska. Mum's family went to Austria and dad's family came under the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatians and Slovenians later renamed Yugoslavia. Mum's father was a teacher in Koroska. Mum did not call herself either Slovenian or Austrian but Korosica. I received Slovenian citizenship in 1994 and feel very proud of my Koroska roots.

Father was employed as a clerk in the very large forest and timber industry, when in 1932 at the height of the world depression, the mill went into receivership and closed down. My parents moved to Pekre, a town near Maribor, where dad took over a country tavern (gostilna). In 1934 the economy began to recover, the opportunity for a timber retail business appeared and we moved to Vinkovci in Croatia. I started school there. Four years of Primary school and four years of High school (gimnazija). I showed interest in foreign trade, so they enrolled me in 1941 in the Commercial Academy in Osijek, 30 km away. I travelled daily by train until 1943 when it became more evident of partisan activities and sabotages on the railway line, stopping the trains and forcing young men to join their forces. I was forced to find full board in Osijek. In summer of 1944 the Germans took over the school building and used it as a hospital, so we had to abandon our education. My mother was not very impressed with the advancing front line, so she chose to go to Slovenia, where it was much more peaceful and less partisan activity. I joined her on the 11-day goods train journey and stayed with our relatives; mother was helping them on the land and in the house. I however joined the partisan units, after receiving an order to join the German army to help defend the onslaught of the Russians on Vienna. The day after I joined x (deleted full stop) I heard men under a tree singing a beautiful song, which I never heard before (ob jezeru v tihi noči...) The melody was easy to follow, but the lyrics were something new, so I came closer, leaned against the tree and joined them in the chorus. One of the fellows turned towards me, commented on my good voice and asked if I would like to join the choir, which was a unit of the brigade headquarters. Next day I was a member of the choir; free from sentry duty and fighting, but heavily engaged in singing and reciting.

So, shortly after I joined the partisans, the Germans realized that they cannot win, and they ended the war.

I was demobilized in December 1945 and continued my education in January 1946 and matriculated in August the same year, when I was called up to finish serving my obligated two years of army service. I was sent to southern Macedonia where I contracted malaria. On return my parents informed me that my father's business has been nationalized; he lost his business and was now employed as a storemen on a building site with a wage hardly sufficient to support them, let alone my further education at the University in Zagreb, where I was already enrolled. So I moved to Slovenia. The main reason why I wanted to get out of Croatia was my involvement in an underground secret organization which was not exactly friendly towards the oppressive regime – to put it a nice way. My political record soon followed me, so I was on constant alert.

In August 1948 I met Tone Zagorc, the manager of my uncle's general store, which was also nationalized. We became good friends, as a matter of fact such good friends that we fully trusted each other with our lives. We began to plan our escape from the ever more oppressive tyrannic Communist regime. We decided to escape on the night of 29 January 1949 the night of new moon – total darkness, so we could not be seen from a distance while crossing the border. The winter 48-49 was one of the mildest winters on record with very little snow even in higher mountains. That night was also so painfully still and beautiful, which slowed our progress to about 100 meters an hour. During the day the snow was soft, due to the above zero temperature, but during the night the top of the 10 cm thick layer formed a frozen crust, which made a crunching noise with every step. We tried to walk under the trees, where there was no snow, but there the dry leaves and twigs made a similar breaking sound. It took us seven full hours before we reached the barbed wire – the border, the last few meters to freedom. We tried to lift the barbed wire so we could crawl under and to the other side, but just at this point we did not succeed. We tried more to the left but it was just driven and held by steel poles into the ground. We retreated over the fifty meters of grass cut to a height of about 5 cm back some 50 meters into the dense forest. There we spent the rest of the night and all next day. We did not have any food with us, nor did we carry any spare clothes for that matter, just in case we were stopped on the way and questioned about our presence in this forbidden area. In that case our excuse would be, that we are about to visit our friends living nearby.

We did not eat or drink all day and we did not feel any hunger, so nervous and tense we were. As a matter of fact we didn't even mention food or drink.

All day we recited the poems of our great poet France Prešeren, whose pocket size book of poems was my only treasure that I had on me and to this day still dearly treasure it.

At the nightfall, close to seven o'clock, we slowly made our way towards the border. We carefully crossed the path where the border patrol walked when changing the guard. We reached the barbed wire a bit more to the right. Tone reached under and successfully raised it high enough for me to crawl through. Then I raised it for him to crawl through. We were on the other side. A feeling of relief went through me, but we were still not certain that we are out of that land of hell where one is not convinced to wake up in the morning still in one's own bed.

So we slowly and very carefully crawled slightly downwards towards a well lit house. Now, this simply must be Austria, as in Yugoslavia since last August each household in the country received a ration of one litre of kerosene a month, so it was impossible this well lit house to have lights burning in every room. We were now standing behind a big tree and listening to any voices. I finally gathered enough courage and walked around the house when on the entrance door I noticed a big sign which displayed a large Austrian coat of arms. The feeling that hit me that moment was simply indescribable. I ran to the big tree and loudly announced to Tony "this is Austria! We are in Austria! We are free! Free! We didn't knock on that door, but on the neighbours, which was some 100 meters to the right. The woman of the house, carried a pail of pigswill, opened the door and nearly dropped the pail. "Is this Austria", I asked in German, which I still spoke, although the last four years one would have suffered unpleasant consequences for the next few months had one been heard speaking the language of our enemies.

"Ja, ja, Austria", she replied with a trembling voice. "We just escaped from Yugoslavia", I said with an excited voice. Her eight year old son came to the door, politely said "Good evening" and disappeared into the night. She invited us inside and after she found out that we did not eat or drink since midday the previous day, she gave us each a plate of cooked potatoes and poured over hot lard. I was still so nervously distressed that those potatoes, which were one of my favourite dishes, tasted like plain sawdust. I could not even swallow a spoonful, so the lady gave us a glass of milk, to wash it down. Two minutes later three Austrian gendarmes entered, the sergeant shouted in a commanding voice "Hands up!" Tone and I stood up, with hands in the air, when the lady yelled at him "For goodness sake, let them finish the potatoes. They haven't eaten anything since midday yesterday".

When we finished, they escorted us to their station and we had to give detailed description of our flight.

We were interrogated for the next three days by the British occupation forces; afterwards we spent three weeks in the quarantine camp in Strass. My mother's family lived in Klagenfurt, Austria, so I went to them, hoping they would receive me with open arms. Instead, I was told to go back and apply for a legal permit to leave

the country. They obviously had no idea of the conditions in Yugoslavia in those days. I helped in my uncle's food shop and got paid at the end of the week enough to buy a packet of cigarettes. I helped some of our distant relatives on their farm, which was rather hard manual work. I helped my second uncle excavate four meters deep hole on his block of land, for the cellar. I was mixing concrete by hand for the whole foundation, excavated and concreted the wall for the 25 meter deep water well and finally the last three months before the winter set in, made hundreds of lesser blocks by hand for the whole house.

The twelve months in Austria were the most difficult months for me. I also married in December that year, as we could not migrate to Australia unless we were married.

We arrived in Bonegilla on 28 March 1950 and I was sent to work three weeks later on a two year contract to Tasmania. I was given a pick and shovel and told "Dig!"

Blood blisters formed which turned into hard calluses. Yes, it was physically very demanding work, but the wonderful feeling of being free overcame me with an indescribable enthusiasm. I will never forget the day – payday, the only time I treated myself with a small glass of beer in the pub on the way home. With my Polish workmate Janek we left the pub, walked towards the railway station and burst out singing old partisan songs. People were looking at us, smiling and waving. We also sang a German wartime marching song and we were not arrested nor punished. I really began to like this country.

It was in those days that I decided never to get involved in politics, never to enter into serious quarrelsome discussions and never to reveal to anybody which party I will vote for when I acquire the voting rights. O, yes, I did on few occasions reveal that I voted for this, that or the other party, but nobody, I repeat nobody really knows what numbers I put in what squares while I am in that little polling booth.

Twelve months after our arrival in Tasmania, we succeeded to convince Mr. Smith, an Employment officer, to permit us to go to Melbourne, as my wife's sister was there. In the Austin Hospital, Heidelberg I became a wards man; I was given a broom and told "Sweep". The remainder of the two year contract I spent as an attendant in the Mont Park mental hospital, where I learned a lot about the English language. On my days off I found myself a job as a cleaner-labourer, later as a painter with a painting contractor. Two years later, with my friend Jack, who actually was a baker by trade, we started our own painting company. After five years we became successfully "big", but because we lived on opposite sides of the town, we split up.

I was aware that the intellectual Australians had accepted us, likewise I was aware of the harsh, uncivilised and rude rejection of the primitive Australians. We were told to

“go back where you came from”, they gave us titles like “you bloody New Australian bastard”, dago, wog and some unmentionable ones.

In 1959 we became parents to a most beautiful girl – Angela Adelaide. In 1963 when Angelca was 4 years old we went home for a six months holiday. It was sad to see the old country still suffering under the cruel whip of communism. Lack of goods was so evident, compared with Austria or Germany, who were actually the defeated nations in WWII; they were now enjoying much better living conditions than people in Yugoslavia, with the exception of communist party members. They had it good! In the papers and on the radio they were boasting how progressive the country is, how strong the army is. As a matter of fact Yugoslav army was the second most powerful army in Europe after the Soviet Union. But the shops were still barren. If you needed something, you had to KNOW the shopkeeper (government owned shop!) or the doctor (on the government payroll!) And even had to hand him under the table a ‘thank you’ envelope. Compared with Austria or Germany the country was far behind, that was a fact.

The following years were quite fruitful for me. We were blessed with another increase to the family, this time a boy, Victor Julius. The business expanded thanks to my strong involvement.

In 1973 I went to the Jugoslavs Consulate in Hawthorn to apply for a three times entry-exit visa, but the rude Serbian officer, who obviously was a secret agent, told me in very nasty and uncivilized manner, typical for a Serb, that only single entry-exit visas are available. After nearly thirty minutes I angrily told him that “I will not visit Yugoslavia, I will not spend my money in Yugoslavia, although I know for a fact, that you starve for foreign currency, but will rather spend my money here in this free country Australia”, which I did too. I was very relieved when I was outside on the footpath again.

My next visit to my country was in 1992 when Slovenia broke away from the Eastern block and became an independent nation, rightfully belonging to the middle European Western system with its own new currency: Tolar. Slovenia was accepted into NATO, then in 2004 into the European Union. In 2007, 1 January the new European currency, the Euro was proclaimed as a legal tender, which the two million people gleefully accepted. On 1 May 2004 Slovenia was accepted as a full member of EU. To mark this historic occasion, I decided to celebrate it by undertaking a charity walk. After months of e-mails and phone calls I began the walk at the source of the river Soča in the Trenta valley, which is in western Slovenia close to the Italian border. Twenty eight days and about 930 km later, I finished this unforgettable walk, which at the same time was in aid of cancer cure; I was received by the President of Slovenia, Dr. Janez Drnovšek. I handed him a present in the name of all Slovenians in

Australia, a present to Slovenia – a real boomerang made and decorated by an Australian Aborigine. On the bend of the boomerang was an Australian black opal. Also in the velvet lined case with a Perspex cover, was a plaque with a description and an Australian and Slovenian flag. The president was very impressed.

(More details about my walk in Slovenia can be found on the internet. Just type in Marijan Lauko or Marjan Lauko. Details about my walks in Australia can be found if you type in Mario Lauko).

At this point I must say that during my walk I have noticed a vast change in enthusiasm, passion and eagerness in the everyday people's lives. In these few years of independence they have achieved an enormous economic growth, which can be accomplished only by erudite thinking, deep seeded natural positive application of previously prohibited free thinking. The people and their leaders have proven that this great little nation definitely does not belong and cannot be ranked among or be classified as a Balkan or East European state, as still claimed by some uneducated and misinformed reporters.

Anyway the Balkan Peninsula is a thousand plus kilometres away, the Balkan Mountains are also hundreds of kilometres to the south east; Slovenia is situated on the eastern slopes of the Alps, which every intelligent person knows is a mountain range in Central Europe and not on the Balkan.

In hindsight regarding my charity walk in Slovenia and my life in general in Australia I can with confidence say:

My dear Slovenia! I have observed many facets of your natural beauty. You have mighty mountains, fertile plains and your fast flowing rivers. I have visited hospitals, museums, churches, black kitchens, monasteries and ancient castles. I have walked on very steep terrains, on snow, bitumen roads, gravel, rough rocky paths, railway lines, and steep bush tracks and across paddocks through knee deep grass in drizzle, rain, gale force winds and a few clear days. I was interviewed almost daily by TV stations, had three live TV appearances, radio, press three to four times a week and SBS Melbourne every week.

My dear Slovenia, you will remain in my memory till my last breath.

My dear Australia, my dear Queensland. You are now my second home. I will always treasure your beauty and be grateful for the most precious thing you have given me – freedom.

Twelve months after my return from Slovenia, my eyesight has rapidly deteriorated. I have been diagnosed with macular degeneration (wet) in both eyes and am now constantly dependent on others in my daily life. Fortunately for me, this country has

a big heart. I am a grateful recipient of a number of concessions which I enjoy and which make my life much more pleasant and bearable.

Two years after our arrival in Australia our friends Paul and Katie have already saved enough money, for the minimum deposit on a two bedroom weatherboard house in Heidelberg, a Melbourne suburb. It was a basic house, no light fittings, no curtains, only two power points in the whole house. The road was unmade, no footpath, no front fence, no garage, only one narrow concrete path from the front boundary to the entrance door. The front and back yards were full of bits of timber, plaster and other building scraps, left over by the builder. The floors inside were covered with rubbish, hard plaster and other scraps. My wife and I cleaned the inside, made it suitable for living and moved in. On the bedroom windows we put up bed sheets, bought electric globes for the kitchen and bedroom, Katie supplied the kitchen table and four chairs, all very cheap, but good enough to sit and have a meal.

To celebrate the occasion, we invited our friends, some 14 of them, we spent one Saturday evening singing, yodelling and dancing at the same time enjoying the good homemade food prepared by our wives.

The neighbours came in for a drink and tasted the food, particularly the apple strudel and praised the good cooks. In those days they were still using dripping for cooking and could not believe that lard or oil can be substituted.

As I mentioned above, we bought our house four years after arriving in Australia. That house was also just a house, with piles of building scraps and rubbish. There were no light globes, lamp shades nor floor coverings. There were also no road, garage or concrete paths. It took us quite a long time to acquire those missing items. The main thing was: we had our own roof over our heads.

If I compare our beginning in this country to today's conditions and today's young couples, who "cannot and never will be able to afford to buy a house". They have different views on life, they expect to have a house completely finished, fully furnished, a car, possibly a four wheel drive, or two in the double garage, garden landscaped, even a swimming pool in the back yard.

I mention this in case any young fellow will read it, not to be disappointed or ashamed to start 'at the bottom' and work his way up through life. Then and only then will you understand and appreciate life in full. Remember, one day you will be 'on top', you will enjoy the fruits of your hard labour, you will look back on life and realize how much you have missed out, how much wrong you have done and how much you have punished your body by maybe smoking, alcohol and drugs.

O, yes, I have smoked cigarettes, pipe and cigars, which is the worst punishment your body can endure. It is just as detrimental to your health as drugs. Alcohol is not far

behind. I said goodbye to the cigarettes over 30 years ago, when I had only two more years of life left in me – due to nicotine poisoning.

I said goodbye to alcohol nearly 20 years ago, when I began to enjoy drinking filtered water. Today I am still walking 5-10 km every morning before breakfast.

In 2003 I organized a charity walk from the Sunshine Coast-Kingscliff on the north coast of NSW and finished in my Slovenian Club LIPA on the Gold Coast. The short 250 km walk lasted 10 days, with two days of relaxation in Kingscliff. The collected funds were handed over to the new Cancer research centre in Nambour.

In August-September of the same year I myself organized another charity walk, again in aid of the cancer research centre in Nambour, this time from Maroochydore to Mackay, a distance of 1002 km. I finished the walk in 28 days.

Now I am beginning to realize that my age has got a stern grip on me and does no longer permit me to undertake such lengthy adventurous excursions. But knowing my own stubborn persistence... who knows...

Marijan Lauko. Sunshine Coast, Queensland

## *Our Uncle Simen by Franc Visocnik*

Joze



Zagar with Majda and Franc Visocnik. Franc writes about Majda's uncle Simen.

Simen was born under Julian Alps while Franc der Keiser was still ruling our country. Simen lived a normal life until that fateful shot in Sarajevo; since then the shooting followed throughout Europe and even further.

Simen evaded the scattering of deadly ammunition on Soski Front; he went instead to work in the tin mine. When river Soca was no longer bloody red but again reflected the clear blue sky the three coloured flag announced the new entity: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. This new country wasn't a paradise but when Serb King Peter escaped from Yugoslavia, the evil forces were truly unleashed.

The devil does not usually travel alone; the first one was the Fascist-Nazi invader and the second came under the banner of the bloody red star of communism.

After the so called liberation in 1945 the terror continued, the machine gun could be heard at night, people tried to escape from their liberated country.

After the Liberation Front offered the family the taste of Bolshevik goods, our Uncle Simen and his sister were forced to seek refuge in a foreign country. The escape was made easier because half of his land was outside Yugoslavia. Simen's sister eventually became my mother in law.

In Italy Simen shared his destiny with many other refugees, political émigrés. His dual ownership of the land made it possible for him to remain under the Mangart mountain and under St. Visarje.

After a quarter of a century the younger generation suggested that the family moves even further away. The old saying: the further you travel the more there is to see, came true for Simen.

Not that Simen knew where he was going but he agreed to join the family into the kangaroo country; so we all settled on the Pacific beach in Queensland.

Everything suddenly changed for 84 years old Simen. Nobody spoke Italian or Slovenian anymore. He discovered that he no longer had to shovel the snow in winter, the big water at the back of the house was salty and the big ducks-pelicans were not dangerous. Because the country was flat he got a women's bike and explored the country with his four legged guardian Dalmatian Bookie. Uncle Simen gradually learned English but the words he learned nobody understood. Uncle Simen however said that everybody understood him and that he also knew what others were thinking. They all knew him and greeted him with a smile: Hi Simon.

Our neighbour a doctor told us a story. His patient a policemen told him about a certain old man presumably Hungarian who was travelling around on a pushbike. This old man was riding a bike on the road instead of the cycling path. The policeman explained to the man that the road is for the cars and the bikes should be on the path. The old man nodded and said Ja, Ja. The policeman continued on his way and so did the old man. Next time the man of the law again found the old man on the road and again he explained to him that he must ride a bike on the cycle path and again the old man kept nodding in agreement saying Ja, ja.

When the same policeman saw this old man riding on the road next, he got out of the car, grabbed the old man under his arm and picked the bicycle with another hand. He placed the man and the bike on the path saying: Here Ja Ja. Since that day our Simen rode a bike where he had to and his faithful dog ran in front and later behind him.

We thanked the neighbour; in the language that Uncle Simen understood we explained to him where Ja Ja was supposed to be.

One day Uncle Simen's niece noticed that he was limping. What is wrong Uncle Simen, she inquired.

Oh, nothing, really nothing, he said. But why are you limping, asked his niece. Oh, down there on the road crossing a car hit me a little bit. Did you fall down? Yes I fell down a little bit. Two women helped me up. Your leg is bleeding, does it hurt. Yes, it hurts a little bit. And what happened then? They were asking me something. And you? What could I do I just said: Ja, Ja. One of the women then talked into her mobile and when we stood on the footpath the police came and an ambulance and they talked. And you? I sat on my bicycle and came home.

We disinfected and dressed the wound which was soon forgotten.

Uncle Simen's poor English was not fateful because he had a home background where he received the explanations about this new world in the language he understood.

He was happy to receive many Happy returns when he turned a hundred years old and he enjoyed a huge torta but he was even happier when he received from Italy a new bike for his 95th birthday. It was a ladies bike with a specially low pedals so he could step easily on it. The bike had a nice sounding bell with which he warned walkers on his daily rides.- Uncle Simen also got his first watch so he wasn't late for lunch. France Visocnik Bribie Island, 15 October 2007

### John Bozic

I was born in Ilirska Bistrica (IB) November 1944. My parents came from a small village of Sabonje 7 km away. My father was imprisoned when I was 3 years old and for next 6.5 years our mother took care of my brother and I under extremely difficult conditions.

I went to primary school in Trnovo which is part of Ilirska Bistrica until 9.5 years old and then we left for Italy. Interesting point was that we left with rare Yugo passports one way only and stamped on it: no return. We left under the federal law that said if the head of the family is in another country, the rest of the family has the right to follow under certain conditions. We made an extremely difficult decision but in hindsight the right one. Since my mother was born under Italy, we were deemed by the Italian Government as non refugees and classified under voluntary repatriation. We stayed in a special refugee camp in Trieste mainly for Istrians who elected to live in Italy. 6 months later we were transferred to an international refugee camp in San Saba (Trieste) with the vision of going to USA.

Interesting point is, the international language of communication in the camp was Serbo-Croat hence by the time we left Italy my brother and I were fluent yet we have never been to Croatia or Serbia. I continued my primary and secondary education in Trieste.

In 1956 we were due to leave for USA; it was just after the Hungarian Revolution commenced. At that point USA stopped all migration until further notice. My father was very disappointed and did not want to wait any longer, hence we applied to migrate to Australia.

We were approved very quickly and in December 1957 before Christmas we boarded the ship Sydney from Naples and commenced our journey into unknown.

I do recall my mother confessing to a friend that she did not know precisely where Australia was; she added that she only intended to make some money and return. I think these thoughts were every migrant's inspiration, but in reality very few people returned back home.

Arriving in Melbourne in January 1958 we were quickly transported to Bonegilla which was an interim camp for the migrants, before they dispersed all over the country.

After a disappointing attempt at picking hops, my father decided to try and get a job in the booming building industry in Canberra. He was successful hence we followed and by the end of March 1958 we settled in O'connor, Canberra. Because of the boom, the rental accommodation was nonexistent. The 4 of us all lived in one

bedroom and shared the facilities with others. We constantly moved around trying to improve our living standards.

In those days Canberra was small and had a population of around 30,000 people. There were only 2 public high schools and 4 private schools to choose from and my English education began at St Edmunds college which at that time was only half finished. Travelling to school by bus in those days was a gruelling 1.5 hours picking kids from all northern suburbs. I integrated into the system very quickly, mainly due to my English studies in Italy, hence with reasonable command of the language. Discrimination in those early years was common, but it somehow never worried me.

After completing my secondary education I began a 5 year apprenticeship in automotive industry and had automotive businesses in different capacities until mid 80's.

My family first contact with the Slovenian community in Canberra began very early. My parents were looking to make new friends and since there was no Slovenian club as yet, individual contact by word of mouth was essential. In the very early days I remember Mr Falez who was instrumental in raising enough funds with others to commence the building of the club's premises in Woden. I do recall Mr Falez's relentless persistence of door to door canvassing to raise money for the cause. I also remember him knocking on our door late one night and skilfully persuading my father to part with \$20 for the building fund and making him a member at the same time. Mr Falez held many positions within the Slovenian community; to me he is a real patriot that I highly respect. Over the years I got to know all his family on a friendly terms.

In 1967, I decided to marry a young lady named Linda against mine and her parents' wishes. Her family migrated from Scotland. The result was 4 wonderful children. Fiona, Vanessa, Rachael and Damien.

I always dreamed of going back to my roots and in 1974 with my 2 oldest children at that time 4 and 6 years I packed up and went on an European adventure with intent to work in Europe. My child hood memories of Slovenia were not precisely what I came back to, nevertheless we had a wonderful time visiting relatives and friends that I have not seen for more than 20 years, but above all we travelled intensively learning about the history and geography of my native country. My overall impression was sad that the Communist regime were bungling and mismanaging and bleeding the Slovenian economy. I felt the suppression in people without them saying a word. This was the first of many visits that I made to Slovenia over 33 years. From early 90's when in Europe on business I would sneak in usually for one day only and surprise my relatives, and this kept a bond between them and myself. I felt that Linda got to know Slovenia just as well as her native Scotland.

On the first visit I learned very quickly, that no matter how well you spoke Slovenian, (and mine still is very poor) people would easily identify you as a stranger; they always asked me where I came from. No matter how hard I tried, I was never successful in passing as an everyday Slovenian. On those occasions I wished that my Slovenian grammar had been better.

In 1985 I decided to change direction in my life and decided to leave the automotive industry and do something different and challenging. After a 3 year stint in the commercial redevelopment and studying for my Gemmology diploma and still not being satisfied I was looking for alternatives and this led me to become a member of the Slovenian Association in Canberra. On frequent visits to the club's Saturday functions, which I thoroughly enjoyed, I slowly realized that there was no harmony and unity within the club. Different members pulling in different directions and trying to disrupt the main function of the club. This differences stemmed from the old days back in Slovenia. During my membership I made many Slovenian friends. Even after establishing my Gemstone export company and going to work in Japan in the early 90's I kept my membership going but the disintegration of the Association was inevitable mainly due to no new Slovenian migrants arriving and the children of the those founding migrants not following their parents footsteps.

In my travels people would ask me if I was a native Australian or not and by responding that I was born in Slovenia would immediately bring a 90% response of: oh yes I know Czechoslovakia. This was a usual response from the Japanese and other nationals. During the 16 years I worked in Japan, I learned about their culture and language, which was a huge learning curve in my life. During that time I met my current lady in my life and my partner Hiromi who now resides with me in Sydney

At times I sought other Slovenians in Japan without success until 2002 Fifa world cup preparations. The Slovenian team was stationed in a small city of Mimasako-cho about 200km south of Osaka where we lived. The local city council wanted to have a small Slovenian culinary fair so that all the children etc could learn about Slovenia and Slovenian cuisine. They underestimated the rarity of Slovenian people and ever more so Slovenian Chefs in Japan, but found the only chef in Japan whom I saw on television teaching a group of Japanese the Slovenian culinary art. I was lucky to be watching the program and learned that he had a Slovenian restaurant called Pika Polonca. His name is Igor Lajlar (about my age) I did contact him and arranged to come to his restaurant.

He lives In Kyoto the old imperial Capital of Japan about an hour travel from Osaka. It was a memorable visit and I learned a lot about him. He came to Japan in the early 70's graduated from Kyoto University, married a local lady and it was my pleasure to have met all his family. We had a wonderful comparison of his Japan and my

Australia. I admired with a touch of jealousy his Japanese fluency. Since I was the first Slovenian until then to eat in his restaurant, he treated me like celebrity and introduced me to his regular Japanese guests. I do recall his Gibanica which he passionately promoted at every opportunity. I understand that he has now expanded and organises tours to Slovenia, where the Japanese tourists stay on farms and experience the real country life.

I have had so far a very challenging and fulfilling life, but I do regret not passing more of my heritage down to my children. When the parents are of different nationality, usually the mother tongue prevails; hence my children all understand the Scottish dialect with the native touch. Although all of my children have been to Slovenia at some point in time, their Slovene vocabulary is insignificant.

As the years roll on, I see my link with my relatives diminishing. I have only one Auntie left who resides in Ilirska Bistrica and my cousins who are spread all over from Europe to South America and am very lucky that I had the opportunity to visit them all.

I often ask my dear mother Paulina who is now approaching her 88th birthday and still lives in Canberra and maintains her full independence and amazingly still drives her car, whether she has any regrets of ever coming to Australia. Her response is always the same that we are lucky to be in the lucky country, because the decision was made to come to Australia at that time on the basis of urgency and not on the knowledge or merit of the lucky country. She would do it all over again. Visiting her still gives me the opportunity to speak Slovene dialect from Ilirska Bistrica. My mother still cooks those wonderful dishes that I have enjoyed as long as I can remember and my children have learned some of these skills from her too.

Coming to Australia as a child, I have never been torn between my native and my adopted country. I know that I belong here but I still support Slovene athletes in sport and in other Slovenian policies. I love Slovenian music and songs and above all food.?

I will also continue to visit my relations overseas until the inevitable links will come to the end.

## ***Andrej Globocnik***

I was born on 10. 2 1932 in a village of thirteen houses close to Trieste. We had no land so my father provided for us by working as a carpenter. Times were hard, the work irregular and poorly paid.

Trieste territory has been a disputed territory throughout history. Trieste was a free port under the reign of Austria; this was our territory's most flourishing era. During the WWI the allies promised Italians Trieste, Primorsko and Gorisko for joining them in the fight against Austria. After WWI Austria disintegrated so allies rewarded Italians by giving them our Slovenian land. Nobody asked our people how they felt about it and what they wanted. They pushed us into an untenable misery; we became Mussolini's victims, we were and still are paying the price for their decisions. Some of the blame for this goes to our own poor leadership.

People of Primorska resisted Germanic rulers but after they were annexed by Italians they were sorely disappointed. At first Italians introduced Italian as a second language but soon Italian became official language and people were forbidden to speak Slovenian publicly. My father was often in conflict with authorities because both my parents were patriotic Slovenians.

Our region is known for producing good wines and fruit but it was not worth producing it because people were not allowed to sell it on a free market and the government paid less for it than it cost to produce it. The laws on the paper were the same for everybody but the administration of the law discriminated against Slovenians. Most Primorska people simply hated Italians. Italians rewarded the few Slovenians who joined Fascist Italian Mussolini party; they gave them special privileges to encourage other Slovenians to become fascist Italians.

I was eight at the beginning of the WWII. I remember the war years being full of fear, hunger and misery. Italians picked dad for the Mussolini army. They put all Slovenians into so called special battalions so they could easily keep them under control. By conscription of young and older men into the army they made it harder for Slovenians to rebel against Mussolini or to join the Liberation front partisans.

After Italy capitulated my father returned home and joined partisans. He was shot in a leg so Germans easily captured him and sent him to jail in Trieste. Mum managed to see him once and he asked her to bring me to see him. The following night we walked 19 km to Trieste and in the morning collapsed under the huge chestnut tree hungry, cold and tired. We were afraid that we might not be able to see dad. At daylight we approached the jail entrance and mum begged the authorities to let us

see dad. We cried and begged but our tears did not help; the guard's face remained unmoved, cold and hateful; our pleas fell on deaf ears. My mother was a pious, honest lady and she fell to her knees in front of a guard; she said in good Italian: mister, have you no heart? Maybe you have the family at home; maybe you have children. Look at this boy here; maybe he will never again see his father. Mum was pregnant with my sister that was born a few days later.

I believe that mum's words and her condition melted the guard's icy cold soul because he said: All right but only for half an hour. Oh yes, we saw our starved, sad dad. He knew what to expect from his captors. He also knew in what miserable situation he was leaving his family. He embraced me and said: Toni, believe that Christ lives. We returned home late at night.

Dad ended his life in a crematorium at the age of 33 with about 500 other local resistance fighters. Under the Nazi occupation, the sole extermination camp on Italian soil was constructed at the Rizarna near Trieste.

There was nothing left of dad to bury at our cemetery but I erected a place of remembrance for him like for the rest of my ancestors have so they will not be forgotten.

After WWII on April 30, 1945, the Italian anti-fascists incited a revolt against the Nazis and on May 1, Yugoslav Tito's army liberated most of Trieste from the Nazis. Intent on annexation, the Yugoslavs quickly began forming their own military administration. They began to arrest members of the population, including the Italian democratic resistance force. The Yugoslav troops were finally forced to withdraw from the city under diplomatic pressure from the Western Allies. In 1947 Trieste became independent and governed for several years by the Allied Military Government, comprising American and British forces. This state was dissolved in 1954 and the territory dubbed Zone A, went to Italy, while the southern part of the territory (Zone B), comprising Istria and some parts of the Karst went to Yugoslavia.

Zone B was divided between Yugoslav republics Slovenia and Croatia according to the majority of population; Slovenia got the territory around Koper, and Croatia got most of Istria. The city of Trieste went to Italy even though Yugoslavia strongly protested against it. We were happy that our village came under Yugoslavia. The border cut along our home.

Yugoslav government promised liberty, freedom and prosperity to Slovenians; Yugoslavia after the war became to us a new promised land of milk and honey. Our people were hopeful that their fortunes would improve in Yugoslavia. At the beginning most Slovenians wished to join other Slovenians in Slovenia although Slovenia itself was a part of Yugoslavia.

Soon Primorska Slovenians were bitterly disappointed in Yugoslavia. They saw no prospects for economic prosperity; we again felt betrayed because Yugoslavia did not fulfil its promises with which it lured us under their government. People felt controlled, scared and insecure. No resistance or criticism was allowed; people felt that they were constantly watched and listened to. They said that everyone was free to practice religion but everybody knew that people who went to church could never hope to prosper or get the positions they wanted.

The years after the war were hungry miserable years of poverty, destruction and restrictions. The consequences of the war were still visible and felt every day in every way. The faces of people were sullen and worried. It was hard to buy the necessities. As an apprentice I had to work hard ten to sixteen hours a day hungry most of the time and without the basic comforts for decent life. When I finished the apprenticeship I owed some money to the company for the meals they provided. I could not pay it so the company sued me. I arrived to Sezana court in February 1952. The kitchen administrator Janez came to witness about my crime. My good friend Janez left his wife and a baby that early freezing morning to walk twelve kilometres to Sezana so he could save the little money they gave him for the bus trip.

The judge asked me: Why didn't you pay your debt?

With my meagre wages I could not do it, I answered.

Do you intend to pay the debt, asked the judge.

I do, of course I do, I replied.

When, asked the judge.

As soon as I will have the money for it, I promised and that seemed to satisfy the judge. I was expecting something worse. That was the one promise I never fulfilled and I am not sorry. I walked three hours to Sezana and three hours back home. I had nothing to eat all day and in my misery I did a lot of thinking on the way. I remembered the afternoon my father prepared to join partisans. Mum begged him to be careful but he told her that this was his opportunity to fight against the cruel invader and seek justice for our people. He insisted that this was everybody's sacred patriotic duty. He said that even if the worst happened his children will enjoy the better future; they will have freedom and prosperity for all the days of their lives. What irony, what betrayal! How wrong he was. Luckily he did not see what was happening because he would protest and get himself in greater trouble. I returned home in the evening and my mother embraced me and said: My poor child look at you. The tears ran down her old face. Maybe our smoky kitchen brought the tears to her eyes but I think that I looked very miserable and sad to her. I was exhausted and starved.

Mother, I am going to go away, I said.

Where, she whispered.

To the other side, I said.

I escaped to Italy in 1956; after all our complaints against Italy we realised that even post war Italy offered more freedom and prosperity than Yugoslavia. I planned to immigrate to Canada for a few years to earn some money and then return home. I hoped that the situation at home would improve and we could then begin to enjoy the more carefree life like people in the west did.

The migration to Canada was unfortunately closed; I waited patiently for almost three years to be accepted by Canada or Australia. In the meantime I found casual employment so I could survive; I also sent home some money. I moved freely because I spoke Italian. Of course all this was illegal since I had no Italian citizenship; I was not willing to renew my Italian citizenship. I left Naples for Australia on 13.4.59 on a ship Fairsea. About 1800 migrants of different nationalities came with me. We arrived to Melbourne on 10.5. 59 and continued our trip to Bonegilla by train. They were heating the train with hot water in tin containers under the seats. When the water cooled down they replaced it with containers of hot water. I was dismayed by the scenery; barren countryside and long wire fences stretched into emptiness. It was a cold foggy day when I arrived to Bonegilla. The food smelled terrible and I could not eat it. I never ate sheep in Slovenia and we never used beef dripping as fat.

After a miserable month in Bonegilla they sent me to port Kembla Steelworks. Wollongong became a migrant city because of the Steelworks. They provided full board in a camp but the food was as terrible as in Bonegilla; I wanted to get out. An Italian came looking for boarders and he offered me a room. He had five families in a house and he slept on the veranda so he could collect more rent. Women made a roster to cook on the one stove but it was an improvement for us to have home cooked meals. After a month I found an Italian baker who let me share his home for half the rent because I helped with the maintenance. Italians played an important role in my life simply because I spoke Italian. This was rather unfortunate in the long run because it stopped me from trying harder to learn English. I married the baker's daughter Marcela who only spoke Italian although her grandparents were Slovenian. Although Marcela learned some Slovenian I regret that both of us did not become fluent in English much earlier. It did not worry us at the time but now I can see how one could not get ahead without knowing the language. I started evening English classes but when I could work overtime instead I dropped out of school. Economic survival seemed more important at the time. I bought a block of land. I borrowed most of the money and repaid it in the following year. We enthusiastically began to build our house. Marcela and I had three daughters by the time we moved into our

own home. Being a family under our own roof was the best reward for all our struggles of the past. Marcela stayed home with the children.

We stayed in port Kembla for ten years. We made many Italian and Slovenian friends and some of different nationalities as well. Those first friends remained our lifelong friends. Slovenians in Wollongong had their association Danica which we joined. We had very happy gatherings and celebrations there.

We all carried with us the unpleasant heritage of war and after the war years but we never boasted or complained about it. Slovenians in Wollongong to this day follow this line. The doors of their club were always open to everybody be it for sport, religious or social gatherings. Everybody was welcome; they have good relationship with other Slovenian associations to this day. We tried to understand each other; we knew that beside pleasant memories we carried much bitterness and pain. Nobody saw the depth of trauma and pain in the person next to him but the burdens of the past defined us. We realised that our experiences will follow us for the rest of our lives whether we wanted them or not. Despite our past we were given a chance to use our talents and energies for the common good of our people.

I stopped blaming people for what happened to us in the past. My duty is to live in harmony with people and with myself. I reconciled with the idea that all the wrongs perpetrated against us do not give us the right to perpetuate the hatred. With goodwill and respect for human life it should be possible for all of us to live in peace and harmony.

One day we visited friends in Sydney and on the trip back to Wollongong we decided to put our house on the market and move to Sydney. We realised that Wollongong was a dirty polluted city and that Sydney offered greater educational opportunities for our daughters and better job opportunities for me. In Sydney we lived in a rented flat for the first year while I built our house. In 1972 I started subcontracting for builders. I earned enough to provide well for our family. We chose a Catholic College for our daughters because we believed that it provided the discipline and good teaching; nothing was too expensive for the education of our children. They speak Slovenian fluently and have been to Slovenia several times. My family was the greatest blessing for me and I am happy seeing my daughters on the right path. This is my greatest achievement.

In Wollongong I became a committee man of the Slovenian association. I vividly remember Simon Gornik one day standing up and walking out of our meeting. I went after him and asked him what was wrong. He said: Everything in there smells of communism and I cannot tolerate it. My father was killed by communists. I said: My father was killed by Germans. Do we want to perpetuate war and foster the hatred or do we want to accept peace and live and work together?

Simon understood and we became friends. On my short visits to Wollongong I am glad to see that friends from thirty- forty years ago remain my friends to this day. We understood each other's pain but we do not blame each other for it. I never hid the fact that my father was a partisan so some people labelled me a communist. In Wollongong we realised that we came from different political background but we tolerated each other.

Unfortunately in Sydney that wasn't possible because certain individuals believed that they had a God given right to make decisions for everybody else. If these individuals really practiced Christ's teachings they would fear his judgment because they perpetrated much unhappiness to their own people. Jesus was teaching us to love each other and forgive those that have wronged us.

Vlado Susa approached me one day in Sydney and invited me to join Slovenians as they were building their clubhouse. Although I was then busy building my own home I agreed to help. I was proud that I belonged to a very small nation and to a smaller still group of very conscientious and united group of people capable of building a club home for all of us and for our children and grandchildren. I was very naïve. I fully trusted people I barely knew.

We built the club in record time. Wonderful! The Slovenian Saturday school for our children started and I brought our girls to school; quite a good number attended and their teacher was good. The club was well attended. It was exciting, interesting, and lively; we were all happy gathering every weekend after a hard week's work to spend the time with our Slovenian friends. We were happy to come together as a nation and as friends.

But not for long! It came like the lightning from the clear sky. One day I drove my daughter home from Slovenian school and she asked me: Dad what did you do that the men in the club are so angry with you.

When I later investigated I discovered that some of us were stigmatised as Reds. The club suppressed these attitudes during the building of the club and until the club's activities reached its best and most active period. If the leaders of the club honestly presented their aims and goals at the beginning many people would never join and help building the club.

Who caused these divisions?

Slovenians were always a divided nation. This division cost us at one time to lose our Northern part Koroska. During the referendum Slovenians fell for Austrian promises and their friendly invitation to remain a part of Austria. The church also contributed to this decision because they were describing Serbs as green devils. Austrians are of course Catholics and Serbs are orthodox. If all Slovenians decided through that

referendum to remain in Yugoslavia we would now all be in our independent Slovenia. As it happened, Austrians don't even allow Slovenian road signs in Slovenian part of Austria.

Some Slovenians always favoured Germans; this was best evident during the WWII. After the war the people who collaborated with Germans, demanded the same victorious rights as had those that defeated the enemy and won the war. Many died for this victory, amongst them was also my father.

There was much written and said about our reconciliation but little changed in our hearts.

In the meantime Yugoslavia and communism self destructed and do not exist anymore but people still hide their party membership books just in case if they will need them again; they only changed colours; maybe tomorrow they will again get a chance to cover everything with the rag that carries the swastika. They changed their red horse for the black one. Not because of their convictions but to secure the place at the trough.

Australian Slovenians who had contact with Yugoslav embassy were labelled as communists and the others were called anticomunists. The leaders of both groups were promoting their beliefs. These divisions happened all over Australia so they must have been orchestrated by some background powers but I was never aware of them.

Slovenians are still talking only about communist terror. We judge and criticise communism; it really had caused much damage and suffering. We Slovenians who had to leave our homes and our loved ones were not immune. I hope the communism will never return because the burden of its heritage is still upon us. We had to endure the evils of the war and of communism.

As we all condemn communism it would be right to write something about the conditions that existed before communism; these conditions made communism possible. Bolsheviks orchestrated the cruel and bloody revolution. Horrible! But what about the suffering, poverty, fear and degradation of millions of people who had no rights before the communism? Did God approve of that? They were God and government fearing people. Why don't we write about that as well? Communism did not replace a perfect system; the conditions for ordinary people were rotten before the revolution. Those people sincerely hoped that communism would save them.

It is true, however, that we all escaped from communist dictatorship. The foreign countries welcomed us because they needed and used our hardworking hands; we were grateful because we needed the roof over our heads and the simple comforts to survive. We worked like bullocks with the yoke around our necks.

Among us were individuals who tried to revive their old ambitions from the war years; they ostracized anyone they could not use to achieve their goals. Is that understanding and tolerance towards those who think differently? Is that the love of your neighbour? Or is that selfishness and greed for power? To think that we are all children of the same mother and have somewhere our common home country which we call Slovenia with pride! That hurts. There is no unity or understanding; there never was. And more! We bring our traumas on our children and our communities. We are forcing our ways. I feel ashamed and sad. How do you feel my fellow Slovenians?

Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia until 1991 and Yugoslav Embassy was representing Slovenia and also Slovenians in Australia. Whoever had to deal with any kind of documents relating to Slovenia had to do that through the Yugoslav Embassy if he wanted to or not. The same rule applied also to those who applied for the pension for their parents. Did they become communists while they arranged these things? All of us who travelled to Slovenia could do that only with the permission of Yugoslav embassy. Are therefore all of us naughty communists? If I remember rightly Yugoslavia offered amnesty to all who lived in Yugoslavia from 1941 on, except to those who were actively collaborating with Hitler. And we had such people in Sydney. These people of course did not dare travel to Slovenia. They knew why. They were openly protesting against anything that did not fit with the period they mourned. They persecuted like the worst social evil those whose views they did not like.

Spomenka Hribar in one of her articles described her communist father who was an honest strong man and paid with his life for his beliefs. There were other honest good communists although more of them were greedy corrupt opportunists who blackened their red horse at the first opportunity just to remain in the saddle. As I see it, red and black party members hold much in common, both want to govern and force their will on people; both are opportunists and insist that: if you are not with us you are against us. Both are greedy for power, wealth and influence; both want to live on the account of the honest hard working people. They work on the principle: You scratch my back and I will scratch yours or as they say in Slovenia: one hand washes the other. They are grabbing for themselves the property of the nation and our nation is getting poorer and more disillusioned. Communist did not take the national wealth out of the country; it remained in Slovenia for Slovenians.

I understand that Yugoslav embassy had to promote the symbols and interests of Yugoslav government since they were employed as Yugoslav representatives. They had to assert their influence over Yugoslavs in Australia. Slovenska izseljenska Matica SIM- the organisation working for the benefit of Slovenians abroad promoted Slovenian culture and kept in touch with Slovenians outside Slovenia. They were

working under the restraints of the same communist regime. When SIM representatives came with cultural groups to perform for us I accepted them.

Slovenians at home joined the communist party for different reasons. A few were ideologically convinced communists but most were opportunists who realised that the way to advancement, prosperity and power was through the membership of the communist party. Some simply had no chance to hold their jobs let alone be promoted if they were not members of the party. They did what they had to do to survive economically and professionally.

Slovenians historically had to adapt to ever new regimes; they were forced to make themselves acceptable to foreign powers in order to survive. Most of us speak other languages and we are willing to accommodate others who do not speak Slovenian. Maybe this is a result of our smallness and of being ruled by foreigners. In Yugoslavia official language was Serbo Croatian but on coming to Australia some Slovenians resented those Slovenians who spoke Serbo Croatian with other Yugoslavs. Some Slovenians rejected everything Yugoslav; they labelled anyone associated with Yugoslav government a communist. These leaders wanted to dictate to us what to think and say.

This reminded me of the times when I was already for the second year wearing the trousers belonging to the Yugoslav army. At that time there were also people trying to brain wash me to think what they wanted me to think.

It was a freezing winter and some of us had frost bitten ears and noses; also our fingers cracked and were bleeding. Three of us slept together and pulled our blankets over ourselves to warm up. During the night the vapour of our breathing froze the edges of the blankets. When you grabbed the machine gun some of your skin was left on it. We had no gloves or socks or medical help. We were so cold that I felt the ice in my veins instead of blood. Snow in places covered the telephone poles and the temperature fell under minus 33. I was as hungry as a Siberian wolf. I must have in that condition said something my superiors did not like. How dare I? They called me for interrogation.

Don't you know that Yugoslav soldiers want for nothing?

I know, I began fearfully; I was just thinking, I started again

You have no right to think. Here are others who think for you. Three days jail in isolation!

Please, I begged, I want to explain.

Be quiet.

I would just like to say that...

Seven days jail. Turn around.

That meant that the proceedings were finished and I had to disappear. That was the harshest punishment which a commander of first battalion of 93<sup>rd</sup> regiment could pronounce. It was 1954.

Jail was 2 by 3 metres room with a wooden bench for the bed. I was allowed to bring one container. Such events made me want to leave my country and they were the reason that I am in Australia.

What irony? What similarity with Slovenian Australian leaders! They would be capable of acting like that commander if the situation arose. They were just as selfish, intolerant, uncompromising and unable to accept diversity of views. We had many examples like that in the club.

We wished for peace; we wanted to foster good relations with our home country and cooperate with SIM when the situation demanded that. They muddied our names, they labelled us communists. That tactic was successful with those of the same views during and after WWII; this did not go well with the rest of Slovenians or with Australians. The West used these people during the cold war because they have been very vocal anticommunist and anti Yugoslav voice. Later the West abandoned them because they were no longer useful. They did not only lose the war against communism they lost against the west.

Americans and English returned Slovenian home guards who escaped to Austria, to Yugoslavia after the war. Although Churchill hated communism he hated home guards more because they collaborated with Hitler. Neither Hitler nor allies trusted them. The way the Yugoslav government had them killed after the war was not fair or acceptable but the revenge played a great role in it. The question exists: how would they act in the same situation?

Those of us who were ostracised by these so called anticommunist leaders, established our own club. Some accused Yugoslav authorities of giving us the idea and of starting our new association but I was never aware of any influence or interference. The atmosphere among us improved but the bitterness in our relations still exists. With a little goodwill and understanding and acceptance of diverse opinions and beliefs we could achieve much; especially that our children would enjoy common social and cultural experiences in the same building we built together. We could offer hospitality and friendship to all our people and our children could learn the language and Slovenian culture; we could love each other instead of barely knowing each other. Many don't even say good day to each other as they meet on the street.

I escaped from Yugoslavia and I did not like South Yugoslav nations ruling and abusing Slovenia. At the same time I like to have friendly relations with other Yugoslavs and I would be happy to live in a confederation of Yugoslavia in which Slovenia would have a total autonomy.

I think that Slovenians are going from one extreme to another; we were brought up to firmly believe in building the brotherhood and unity with South Slav nations but now most Slovenians resent anything that comes from the south.

The government nationalised the property after the war but now they are returning it to the descendants of those land owners who oppressed Slovenians in the past. Distant relatives of Germanic and Italian aristocracy that ruled Slovenians in the past are claiming the best lands and buildings in Slovenia. The church is getting their vast portions as well. At least Tito stood up to foreigners and did not give in to their demands. Whose property is it? Who are they returning it to? Why? Weren't these goods once the possessions of our ancestors?

I believe that Slovenians will find a way of surviving like they did throughout history. There have always been groups of people determined to defend our language and cultural identity. We will keep searching for opportunities; we haven't been called opportunists for nothing. A friend of mine once said: Slovenians are quietly waiting to pounce at every opportunity. Those of us close to the border are specially known to grab every opportunity.

I never had a conflict with members of any other nationality but Slovenians always find something to disagree about. Maybe Slovenians love each other so much that we can't stand it when they don't think the same way we do. Although most of us long for each other's company we cannot bridge our differences. Instead of having fun in our old age we created our own hell. Maybe we argue because we care about each other. Maybe other Slovenians provide the only chance for us to argue. Most of us could not argue with Australians because we did not speak English well enough or because we did not care about them enough. Maybe we did not find so much to disagree about with foreigners.

I am hopeful that our children will find some comfort in knowing other Slovenians; they are not burdened with the events of the past; they will look to the future. Maybe they will revive Slovenian culture at home and in Australia

## ***Janez Gornik***

My most vivid childhood memory is of kids at school calling me Gipsy. I don't know why this made me so ashamed and angry and upset. I had many fights because of it and I was always in trouble because of fighting. You could say that I escaped from Slovenia because kids called me Gipsy. Parents scared their children by saying that gipsies will take them if they are not neat and honest and hardworking. I grew up terrified of Gipsies.

I heard people say that my father used to be a Gipsy. I couldn't say when my father stopped being a Gipsy or if secretly he was still a gipsy. We used to go to church like ordinary people and we never went begging from house to house like gipsies do.

I was born in 1941 as one of five children. My parents produced food on their little farm on the border of Slovenia and Hungary.

Everybody was poor at the end of the war. Our house was burnt and we lost our animals. We were forever hungry and waiting for my mother to bring home food. She worked on the fields for other peasants and when she returned, tired in the evening, the kids jumped to untie her apron. We thought only of our hunger and blamed mum if she didn't bring enough or if she came late. Later I realised that as the oldest, I should have helped her.

Dad worked in the vineyard and often came home drunk, singing through the forest. He chased mum through the house and sometimes he caught her in an embrace to dance with him to his song. Mum often ran out of the house to feed pigs or chooks, so he chased us kids. He hugged us and bounced us on his lap and we were delighted. That was the only nice thing that happened to us. Dad sang silly songs and the tears rolled down his eyes and we asked for more.

Mum was always busy, she nagged us to help her but dad told her that kids should have fun. People said that mum deserved better. I loved dad more than I loved mum.

Everything changed when I went to school. At school I first heard that dad was a gipsy. It seemed that nobody liked my dad and that everybody felt sorry for my mother. Mum inherited a vineyard and a paddock from her parents but dad came with nothing. I became ashamed of dad and I began to hate mum for marrying him.

I heard the whispers that my father was drinking with a woman in the vineyard's storage room. Kids teased me about that but I was strong and I hit them to shut them up.

One day I went to the vineyard to get some grapes for mum. I heard the laughter from the storage room above the vineyard. I saw a fancy basket full of grapes and red peaches covered with silky flowery scarf. I realised that the basket belonged to a woman who laughed with dad inside. I grabbed the basket and ran home. I don't know why I did that but I was very angry.

Mum ran to the vineyard and abused the woman who was drinking with dad. The other woman was younger, she had a flowery dress and she laughed at mum. Mum yelled at dad and the other woman. The other winegrowers came out to listen. I was hiding behind the bushes and felt ashamed.

Mum kept the woman's basket and scarf and whenever I saw either of them I remembered and was sorry for bringing them home.

In 1956 I moved to Ljubljana where I met Alenka. We both worked in a textile factory. I had nowhere to live. In the summer so I slept on the railway bench. In the cold late autumn the police chased me away. It wouldn't do to have me freeze in the night. Alenka and I decided to get married and move in with Alenka's family on the outskirts of the city. That's where problems started. Alenka's family told her that she could do better.

After our son Martin was born I felt trapped. I wanted to be somebody, live in my own house, and make my son proud.

I escaped to Austria from where they transported migrants to other countries. I promised Alenka to send for her as soon as I settled down.

In 1960 I arrived to Australia by Qantas. I met migrants of many nationalities coming on the same plane. I landed in Sydney and on my long bus journey from Sydney to a migrant camp in Bonegilla; I sat next to Nicola. This Croatian migrant told me that his cousin Stipe will pick him up and take him opal mining in Lightning Ridge. Stipe later told us that there was money, lots of money in opal if you were lucky. Black opal from Lightning Ridge was the most precious and beautiful gem in the world.

I joined the two men. The road to Lightning Ridge seemed endless but I was happy because the monotonous scenery took me away from everything I wanted to forget. The trees ahead promised to turn into forests but they were really just scattered clumps of shade for the thousands of sheep. The countryside had no landmarks that I could remember but I welcomed the newness, the distance and the aloneness.

The mirages on the flat country encircled everything within into a pretend ocean. The trees in the distance seemed to grow out of the glistening water. The water turned into dry parched, cracked dirt as we came near. Everything seemed unreal.

The dirt road brought us to a small dusty settlement with a ghost like mullock heaps of opal dirt around the camps.

Miner's dwellings were much like Gipsy villages at home.

The old miners told me that in Lightning Ridge everyone had an equal chance and fortunes were made overnight. I was determined to make a go of it.

There was a story about Steve, a poor Hungarian Gipsy, who built a camp in the bush. As he dug a hole for the toilet he bottomed on opal and became rich. Miners came to seek Steve's advice. Steve became an expert in everything. Overnight he became well known and respected. The dreams were made of true stories like that.

I never told anyone that they called me Gipsy. I never talked to Steve because he was a Gipsy.

Among strangers I learned to speak English fast. The mining vocabulary does not require too many words and all are related to opal.

Tourists often inquired about the meanings of the local expressions. I felt clever as I explained to them about angel stones, china hats, gouging, fossicking, puddling, specking, propping, about the biscuit bend and tailings and bottoming.

Stipe introduced me to pig chasing. The floodwaters brought hundreds of pigs from the farms up North. The pigs became feral and, hiding in the huge wheat paddocks most of the time, they were hard to spot except when they ventured along the bore drain to get a drink. Farmers welcomed hunters who got rid of the menace as long as they kept the gates shut and didn't disturb other stock.

Stipe drove his old Ute into the bush over the logs and drains. The boys tried to hold on at the back with the pig dogs. Stipe didn't want the sows because they were always pregnant so he directed the dogs towards the chosen boars. When we mustered the pig, the dog jumped out and caught it by the ear and we followed. One pulled the pig's tail and kicked his hind legs in to make it fall on its back before we put it in a cage. We brought home eight wild boars that first evening. At home Stipe grabbed the tail of the one at the cage door and pulled it out and onto his back. Grab the back legs, he yelled. They pushed the boar, head first, into the steel frame, so it couldn't move. Stipe quickly cut into the flesh and

castrated the pig. Catch, he yelled, as he threw the pig's balls at us. Nicola wanted to have a go next; he wielded a knife towards the other men asking them if he could perhaps practice first on either of them since they had no use for their balls here in the bush.

You would have a go if it was whisky we drowned you in afterwards, laughed Stipe pouring the antiseptic over the pig's wound. Now comes the bath, he said as he poured kerosene over the bleeding boar to kill the lice before he released it into the sty. In a couple of days they'll want to eat again and then I'll clean their guts out with de-wormer. Once on grain they'll grow fat in no time.

I grabbed the tail of the boar while Stipe spread its legs to let Nicola get the balls. I made a mistake and patted the boar's ear. Like a flash of lightning the boar twisted its head and slashed my hand with its protruding tusk. I let go and the pig bolted with half his pig hood intact. Get him, yelled Nicola and Stipe joined him chasing the pig into the scrub.

I poured antiseptic over my gaping wound and wrapped the hand into my shirt. That's the last of cutting balls for me, I said to myself.

Two months will see them fat. In the middle of winter we'll kill them, said Stipe.

In July most Yugoslavs in Lightning Ridge came to Stipe's place. They brought cartons of beer and bottles of whisky to recreate their memories. Nationalities forgotten we all spoke Serbo-Croatian as directed by our Yugoslav government at home. We needed the unity, a dozen or so men lost in the bush among strangers.

Aboriginal girls came to drink with the men. Once we killed eight fat boars and selected pieces for smoking. The rest we minced for sausages, arguing all the time about the recipes used at home. Girls were generous with their help but they followed men's instructions for the cuisine they were unaccustomed to.

Yugoslavs preferred pork to lamb and mutton, they even preferred rabbits but most rabbits were poisoned now. The farmers spread the poison because the rabbits dug into the ground and spread the obnoxious weeds into the waterways and so into the outback. Like the wild rabbit, domestic animals introduced to Australia also adopted to warm conditions quickly. Without natural predators they easily competed with the native fauna for natural resources. There were no fences in the early days and many pigs, horses and buffaloes escaped into the bush where they bred uncontrollably. The graziers were afraid that feral animals would bring foot and mouth disease to the continent.

The floods brought many domestic pigs from Queensland and they roamed wild in the bushes around Lightning Ridge. The farmers who cleared and ploughed miles of land were afraid that pigs would destroy their crops. The golden grain paddocks swayed in the wind as far as the eye could see during the wet season but during the drought the land was bare and the feral animals dug for roots into the scorched ground. As the wind came it lifted the precious soil and made enormous dust bowls out of the country. The thin layer of the soil was becoming thinner.

Flies bothered miners in the bush. We cooked on the campfire and millions of flies descended on any spot touched by food. The newly introduced cattle, sheep and pigs produced tons of manure for flies to breed on in the hot summers. Flies had no natural enemy in Australia until they brought the African beetle to digest the piles of manure scattered in the bush. But the flies persisted and Australians invented hats with fly screens and corks bobbing down around their faces. Gradually they sprayed the flies dead. Now flies only appear in spring and autumn unable to resist the warmth and the dung smell. There are no flies in the heat of summer or in the cold of winter.

On my arrival I wandered around opal fields and spotted an unusual concrete structure. I stopped at the sign Bush Observatory, visitors welcome. I was amazed seeing the rooms dedicated to philosophers, astronomers and scientists. In the concrete was written a story about Alex who was wrongfully accused of murder. He spent four years in jail before he was pardoned but he never wanted to join the rat race again. The observatory was his monument, his dream. He mined for opal but mining was just a hobby, something to do when he wasn't building. Money wasn't important to Alex; he lived cheaply and spent most of his money on the steel and the cement for the astrological and astronomical structures in the middle of the bush.

I met Bill who lives in his old shack close to Alex. We liked each other from the start. I decided to work with Bill on percentage because he had his own equipment.

There is a story behind every man in the bush, said Bill with a twinkle in his eye. The camps of Bushmen stretched into the virgin bushland. The men accepted each other's anonymity and shared of themselves only what they wanted to share. The anxieties and fears of the past were replaced with dreams for the future. Everybody was equal. Other men's languages were as strange to me as mine was to them. We marvelled at each others' customs and traditions. I became one of the boys. My story was safely tucked away. The events from the past could be recalled at will but I could pretend to be who I wanted to be.

During the working day Bill spoke in rare monosyllabic words. In the evening we sat around the campfire and Bill and Alex talked about Greek philosophers and famous astronomers. We looked at the sky sprinkled with most brilliant stars.

On dry hot summer nights most miners slept outside on makeshift beds to catch the breeze but during wet periods voracious hordes of mosquitoes forced us inside. We were reluctant to go outside even to cook.

Bill downed a woollen balaclava on his head as he rushed to his small campfire to get the billy-can to make tea.

I stopped with Bill in his camp until I built my own nearby. I worked hard because I planned to go home and bring Alenka and Martin with me. She sent me a photo of Martin who started to say daddy.

While I tried to save money to bring my family over I met Edna, exciting, willing and beautiful Aboriginal girl. I told Edna about Alenka and my son and she seemed pleased about them.

Most of other migrants slept with Aboriginal girls. You have to have somebody. I realised that for every hundred of miners there were about twenty females.

Most of the migrant women were married. White Australian girls rarely picked a non-English speaking migrant man. Thank God for Aboriginal women who felt quite happy to sleep with migrant men.

I grew fond of Edna and after awhile I invited her to my camp.

I always remembered Bill's words: It is easier to find opal than a partner. As long as you are not after the same thing you can trust your friend or your brother, but on opal we are all greedy for the same thing. Many friendships are broken on account of opal. People start off trusting each other, they couldn't be bothered with contracts, they work happily until they find money, but then most look again at their vague verbal agreement and try to get more for themselves out of the partnership.

Bill liked to sit in the Diggers Rest hotel telling stories about the gems he found and saw. When others argued about the power of politics and religion Bill insisted that the power of man's greed wins hands down every time.

When the talk came around the reasons for us being here Bill said:

When you join the system you put yourself in line for promotion and then you wait for promotion and pay rise all your life. You are constantly afraid that you will fail because you may not be good enough. When there is no more chance for promotion, you slip away and die.

Men are less scared in Lightning Ridge. In the system a man is driven towards a pay rise and promotion. If you don't get ahead you become afraid that maybe you are not even good enough to be where you are. That maybe tomorrow you will be left behind.

Bill and I found a huge nobby of opal weighing almost half a kilo. Bill showed it in the pub and it passed from hand to hand and from lips to lips as his mates licked it to examine it for any traces of colour. A bluish-green and pink lines were noticed on the grey background but there was no commercial value in the colour. It was an interesting specimen and Bill's fellow drinker, offered a hundred pounds for it. That was a lot of money in the sixties for a colourless stone. Miners talked in pounds for years after the currency changed to dollars. It took a long time before dollars were granted the status of real money.

Bill's friend wanted the nobby specimen as a birthday present for his friend, a local shopkeeper, who used it as a paperweight on the counter of his shop.

An opal buyer spotted the nobby some months later and paid two hundred pounds for it. He took it to Japan to serve as the background piece for his opal exhibition. The large ugly looking blob of grey potch fascinated his Japanese business partner. He wanted to buy the piece to contrast with his colourful opal collection.

The opal buyer passed the nobby into his hands but it fell on the marble floor of the exhibition hall and it chipped at the end. The opal buyer picked it up and his face changed as he slowly kneeled onto the floor to cover the stone. The heart of the paperweight nobby was a pure red on black gem. Scooping the broken stone he excused himself and went into his room where he looked into the mass of red fire, where purple, violet and green flames moved like flamenco dancers inside the fiery hell of the stone.

This is, this is, he stuttered as he searched for the name that would portray some of the beauty of the stone. This is a bleeding broken heart, he named the stone. He booked the first plane to take him back to Lightning Ridge.

Joseph, the local cutter quietly locked the workshop after he glanced at the nobby. He took out a bottle of whisky and they sipped slowly as the nobby passed again and again from hand to hand. They held it to the eye, under the table, far away, under the light and magnifying glass and finally they left it on the table to look at them.

What are we going to do with it, asked the cutter as the daylight faded.

We'll decide tomorrow, said the buyer exhausted from the admiration.

The next day they decided on one large heart shaped stone to keep and enough little ones to make the man a millionaire. The cutter got a generous commission and both men agreed to keep the story of the stone a secret. But no story of this proportion could be kept secret for long. You can't hide a fire; there will be smoke and the heat. Rumours began. Nobody knew how the story emerged, it probably just boiled over. People simply had to share the knowing. Over the years I heard little details of the story over and over and it became the greatest story of my life.

It became one of the great stories of Lightning Ridge.

At first I felt let down by Bill.

You should have known. You had been in the Ridge for ages, you know everything about opal, I accused Bill.

Sometimes you have to break the heart to see what's in it, said Bill almost unconcerned.

Go and see the buyer, said Edna. He might give you a share.

I was too sick at heart for the beauty I had and lost. You can't be that lucky twice. I left Bill to start on my own.

Old Bill became sick and died soon after.

Edna became my mining partner. Just as well I bought my own compressor and jack-pick. Edna filled the wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow and tipped the dirt into the bucket to be lifted out by the hoist. When the truck was full we took the clay dirt to the puddler to wash. As we waited, Edna and I sat in the dirt, drank beer and smoked in expectation. Going through the tailings was always exciting as the colourful silica shone in the clay mud. But we found nothing worthwhile as we drove for over thirty metres into the dirt.

That's it, I said and switched off the compressor.

We sat leaning on the clay wall and Edna scratched into it with a screwdriver. The glassy sound told her that she spotted the opal even before she saw the rainbow-coloured chips. I grabbed a jack pick and drilled.

We cried. We just hugged and cried.

There is more, must be more, Edna whispered. But there wasn't. We cut a few tiny red stones from the chips on the ground and feverishly followed the direction of the trace for another twenty metres. The red stone, only centimetres from the surface was the only stone. The story of it spread like stories do in Lightning Ridge.

It could have been a twenty-carat of red on black, miners said. You could ask any money for a stone like that. And there were lots of little ones.

Twice unlucky, I expected the third chance but it never came.

Edna and I had seven children in ten years. As my family grew I relied on odd jobs to provide for them and only mined to pursue my dream. I found insignificant green and blue stones but never again anything that would warm my heart.

Our oldest son Kevin often came with me on the field and played there with his dogs. He picked lumps of dirt and threw them for the dogs to fetch. Once a dog returned a fair sized lump of dirt and, wet from the dog's saliva, it exposed a speck of red colour through the dusty surface.

Kevin showed it to me and we went to the cutter to see what was inside. To our amazement the stone sold for two thousand dollars. I banked the money for Kevin. Since then all my children became keen on specking. A few days later I went to the pub and heard about a boy who found a ten thousand-dollar stone just like that on top. Kevin's story spread and became bigger and better with every telling. I didn't mind becoming a celebrity.

One day in the pub a miner was telling a story to some tourists: This little black bastard found a fifty thousand dollar stone on top of the mine and threw it to a dog to lick. People laughed in amazement. Neither the storyteller nor his audience associated me with the little black bastard. I ignored them, I knew that they said things about my kids behind my back.

Most European miners had kids with Aboriginal girls. There were few girls around of any sort except Aboriginal. Australian girls were stuck up farmers' daughters or office workers or nurses and teachers.

The opal became scarce so I had to look for work on the nearby farms. There was no unemployment benefit in Lightning Ridge until the eighties; you couldn't say that you were looking for work if you lived in Lightning Ridge because there was no work other than mining. You were here on your own with your luck.

I took a gang of Aborigines into the bush fencing, shearing and grid making. We camped, cooked on the open fire, boiled the billy, baked the damper, and barbecued the meat farmers provided. We used bore water for everything. I had to fill my hat with water and put it under the tree to cool before I could drink it. At least water was available since they drilled the artesian bore. I heard that they looked for oil and found water. Trenches were made on the nearby farms to use the water for stock. Hot water from almost thousand metres deep Artesian Basin

provided for the bore bath where people of Lightning Ridge met after work to soak their tired bodies.

These days many European migrants come because they believe that the water has a healing power.

Often all the family joined me as I went cotton chipping and stick picking at Wee Waa. I was used to chipping from home.

I hated to work with animals though. When I first went mulesing, I held the sheep while Edna's cousin cut the skin off the sheep's bum, spread the mulesing powder on the bleeding wound and let go. I almost passed out. Have to be cruel to be kind, said the grazier. We cut the skin off their bum so the wool won't grow and the shit won't stick to it and flies won't lay maggots.

I hated dehorning. Young calves cried as I cut their horns and I felt a pain in my stomach.

They get caught in the fences if the horns are left growing, they fight and damage their skin, the flies attack the wounds, explained the grazier. It had to be done. I didn't mind shearing, crutching, drenching. I talked to sheep as I shaved their faces and feet so the burrs didn't stick in the wool. I hated inflicting pain on dumb animals but I had to cut their tails and balls. They showed me how to put the sheep down with its front legs opened wide around my neck while I held the open purse with two fingers and pulled the balls out with my teeth and spat them out. To do a calf you needed two blokes, one to hold the head and the other to throw it on the ground from the back.

I heard people say that people on the land had it easy in Australia, that they just let the sheep loose in the paddock and let the wool and meat grow. Our people know nothing of the backbreaking jobs with animals.

I heard a grazier say to his city friend: The wool grows while I sleep and it grows on something that we eat.

It made sense to him. There was a lot of cheap labour around. Aborigines and itinerant migrants did most of the backbreaking work.

I caught myself talking Slovenian sometimes as I walked alone in the bush. I started by humming familiar tunes of love songs dad used to sing at home. Later I checked that nobody was within an earshot and then I sang out at the top of my voice. Talking out came gradually. First I felt weird saying things out loud to sheep and kangaroos and stupid galahs but lately I said things to fences and bushes. The half-forgotten language brings back memories from childhood. There was no need for embarrassment since no one knew or cared that I even

existed within the vastness of the outback. There was no need to tell anyone about this either since no-body would be interested. People accept others as they come in Lightning Ridge.

I was fascinated by the name Lightning Ridge . My Australian partner Bill liked to explain about the town's history.

At the turn of the twentieth century a shepherd grazed his sheep on the spot where the town stands now. Lightning once struck the Ridge which was the highest spot for hundreds of miles. It killed a shepherd, his dog and six hundred sheep. The place became known as Lightning Ridge .

Shepherds found colourful silica flushed out by erosion and washed by floods. Fascinated by the shiny stones the shepherds sunk the first shafts in 1901. The first miners came to Lightning Ridge soon after. They were obstructed and persecuted by landowners who wanted to stop these vagabonds trespassing on their land. When the graziers could not break the miners' spirit they fenced off the water and then poisoned the water with an excuse that they wanted to exterminate the rabbits. Without the water and with their horses impounded, the miners paid heavy tolls on food supplies.

Those men really had a lot more grit than we have today, remembered Bill.

A serious mining only started when I arrived in the sixties. Every miner became an inventor of the tools he used. New machinery was invented from old bits of steel often found at the tip.

Lightning Ridge was a good town in the sixties. Nobody locked their camps, there was no stealing or thieving, miners could leave their opal and equipment on the field and it would not be touched.

Books were written about Lightning Ridge opal and each writer coloured his story by an individual experience to weave a rainbow of truth and fiction, secrets and myths. Touched by the miracle of the stone, writers were moved to tell their story and the theories about the way to find opal. They called opal a sun kissed beauty, a wondrous rainbow, the joy to the spirit, the peace to the mind. The splendour in the palette of opal colours caused the grown men to cry, tremble and shout.

Miners chose and surveyed their fifty by fifty metres claim, drew a map and paid a small fee to register it in their name.

The experts agreed that there was no way to tell where opal deposits were hiding, yet some miners tried to divine opal by holding two wires in front of them. They marched into the bush and the wires sometimes crossed in front of

them. The diviners assured the newcomers that opal was underneath. The old miners laughed at them because the diviners never found opal for themselves.

Others looked for the signs above ground, they tried to guess the spot by the vegetation or the stars above them.

Miners always liked to peg their claims next to those who found opal; most seemed to be right next to the big guy who found millions. It was like they were standing in line for lady luck to smile on them, right next in line to be touched by providence.

They dug shafts by pick and shovel at the beginning, later they used jack hammers, and in the eighties everybody hired the drilling rig to drill the holes for them. In the nineties they sunk little mechanised diggers and loaders into the shaft to do the manual work.

There was never a dull moment in Lightning Ridge for the miners in the Diggers Rest hotel. There was always music and a happy story going around keeping the hopes alive.

Sometimes miners bottomed on the opal dirt but often it was a false level and all the work was in vain. Even if the level was good, more often than not, it did not carry opal. You don't really know what you've got until you cut it, warned Bill. And you don't know what it is worth until you sell it.

People held their breath while their opal was cut. Sometimes the surprise under the dirt was excitingly pleasant but more often a flaw killed the stone. Sand was often in the middle of the brightly coloured stone and it reduced the value of it drastically. One theory said that opal was formed where there was a fault in the earth formation and the water pierced the ground and continually sipped through the sand stone.

Camps scattered in the bush around the tiny township were made from old tin and Hessian; lime and iron stone made stronger homes; log huts were pretty. Later in the eighties many brought their caravans and built shacks around them.

The rain water tanks often ran out in hot summers and only few miners could afford to run a generator for electricity. Most had dirt floors and candle lights, many brought water in large containers and used it sparingly.

The dust didn't worry us as much as the floods that turned the black soil into a greasy mess impossible to drive through. We had to abandon mining and go specking. We looked over the field if the rain that washed the dirt away had uncovered a speck of colour. The stories were told of the tourists who found a

fortune specking after the rain, everybody knew someone lucky and the stories became the myths.

Thousands of hopeful tourists descended on Lightning Ridge every school holiday or long weekend and many returned regularly or stayed until they ran out of money.

I realised that farmers around Lightning Ridge were also gamblers. They were taking a gamble on the weather. They hoped that the right amount of rain would fall at least once in every four years but nothing was certain on the land. Dry spells sometimes lasted for years and the land cracked and not a blade of grass could be found. The farmer once said that it was a season of shear and shoot. They sheared the sheep and shot it afterwards. Sometimes a wet followed and the water covered the farms for months. The animals became weak and drowned or got bogged in the dirt.

I was out in the scrub near Corcoran Lake mending the fence one hot afternoon when I saw a lamb stuck. The head of the half-born lamb was hanging behind the ewe, which was restlessly baaing for relief. I often watched the lambs being born, the head between the lamb's legs, coming out in a gentle glorious swoosh.

I wanted to end this ewe's agony with a hard hit on the head, but I couldn't. The eyes of the ewe followed me with a dumb tearless sadness and I just couldn't walk away. The memory would haunt me. I reasoned that they were not my sheep and not my problem. But there was just a suffering ewe and the dying lamb and I and I had to do it. I chased the baaing ewe begging her gently to stop and let me help her. The flies were all over the sticky bloody mess protruding from the sheep's bum and I was covered in burrs as I chased the poor creature into a fence and grabbed her for the wool with all his strength.

I should be in the pub with my mates, I told the future mother; it's forty-five bloody degrees hell here. I talked to the ewe to remain sane and think of something to do. I remembered that lambs are born with front feet first, so I closed my eyes as I pushed the bloody head into the ewe and began searching inside for its legs. As I started pulling out the legs the ewe gave a tired pelvic push and the lamb came sliding out. Staggering on the ground, tripping over itself, it slowly found its way to the mother's head and they became acquainted and sniffed over.

Exhausted from the birth, I wiped the blood off my hands but the flies followed me as I stumbled home. The tears washed the blood and sweat off my face as I looked back to see the lamb finding its mother's milk. Suddenly I felt so alone and so close to God that I cried openly and loudly for the first time since I was a

little boy. I was there when I was needed and I felt proud and happy. I felt that time stood still in the bush.

The seasons here are barely noticeable by the slight change of temperature. People in Lightning Ridge remember the times of droughts and the times of floods. Things happened either before or after that dry or that wet.

I looked at the dry parched land. The crops were dead; the farmers were sad watching the stock die and the land crack. They stopped scrub cutting. There was only so much scrub and more sheep. The sheep and cattle held onto the meagre growth along the road, the trees were grey with dust. The Willie Willie rose and, unsure of its path, it darted this way and that. Rollie-pollies, blown by the dry hot air, wrapped themselves on trees. In the remote aloneness of the bush I cried for my family and myself.

As soon as I learned enough English to make the deals, the farmers called on me and I gave quotes for miles of fencing, or water tank building or whatever needed doing. I brought out workers, collected the pay, and checked the job. Most of the workers were Edna's cousins. Aborigines complained about the hard work, they threatened to leave as soon as they got paid but on a payday I brought a Ute full of drinks and smokes and food to the bush. Aborigines spent their money and had no option but to stay. If they had any money left they lost it at night as they played cards around the fire.

They established the Aboriginal Protection Board; they rounded up the dispersed groups of unrelated Aborigines and brought them into the settlements called Aboriginal reserves. They wanted to teach them about the mercy of God and the justice of British judicial system. They also taught Aborigines to live and work like whites. The law prohibited whites to bring alcohol to Aborigines. Whites weren't allowed on the Mission, except for people like me who lived with them. I often took my family to Wilcannia, Brewarrina and Walgett Missions because Edna had relations there.

Farmers took Aboriginal boys to teach them how to work on the land and look after the animals, girls were taught to cook and keep the house.

Edna is very proud because she learned the housekeeping in the big farmer's house.

Many Aborigines lived with whites in small country towns or on the fringes of towns. Lightning Ridge in the sixties was just such a place, a place of bush camps with a mixture of adventurers from all over the world. We built camps in the bush, Aborigines and Europeans, doctors and illiterates, policemen and criminals. We brought our picks and shovels, rope ladders, and candles and

looked for opals from five to twenty metres deep in the clay beneath the sandstone of Lightning Ridge .

In the making for millions of years this rainbow stone only made its debut in the early sixties, when I came to look for it. The world recognised its unique beauty and paid for it. The shells impregnated with specks of colour were proof that there was an ocean here long ago. The skeletons of dinosaurs dug with the opal dirt also told about the timeless history of the life in Lightning Ridge .

Only a small percentage of miners made a fortune in opals, most had to supplement their income with casual work on the nearby properties. Many went to work in the city, saved money and returned. The lure of opal was too strong for them.

Hilda, a Swiss psychiatric nurse commented in the pub that Lightning Ridge was much like the mental hospital she used to work in. The only difference is that people here are free to go home and do their own cooking. You really think that we are all mad? I asked. It helps, said Hilda with a twinkle in her eye. She knew that she was mad to stay with these illiterate beer guzzlers and talk about opal.

I heard that patients from the Bloomfield mental hospital in Orange were taken on an excursion. They stayed here, because the road ended in Lightning Ridge, laughed Hilda.

Nobody has any idea what opal miners should look like or how they should properly behave. Maybe we really are all mad. Like opals we remain unique. People of all races have the same dream in Lightning Ridge, the same working methods, and the same thirst.

We used to meet in the pub to compare our finds. When anyone found a better stone, he invited everybody to a BBQ. The stone was passed around for inspection. We licked it to make it shine better in its unpolished state. The miners predicted the weight of the polished stone and the price per carat.

People counted on each other and in an emergency they were all willing to look after their mates.

Sometimes I watched the sunsets and realised that only the glorious colourful sunsets of Lightning Ridge could ever compete with the beauty of its opal. In the peaceful end of the day I remembered the home I ran away from and I remembered my wife and my son, my mother and father and brothers and sisters and the people who laughed at me when I was a boy. Alenka re-married of course but in my dreams she was where I left her with tears in her eyes and more beautiful every year. I couldn't go home, my children always needed shoes and books and clothes.

The Labour government was keen to help Aborigines since 1975. They spent a lot of money on housing, education and health for Aborigines. The government built houses in town for Aborigines; they gave a message to the rest of us that the way we chose to live wasn't good enough. Edna and the kids left and they live in town now but I stayed in my camp. I could have moved into a town house with my family but the mateship and equality with other miners were more important to me than a new house.

Whites are complaining that Aborigines get everything while white kids have to live in hot camps. Somehow people are never equal. Most white miners call Aborigines bludgers and crooks.

A group of singers came from Slovenia in the eighties. They toured Australia and they wanted to see the bush. I was happy to show them underground, I took them all over dirt roads on the opal field. I told them about the big nobby Bill and I found and lost. The story fascinated the young Slovenian singers. The busy amateur film maker heard the part about the stone worth millions of dollars. He narrated the story into the camera about a man who became a multi-millionaire overnight. I never saw the film but it was shown on television at home. A few months later I received letters from people who claimed to be my distant relatives. Neighbours and friends wrote and wished me well. They all wanted to hear from me. I began to plan my trip home. My son Martin also wrote the first letter to me. He told me that he loved me and that he was hoping for a motor bike. I wanted to go home and surprise Alenka and Martin with a new motor bike. A few weeks later my mother wrote that everybody was saying how selfish I was for not sending money to my family. They all saw me on television and knew about my millions.

I never wrote a single letter home since. I never again worried about being poor. I decided that the only people worth knowing were those who stopped with me while I had nothing. People like Edna. Maybe the poor stay with the poor because the rich do not want them.

In 1991 the roof collapsed in my mine and damaged my back. In 1995 I qualified for a disability pension and last year I got my old age pension. I am thinking about going home. Maybe I will sell my camp and my mining gear and go for good but I will never let anybody know if I am rich or poor.

I will let the bastards, who called me Gipsy, think that I am a millionaire.