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I was born on 23.3.33 in Križe, 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.

South Slavs were under Turkish Empire for 500 years while Slovenians were under Germanic rule; they belong to Orthodox or Muslim religion while Slovenians are Catholics.

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 the 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 aide 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 14.10. 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 kilometre 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 bend 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 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 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 but even he wasn't a good partner. We worked happily until we found a good trace but then Less 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 to Kambalda 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.

Richard 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 can not 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.