

DAUGHTER DANILA DESCRIBED THEIR LIFE:

I, Danila Stolfa am the second born daughter of Silvester and Marcela Bole born in Sepulje, Slovenia on the 6th of October 1944 during WWII. After the war, the family moved to Opcine near Trieste, where I spent my most childhood years up to the age of 11. We lived in beautiful "Villa Donati" with a lovely garden tendered by a gardener. In front of our house ran the Opcine tram which has been operating since 1902. I enjoyed my childhood growing up in Opcine.

My father worked as a police officer for ten years under the Free Territory of Trieste. In 1954 due to political unrest he was worried about losing his job and successfully applied to immigrate to Australia without my mother knowing and this is how our journey began. It was sad when my family left our home land to farewell our loved ones as in those days families would rarely return.

Journey to Australia: It was the 10th of August 1955. Together, my mother Marcela, my father Silvester, my sister Neva and I departed the seaport in Trieste, Italy, bound for a new life in Australia. Our ship was named 'Toscana' and our destination was Melbourne. There were many other families from the police force on the ship as well.

During our journey across the ocean we suffered from the heat with heat-rashes covering our bodies. Calamine lotion was smeared on the skin of small children. Huge waves rocked the ship and we were also often sea sick. We could hear many plates being broken as the ship traversed the seas. I remember much of the journey being in the swimming pool trying to keep cool. One fond memory was being treated to ice cream every day.

Our first dock in Australia was Freemantle where the scenery was lovely. My parents were pleased to see civilisation again since leaving our old country. All the other ports where we had stopped were in undeveloped, third world countries. Also, walking on the beautiful, soft green grass felt like carpet and it left a good impression on my parents.

Arriving in Australia: We sailed 41 days before reaching Australian shores. Our ship was diverted from Melbourne to Sydney and as a result we travelled all night on the train to reach Melbourne the following morning at Spencer Street Station (now called Southern Cross station). My mother was 41 years old, my father was 43 years old, my sister Neva was 15 years old and in a few weeks I would turn 11. I recall my father turning to my mother and saying, "What now?", not knowing the language, the city of Melbourne or anything about our new home. No-one was there to meet us and dad had the responsibility of taking care of the family without even knowing the language. My mother suggested we catch a taxi to our final destination, 13 Ewing Street, Brunswick. We were already paying rent for this house two months prior to arriving in Australia which was a single fronted terrace house with the toilet ('out-house') in the backyard and the bedroom window facing inward to the kitchen. Back home in Opcine, my mother happened to meet a lady in a hairdressing salon from Fernetic that mentioned she

had a daughter living in Melbourne, Australia. She was a very kind lady and offered to help us find a house to rent through her daughter, Slava Fabian. Rent at that particular time was very expensive as it was difficult to find a house due to the high immigration being experienced in Australia. Slava and her husband offered to pay the rent on our behalf so that we did not have to go to the Bonegilla Migrant Centre for processing.

We arrived at our new home in Brunswick via taxi however we did not find the landlord at home. The landlord was a 27 year old single immigrant from Naples, Italy. His name was Nico. My mother knocked on the door of the neighbour and a lovely lady greeted us. Her name was Barbara. I don't know how my mother communicated with her. All I recall is that we left all of our belongings with this lady we had just met. Without knowing a word of English my mother placed much trust in this person in this foreign, new land. The taxi driver took us back to Port Melbourne to find Slava and her family. We were very happy to find that Australian people were very friendly and helpful. Upon finding Slava and her lovely family at home we rejoiced in happiness. They were very hospitable and offered us a warm dinner. We stayed late then Slava's husband offered to take us back to Brunswick where we met our landlord Nico who worked at the railway. He showed us into the house and we spent our first night in Australia sleeping on the cold floor as the house was empty.

The following day my parents decided to go shopping for beds and a fridge and I remember that my parents paid for goods with Guineas. The following day a store owner had contacted us. He was so honest that he returned some money saying that my parents paid more than they should have. At that point in time we knew that Australia was a great country with good people.

Our luggage arrived later from Sydney. We were cold as we only packed summer clothes and the weather was not as hot as we had expected.

My Australian Education: One of the first priorities for my parents was to enroll me into a school. Together, Nico and my mother could not speak sufficient English to correctly enrol me. I had just completed the fifth grade in Opicine and found myself enrolled in a school with children aged one year older than me and not even knowing the language. I attended a catholic school called St. Ambrose in Brunswick. The teachers quickly realised my predicament and placed me with girls my age.

As I could not speak English the teacher was always giving me maths work. On my first day, the teacher asked me to spell my name and I couldn't. I remember saying D-A-N-I-L-A! There were other girls in my class from Italy or Egypt that could speak quite a few languages. I could speak Slovene and Italian however there were no Slovenian girls, except for me.

I was a good athlete so I was chosen to represent the school at an upcoming sporting event held at an oval in Coburg however as my parents didn't know how to get there so I missed out. The following

Monday my fellow class mates were angry with me for not attending the sporting event and I felt dejected.

Often, on my way home from school, I enjoyed buying an ice block with Saspirella from the local Milk Bar. I still remember that it cost two-pence halfpenny.

I completed eighth grade in school and following this completed a 2 year course. Typing course at Essendon Kangan college.

My Mother was homesick: Soon after beginning school I remember celebrating my 11th birthday on the 6th of October 1955. We were in Australia only a short time but I already had a birthday party. My mother bought me a lovely cake from St. Giusto cake shop in Brunswick. St. Giusto is the patron saint of Trieste. Things like this would make my mother very homesick. I remember her crying sometimes for about two months after arriving in Australia. Nico would play records which would set it off, especially "Terra Straniera quanta Malinconia" (a melancholic song). My mother would burst into tears. I already made some good friends - Carol, Beverly, Maxine and Marcia. Those were the names then, different to what they are today. My friends gave me gifts for my birthday. In those days it was fashionable to give a lovely lace handkerchief or a box of old gold chocolates.

There was no television in Australia yet. In Opicene, I used to watch television through a store window. We would go nearly every week to the local cinema.

Finding work: During the first two weeks my parents did not look for work. We were exploring Melbourne. My mother was always asking for assistance if we became lost and I remember her frustration. 'Next time', she exclaimed to my father, "You will ask for directions, ok!" My father said "Leave it to me". A nice gentleman walked by and my father approached him saying "Excuse me Sir", and then he didn't know what to say next. The gentleman, tipping his hat, proceeded to say "Good Day Sir!" and walked off. My sister and I burst out laughing. On the ship we had some English lessons which was obviously not good enough.

My mother would walk down a street knocking on every door until she found a job. She found a number of jobs and had worked mainly as a seamstress. On her first job she did not know what it meant to make a quota. In her interview she made a dress. Her boss said "Yes we can see that you can sew, but at the end of the day you have to sew 20 dresses, ok?" On her first day she sew three dresses, on the following day four dresses and so on until she was sewing 20 dresses per day. That is how Marcela worked seventeen years as a machinist until she was 57 years of age.

My father also found a job as a carpenter. He brought very few possessions to Australia however he ensured that his work-bench, his sharpening stone and his Lambretta, (Scooter) made the journey. His hands in Opicene, were nice and clean and he lamented the fact he had to return to dirty hands. As a

police officer he took pride in being well dressed with a tie, belt and shiny shoes. When he arrived in Australia he changed jobs sixteen times in one year. He found it difficult to settle down in a job until finding a job with the Post Master General (PMG) now known as Australia Post. He worked there as a cabinet maker until his retirement. He was very loyal and rarely missed a day of work. During his time in Australia he was rarely without a job.

My sister, Neva, found work as an apprentice machinist and later as shoe sales assistant and had various other jobs. She was also an excellent machinist. It was very difficult for a teenage girl to leave behind all her friends and travel to a foreign land. Neva had just finished her secondary schooling in Europe and so she went directly into the workforce.

Family and work: I met my husband Joseph at 16 years of age through a boarder living with my parents at the time whom my mother took care of by washing his clothes and feeding him. Joseph, 'I call him Joe' was a very good friend of his and recently bought a car. Both boys liked going to the Slovene dances which were held every two months at the Prahran Town Hall. As a young girl I liked going out with them. They often took my parents and me to the dances. I started to date Joe and after a long courtship I fell in love with Joe and we married 4 years later in 1964. Joe was a qualified Fitter and Turner and worked for 36 years at BHP Billiton.

We lived with my parents for the first few years of our marriage in Pascoe Vale to save a deposit for a home of our own. We built our house in Glenroy in 1967 together with the help of Joe's three brothers that were builders.

In October, 1967 I gave birth to my son Eddie. At the time I worked at Kodak in the Quality Control Testing department. Two years later in September 1969, I gave birth to my daughter Linda. I am very proud of my children who have given me much joy and happiness.

Eddie graduated with a Bachelor of Business in Banking & Finance and currently works as a Portfolio Manager for Vanguard. Eddie married Dianne in 1992 and they have two wonderful sons, Jake born in 1997 and Daniel born in 1999.

Linda graduated with a Bachelor of Business in Accounting and currently works as a Business Analyst for Telstra in Finance. Linda married Paul in 2000 and they have two beautiful sons, Lachlan born in 2003 and Oliver born in 2006.

I was fortunate to work in various jobs throughout my life in Australia. As a young lady before I met Joe, I worked at Kozole Milk Bar, John Hojnik Smallgoods as a sales assistant in the delicatessen and at Industrial Threads. Later I worked in Quality Control at Kodak and Gadsden Ltd. I also worked as a clerk at Ericsson Australia. The job which gave me most happiness was as a District Manager for 23 years with World Book Australia as an Encyclopedia sales representative. I was awarded with a trip to

America in recognition of outstanding accomplishment in Australia in 1986. In my later years I worked as a courier driver and a carer.

Joe and myself have been dedicated committee members of the Slovenian Association Melbourne. Joe has been a member for 22 years as a Bar Manager and I have been a Bar Assistant and Social Representative for 15 years. We have made a valuable contribution to the Slovenian community over the years.

Reflections on life and friends: I had the fortune of catching up with my school friends on our 50th school reunion, then 60th, and again in 2012 thanks to my school friend Nevenka Jagodic, (nee Malalan) who organised the event. We met in grade one and are still friends today. I still have very fond memories of my "old" country however nothing can replace the experiences and memories I will keep of my "new" country.

Thank you Australia for welcoming us to this great country!

DANILO STOLFA

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