

## **LANA MALAKUNAS nee SWITLANA BOHUDSKI: TEACHER AND PUBLIC SERVANT**



My family originates from Poland and I was born overseas on 9 September 1943. My parents were Peter and Tamara Skorobohatch-Bohudski. My mother was from Rovno, which is between Kiev and Lvov. When I was born the town was part of Poland and was known as Rowno, then it was part of the Ukraine and known as Rovno, and now it's still part of the Ukraine but known as Rivne. It was the biggest town in the region during the war and when the Germans invaded many people tried to escape as early as possible, which ultimately was a smart move because thousands of the Jewish population were subsequently massacred. When we left Rowno we went along the Czech border to Germany. My aunt and her son had gone to Brno and then to Prague where they lived until she died. My cousin died last year.

We left Rowno in early 1944 so I was only 4 months old when we went west along the border until we got to Germany and ended up in the British zone which had a number of displaced persons camps. From there we went to Naples in transit out to Australia. My father left first in 1948 and we stayed. I think once you reached the age of 45 you were no longer eligible for sponsorship by the Australian government. At that time my father was 44 so he had to move quickly and he landed in Sydney in May 1948. After a short stay at the Bathurst migrant camp in New South Wales, father was sent as a logger to the camp at the timber mill at Swifts Creek in East Gippsland.

The rest of my family came to Australia on the Stuart Heintzelman in April 1949 and were first taken to Bonegilla and then sent to Swifts Creek, where my father, Peter Bohudski, worked as a timber worker. Swifts Creek was a pretty small place about 25 kilometres south east of Omeo - it started as a gold-mining town before developing its dairy and timber milling industry.

We came out a year later and missed the Bonegilla migrant camp because father was already working and was able to arrange accommodation for us at Brookfield which was out in the mountains up near Omeo. The only way to get there was by logging truck. It was an old deserted house in a clearing. I remember there being kangaroos and wallabies and kookaburras that would dive for snakes and take them right up and drop them and pick them up again and swish them around. I was fascinated by it all. I loved the animals. We stayed about 6 months there and then father was able to get a disused miner's cottage about 3 kilometres out of Swifts Creek and we lived there until we left for St Albans in 1952.

When my grandmother and I joined father I learnt what work could achieve. As a child I was proud of the tall man who worked hard and came home at the end of the day after working in the bush. He laughed and played with me and let me run with the chickens and helped plant the garden so we could grow food. He was a man who went rabbiting and fishing in the Tambo River. A man who bought me a bicycle and taught me how to ride. A man who never forgot to bring me a packet of Juicy Fruit and PK chewing gum at the end of a day's work. He encouraged me in every way possible to go to school, to read to write, to ride my Malvern Star bike, to run and play. We talked and we laughed and from the stories he told me about his own life I learnt about between right and wrong and between justice and injustice. I also learnt that if you work hard despite problems you could do a lot with your life. And so it goes.

### **Attending School**

In 1951 we moved to St Albans and were living in Oberon Avenue. Once we came to Melbourne there was a lot of factory work available. There was the AGI – Australian Glass Industries – which was at Spotswood and a lot of people worked there. Kinnears Ropes was at Ballarat Road Footscray and the carpet mills in Tottenham. There was the CSR Sugar Refinery in Yarraville.

The SEC in Newport took a lot of people and my father worked there until the separation and then he went to work at the ammunitions factory in Maribyrnong.

Father worked at the State Electricity Commission in Newport – he would take the Melbourne train at St Albans and then change at Footscray for the Williamstown line to Newport and after a ten-minute walk would arrive at work. He worked morning, afternoon and night shifts.

My mother always worked, as did father. Grandmother stayed at home and did the shopping, the cleaning, the cooking, and tried to keep up with everyone's shift work. George worked three shifts. I must have learnt about the value of work very early in life. It was in the DP camps of northern Germany that I came to understand that work often meant the difference between life and death. Even as a child I realised that those lucky enough to work were more readily able to put food on the table for their families. They were the ones able to obtain scant medicine or warm clothes for winter from the black market. They were the ones who could barter for small luxuries like soap and cigarettes and maybe some vodka. It was the promise of work that drew father to Australia. The assisted passage migration scheme to boost defence and development which was introduced by the Chifley government after World War Two meant refuge from repatriation and likely death in the Soviet Union under Stalin not only for himself but his family.

My mother's first job was at the ordnance factory in Deer Park. She worked in the detonators section, which was a very dangerous occupation. From there she went to the wool carpet factory in Tottenham, and from there until she retired at 75 – an age that she never admitted because she was frightened the government might catch up with her – but she was 15 years younger according to the official records. She'd worked as a domestic at RSL House in St Kilda and at the International House of Students in Royal Parade. She also worked at Civil Aviation as a tea lady. They called her Thelma because she didn't like her name Tamara. She got called Tammie as well.

I started at St Albans Primary School in July 1951 and finished Grade 6 in 1955. The games the kids played in those days included knucklebones, which originally were real bones that were salvaged from the Sunday lamb roasts. For the girls there was drops which was a card game. Of course we loved to play skippy and hopscotch. The boys sometimes played gambling games of penny or halfpenny against the post. You would throw your penny against the post and if it landed on someone else's penny you would take it. The boys loved marbles and would have their favourite cats' eyes and tom bowlers.

I remember going to the Self Brothers' small general store in East Esplanade with my father when I was about nine. A tall fair-haired man was behind the counter which had an array of glass jars full of lollies – there were boxes of sherbert bombs, liquorish allsorts, musk sticks, sweet hearts, chocolate bars and my very favourite peppermint crisps and polly waffles.

In 1956 I was in the first intake of students for the new St Albans High School, and I was fortunate enough to win a Keilor scholarship during that year. Because the school was still being built, we spent the first 12 months travelling to Sunshine where classes were held in the Sunshine Presbyterian Hall adjoining the park. We moved to the school's current location in 1957.

Bruce Alcorn was special as a teacher. He used to live in Sunshine near the railway line and we could glimpse sight of his house whenever we went past on the train. He taught at Albion Primary School before he started at St Albans High in 1956 and later was at Williamstown High School. I saw him recently at a class reunion and was most impressed that he still remembered my name. We were delighted to see each other after so many years and he took me by the hand and said, "Switlana, you were a good girl."

I remember Paul and Ludmila Pavlov because they lived locally as well as teaching at the school. They were ethnic Russians from Latvia and tried to maintain a happy life as they had in Europe. There was a lot of laughter and there was a lot of song. They played cards, they smoked, and they drank. They had a lovely time perhaps at a time when a lot of the other people were not as

positive in their thinking. There were a lot of sad and depressed people. The Pavlovs tried to rise above their circumstances and hence both Mr and Mrs Pavlov ended up teaching despite having been assigned to factory work when they first arrived. Mrs Pavlov was a seamstress and certainly was very good at sewing and she taught needlecraft. Paul taught mathematics. I met Paul again when I was a student at Melbourne University studying Russian and so was he and we happened to be in the same class. He'd been to Moscow University, as far as I know, and Paul Coverley our lecturer of linguistics had also studied at Moscow, but Coverley was from Scotland. We use to have some very lively discussions about the nuances of language. One would say that this is the way it used to be and the other would say this is the way it is now. Pavlov studied in Moscow pre war but Coverley studied there during Soviet times and the language had changed – the intonation, the pace, the usage. It was nice meeting Mr Pavlov on a professional level rather than as student and teacher.

My final year at St Albans High was when I was in Form 5 in 1960, because that was the highest class at the school at the time. Apart from the educational side of school, I also served as a Prefect, was on the Sports Committee, was the Girls House Captain for Kurrajong, played as Captain of the girls senior basketball team, and won the 75 yard and 100 yard sprints in the athletics. So it was a pretty full year.



Switlana Bohudski's class, Form 1a, 1956.

I have much empathy and gratitude for our teachers in the fifties. They were an amazing group of people. They accepted us for all our many differences, always encouraged and guided us in all endeavours and extended us beyond anything we ever thought possible. They seemed to understand our pain and confusion and gave us hope in an uncertain world. I can only hope that I've been able to give my students a little of what they gave me.

## Matriculation Year

Matriculation was not offered to our intake because there were not enough students who wanted to do it. The decision was made that if we wanted to go on to Matric we would have to go to other schools.

So, of the 150+ initial students, six of us only went on to do matriculation in 1961 - Jeff Barlow, Tony Venes, Margaret Smedley, Doreen Gist and myself. I'm sure there was another person, but I don't remember who it was. Margaret and Doreen were from Albion, and Jeff, Tony and I from St Albans. Jeff, Margaret, Doreen, and I did our matriculation at Sunshine High School.



Girls Senior Basketball Team, 1960. Captain S Bohudski (front right) with E Hermann, I Kryzius, V Kepalas, V Viti, K Grabowski, V Sryter, S Antonczyk, and S Wazny.

## Fellow Students

Tony Venes was not in the 1956 intake. He came to us in 1960 as a mature age student. I think he was all of 24 years of age. The boys in those days all had to wear not only a school uniform but a cap. A little in awe of this new young man (definitely not a boy) we all wondered whether he also would wear a cap - he did. We were very impressed. Tony went to University High School to do his Matric and then on to Monash University, where he studied medicine and graduated as a doctor.

St Albans High School Debutantes, Les Thurgood, Vejuna Kepalas, Vanda Viti, Wladyslaw Citok. Bella Ajayoglu was also in the 1956 intake, but she had gone on to University High School in 1960. From there I believe she went on to Melbourne University, from where she also graduated as a doctor. She devoted her life to paediatrics working from Western General and her own clinic in Footscray.

Vanda Viti was a close friend at school and she enjoyed sports and drama. She also became a primary school teacher and taught with the education department for 40 years. She married Pepi Bognar and they retired to their property in Daylesford.



I'm afraid I've lost track of both Margaret and Doreen.

Julian Castagna was in the 1957 intake and his family had migrated from Italy. Julian joined the school's drama group, started working for the ABC and became involved in the commercial film industry both in Britain and in Australia. Currently he runs a very successful boutique winery out of Beechworth.

Leslie Thurgood, who also was in the year of 1956, lived in Walmer Avenue. His family came to St Albans from England in the early 1950s and his parents, Dorothy and Nevil Thurgood, were involved in the local theatre groups, such as the St Albans Little Theatre.

Les joined the navy and served many years with them. Les and his father were living at Mt Macedon for some years before they were burnt out in the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

### **After High School**

Then myself? I graduated as a teacher having completed my B.A. at Melbourne University and teaching methodology at Melbourne Teachers College. I worked in schools in the western and northern suburbs during which time I completed my Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare.

The condition of our teaching studentships was that we could be sent to teach anywhere in Victoria. If you gained reasonable marks you had a better chance of staying close to the city. I didn't really mind, though I would have loved to have gone to the western district, perhaps Geelong or Portland, but I had made friends with girls who were from the country – Albury, Gippsland – and they all wanted to stay in the city. So, as girls do, before we nominated our preferences we made a decision together to apply for the city and got the eastern suburbs where the girls aspired to be. One went to Lee Street, the other was in Camberwell and I got Surrey Hills.

I married Henri Malakunas, who is of Lithuanian background and his family came to Melbourne in 1949 under the IRO Resettlement Scheme; his father had trained as a teacher but the IRO tested and classified him as an apprentice plumber. Henri and I eventually settled on Mount Macedon in a lovely 1860's old cottage that has its own name of "Haversham". It suited our lifestyle.

### **Teaching Career**

I won't forget the Surrey Hills experience. Come the end of the first year there I was asked to take a composite grade 3 and 4 class for the following year. I accepted that but I always preferred to teach older children and would have loved grade 6. This particular morning I was sitting in the staff room waiting for classes to start and the deputy principal walked in. He said, "Lana, just a word, please. We had a school council meeting last night and decided to ask you to take grade 6 instead of the composite class." I was delighted and said so. He got a cup of coffee and was on the point of going out and I asked him, "Would you mind telling me why that decision was made?"

He said, "It's the first time that we're going to have a composite class in the school and the parents haven't really accepted the idea. So we discussed it and decided that they would accept the composite class more readily if the teacher had an Anglo-Saxon name." My surname was Skorobohatch-Bohudski although I went under Bohudski. For the rest of the day I mulled over what I'd been told. At the end of the day I went straight to the Education Department and asked for a transfer. I knew that if you were primary-school trained you could teach at the junior levels of high school, so I asked if that could be arranged for me. The officer said "Yes, of course. What school would you like to go to?" I was offered Footscray High School, which I was happy to accept, and that's how I changed from primary to secondary school. I then went back to university and completed my degree part time. It's what I wanted to do and the union was also pushing for all secondary teachers to be fully university qualified. After 5 years of part-time study I got my degree. I spent 12 years at Footscray High and they were wonderful years and I still have friends and wonderful memories from that time.

I'd been at Footscray for about 5 years and at the end of the year there was a staff dinner. I happened to be sitting next to the deputy principal at the time. He said, "Lana I've got to tell you a story of when you first came to the school. I happened to be out at yard duty at lunch time. The bell went and everyone went inside. I saw the principal standing outside the office with a piece of paper in his hand. I could see that he was really perturbed and asked him what was wrong. The principal looked up and said 'We've got another one' and showed the slip of paper with the name 'Switlana Skorobohatch-Bohudski'." In those days there was a terrible teacher shortage and there were staff employed who were not fully trained and staff from Europe who had difficulty with the English language. When they saw my name they feared the worst. So they were really pleased to discover that I could speak the language and had trained in Melbourne.

I spent my life in education and feel privileged to have had the benefit of the many experiences. I also completed a post graduate in student welfare and worked as a pupil welfare coordinator at Paisley, Laverton and Sunbury. The post graduate study was at the Hawthorn Institute of Education which did a lot of teacher training.

After teaching for a number of years the last 12 years of my employment with the Department of Education was with the Staffing Unit in Employee Relations - another 12 great years. As you can see, education has been, and continues to be, my life. In fact, in 2003 I received a 35 year service award from the Department.

Most recently I completed the Advanced TESOL Certificate through the Global TESOL College. As a result of this I am now teaching in China ... and loving it - smiling, eager, highly responsive students - hard to beat - and 46 in a class!

What prompted me to teach in China? It all started a long time ago. In 1949 my future husband and I had migrated from Europe to Australia with out families. Now for the first time we were returning to countries from which our families had fled. I felt excited but at the same time a little apprehensive. The memories and stories I'd grown up on had not slipped away as they had become part of my consciousness. It was now 1998 and we were flying to Frankfurt in Germany and then planned to travel through Eastern Europe, which was a fairytale world of intriguing people and culture: castles, citadels, ancient universities graced the ever-changing landscape. Gemstones glistened in shop windows, vendors in parks and cobblestone streets enticed passersby with amber of liquid hues and baskets of fiery red garments. It was a world of music and concerts of spontaneous song. In this world cathedral bells chimed and puppeteers and buskers entertained bright-eyed children. It was also as if by magic that I kept seeing leaflets and posters with one message. No matter where went it was on shop windows and old city walls and even church gates. We'd turn a corner and they'd be there. The paper was different, the colour was different and the writing was different, but they always had the same message: "Teachers Of English Wanted."



I thought it was something I might do when I retired and Henri encouraged me. The idea returned a few years later when we ventured into Asia for our first time. It seemed that teachers of English were wanted in Vietnam, too. I saw the same message in Ho Chi Min city, Hanoi, Hong Kong and other Asian towns. At the end of 2003 after more than 40 years' service I said goodbye to the Victorian Department of Education and Training. I decided to continue studying and did my TESL qualifications – Teaching English as a Second Language. I completed that on-line over the year. This was just in time to get a phone call from friends who were going back to teach in China. It was a wonderful opportunity though I had to reconcile the thought of going to teach in a political system that was diametrically opposed to my own beliefs and which my parents had rejected. The uncertainties swept in. I did my research over the internet and everything I read was very interesting and appealing. It was something useful, purposeful, interesting, an opportunity to experience a different culture. It was an agonizing decision because I would be going by myself, but Henri encouraged me to take the challenge. I decided to do it and was privileged to have that experience.



Lana and Henri Malakunas (left) with Jutta and Nick Szwed (front) enjoying lunch.

### **Teaching in China**

I'm teaching at Taizhou Normal College. It is a teachers college such as Melbourne, Burwood, Coburg and Toorak Teachers Colleges were in the '50s, '60s and '70s. My classes are well over 40 but the students are a delight to teach, so you simply don't notice the numbers. They are very eager to learn and very responsive. They are always smiling and I find myself doing the same. I teach in double periods but the time seems to fly.

Taizhou is in Jiangsu province, PR China. It is about 4 hours North West of Shanghai on the Yangtze River. Since arriving here two weeks ago, we've experienced two typhoons. Last weekend the typhoon was so fierce that along the eastern coast 14 people were killed and thousands had to be evacuated. Being further inland we only got sideswiped, but still the wind was so ferocious that I tossed and turned all night and woke up with a headache and sore ears in the morning. The one good thing about typhoons though is that they blow away the incredibly dense pollution which is always there. Yesterday we had an almost blue sky, but as I look out of my window, I once again see a pall of grey over the city. The horizon is about a kilometre away.

## Exploring Jiangsu Province

If you saw China in the seventies, you certainly would see many, many changes now. I don't have a benchmark for comparison apart from my study of history, but people seem to be content and very proud of the country's achievements of the last twenty years - particularly the last ten.

I'll tell you a little bit about what has been happening here so it might give you an idea of just how much life has changed in China.

## Visiting Shanghai

October 1st was China's National Day followed by a week's holiday, so Dianne and Graham, (the two friends with whom I am here) and I, decided to go to Shanghai where we had an interesting few days. We found Shanghai to be another BIG city with very obvious contrasts of "modernisation" and life as it was, and continues to be in the streets. Our hotel was in an old part of town, very comfortable and clean and only about a 10 minute taxi ride to anywhere we wanted to go. So go we went - to The Bund which is like South Bank but magnified tenfold and probably more, under the river through the Tourist Tunnel with flashing, coloured lights, and then up to the Pearl of the Orient Tower, cheek to jowl with the billion other tourists. The view would have been spectacular had it not been for - yes, you've guessed it - a murky grey pall of pollution.



Lana (second left) and Henri Malakunas (right) enjoying dinner with colleagues.

Every big city has its "road" and Shanghai is no exception. A stroll down Nanjing Road went forever. Street vendors and small side street eateries were quite at home amongst boutiques and huge shopping complexes. There was a buzz as the millions who had come to Shanghai for the "Golden Week" of shopping snapped up one bargain after another. Even I bought a vest and a casual jacket with which I am very happy.

We visited the Old City and the Yuyuan Gardens. It was fascinating to see the architecture of yore and the many quaint stalls and shops which offered everything from silks, art work and pearls to every souvenir imaginable. There were drink stalls, tea houses, and exclusive restaurants - where I might say, we had lunch of shrimp, crab and lemon chicken - very yum!



A trip to what we think is the former French Concession area with lovely gardens and tree lined streets, led to a visit to Sun Yet Sen's house (which was shut for restoration) and the house of Jou En Lai where we were shown over the property by a very pleasant and knowledgeable university student. It was interesting to listen to the history and admire a beautiful 1930's property.

Just around the corner from the hotel was a 700 year old temple of Confucious. It had been almost totally destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but after 10 years of painstaking work by volunteers it was finally opened to the public in 1999. Once again we were given a guided tour by a university student who took great pride in telling us about the history of the temple and the current charitable work being done by the volunteers who look after the property. There were some wonderful artifacts on display - items which had been squirreled away during the revolution and then donated to the temple when times were safer.

We explored the streets around the hotel and saw life as it really is for the many who have not caught up with China's spiralling economy - the street stalls, the tiny shops with their goods spilling onto the footpaths, the families and friends relaxing and eating in laneways alleyways and doorways. We dodged between bikes, scooters and cars as they mercilessly tooted their horns and vied for what little space there was.

We were amused by the vendors and crowds that gathered to watch a potential transaction with a 'Westerner' taking place. There was genuine interest, curiosity, and many smiles and laughter. It was interesting to see that they were all quietly concerned that we weren't short changed. We smiled to see people in pyjamas strolling, shopping, working. It has been explained that because life has become so much better in the last ten years, people are starting to wear more relaxed clothing as they themselves are so much happier and more relaxed. An interesting thought!

A magic moment in time was hearing jazz drifting on the late afternoon air as a soloist played a trumpet, and looking up, I saw him etched in the window of a far off apartment building that had seen better times.

The National Games are being held at the moment in Nanjing which is only 2.5 hours away, but all the basketball matches are being played here at the Taizhou stadium. I have been lucky to receive an invitation to a couple of the matches and am really looking forward to going. Henri used to play basketball and I spent many years watching or scoring matches at Albert Park, so have a good knowledge of the game and really enjoy it.

### **Visiting Yangzhou**

Yesterday we had our first organised trip. A group of us went to Yangzhou which is west of where we are, on the way to Nanjing. It is bigger and "more prosperous" than Taizhou. It has 7 million people as distinct from 5 million in Taizhou. The streets are tree lined whereas in Taizhou there seems to be a lot of building going on and there isn't as much greenery.

It was a glorious day. We visited Heyuan Garden, one of the most famous private gardens in China. The grand residence was built around a central pond which has numerous covered outdoor flyover walkways linking the various parts of the building to the central pond pavilion. The water in the pond sparkled, children eagerly looked for fish that were apricot and gold in colour, and families quietly sipped green tea in the pavilion.

Lunch was served "in a private room upstairs" of a restaurant in down town Yangzhou. We enjoyed many tasty dainty morsels and then spent the afternoon at Slender Lake which was really lovely. The lake wound its way in a narrow L shape on which bobbed pleasure boats in brilliant colours. They floated under arched bridges and touched the shore from time to time. It was fringed by willow trees and red lilies, and adjoining it were flower filled meadows which swept into the distance as far as the eye could see. As I said, it was a glorious day.



Lana Malakunas, 2005





Classmates: Andy Kratsis, Jeff Barlow, Les Thurgood, Switlana Bohudski, 2016.



60th anniversary celebrations, 2016.

Photographs courtesy of Lana Malakunas and Vanda Viti  
Classroom photographs courtesy of Nick Szwed.