

7 Westlake - the Ivanovici family - March 1953 to 1956 by Angela Ivanovici

John (Nelu), Sylvia (nee Suteau) and baby Angela Ivanovici emigrated from an Italian refugee camp in Sinegallia, Italy, to Australia in December 1950. For Mum (Mama) and Dad (Tata), Australia was as far away as they could get from the post World War II disruptions in Romania, their home land. Like many migrants before them, Melbourne was their first port of call. This was followed by a few months at the refugee or immigrant camps at Bonegilla in Victoria, and Cowra, in New South Wales.

Life in Canberra began at the immigrant camp, located on the southern side of Capital Hill (called Capital Hill Hostel). The family moved to 7 Westlake in March 1953. This was home until 1956, when we moved to Narrabundah.

John and Sylvia had just turned 28 (7 October and 2 December respectively) when they arrived in Australia, and Angela was 9 months old.

John was a trained ship engineer. He built roads for two years after arriving - part of the deal for the passage to Australia. When his *apprenticeship* was completed, he joined the motor mechanic's crew at the then Department of Transport's maintenance pool near the power station at Kingston.

Sylvia was a trained dancer and singer, and performed in a variety concert at Bonegilla. She pursued a domestic career thereafter.

The house was comfortable, with the standard two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen-dining, bathroom and a broad verandah right along the back. My room faced west, and I recall moonlit shadows from a cherry tree occasionally turning into snakes during the night - much to my concern and my parents as I woke them up in alarm. The house had a Coolgardie safe which *lived* just outside the back door. I was fascinated by it, with its hessian walls and water tray on top.

Times in the kitchen with Mama included squeezing oranges for sweet, fragrant juice, stirring egg yolks and eating brains (to become brainy according to Mama).

John and Sylvia loved gardening, and I recall a central, fenced bed which housed the strawberries and a very large bed along the fence which grew abundant tomatoes. I vividly remember the smell of the tomatoe plants and the tomatoes. The cherry tree beside the house provided not only fruit. My mother chased me around the central garden bed (for some misdemeanor or other) with a piece of the cherry tree.

We shared the block at Number 7 with a gentle old man and his cocker spaniel. They lived in a small ivy-covered hut shadowed by a big gum tree in the yard behind the house. I always had to call this man *Mr McDonald* and his hut seemed very mysterious and dark.

Of course there were neighbouring kids to play with and visit, although I recall my parents being very strict. We enjoyed family activities and excursions.

The fields over the hill towards Yarralumla were great for mushrooms. I especially loved being swung high by my parents while we searched.

The adults did a lot of fishing in the Molonglo River. I was in it for the paddling around. Even the fright I got when I emerged from a paddle in the shallows with leech covered feet did not stop me. The footbridge near Kingston was a favourite spot and the straight part of the river near Weston. Tata did a disappearing act there when he got a big bite and fell (he reckoned he dived) into the river with his fishing rod. He was under water for such a long time that I thought he had drowned and had well and truly started wailing by the time he surfaced.

Drawing and painting featured at home. Tata was a deft hand at drawing, and I remember his wonderfully detailed sketch of one of the *new* rectangular buses. Mama taught me to paint a wolf's head during a pre-school session. The teacher was so impressed that she visited my parents and there was much praise from all around.

Other excursions included bike rides with Tata. The view from the cross bar of the bike of the bitumen on the road fascinated me as it looked like a fast moving comet-star. Mama was a film matinee fan and she would take me

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with her in the bus to the grand Capitol Theatre at Manuka. At the right season we would walk past the northern end of Westlake to the quince trees for their fruit.

Sometime by the time I was four years old, I had learnt that watering helped things to grow. Unfortunately I also learned that watering did not restore the fur on my teddy bear's nose and chest after I had shaved him.

At least one snail expired during my pre-school experiment with paddle pop sticks which I had hoped to help me see the inside.

I attended Westlake Pre-School, just a short distance down the hill a bit. Photos taken there show us enjoying ourselves.

Then came the big school - St Christophers in Manuka. At the time I attended in 1955 the Kindergarten building was located on the Bougainville Street side of the present day car park. I remember the *really big* kids and the vast number of building. What I do not remember happening on that first day of school was coming home in tears - apparently the kids at school laughed at me for not speaking English very well. From that day Tata spoke English to me and Mama Romanian. It made three way conversations between us interesting at times and me bilingual (which is why my two daughters are attending Telopea Park which is now a French/English bilingual school). That *bad* experience did not deter me, and I loved the smell and smoothness of the wooden toys and enjoyed our *sleeps* and piano playing.

The first car meant trips fishing the Kambah pool at dawn. I have to say that I slept in the car while the parents fished and often woke to currawongs singing.

The move to Narrabundah saw my parents living there until January 1980 for Mama and 1983 for Tata. Looking back, I think that my time at Westlake gave me my long-spanning love for plants, animals and natural things, for cooking and enjoying food - all of which have put me in good stead for the present and years ahead.

Following on the next page is a page from *True Tales From Westlake's Vanished Suburbs of Westlake, Westridge & Acton* that shows Angela's photograph of the children getting into the Westlake School Bus. This service was not available when I was a child and was a service introduced in the 1950s.

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Below: Westlake children catching the school bus in front of 27 Westlake (mid to late 1950s & Ivanovici). Above Left: The same view 1998. Above: Plan of Westlake Cottages. It has been turned upside down to mark the same view as seen in photographs.



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Blue arrow points to Angela.

