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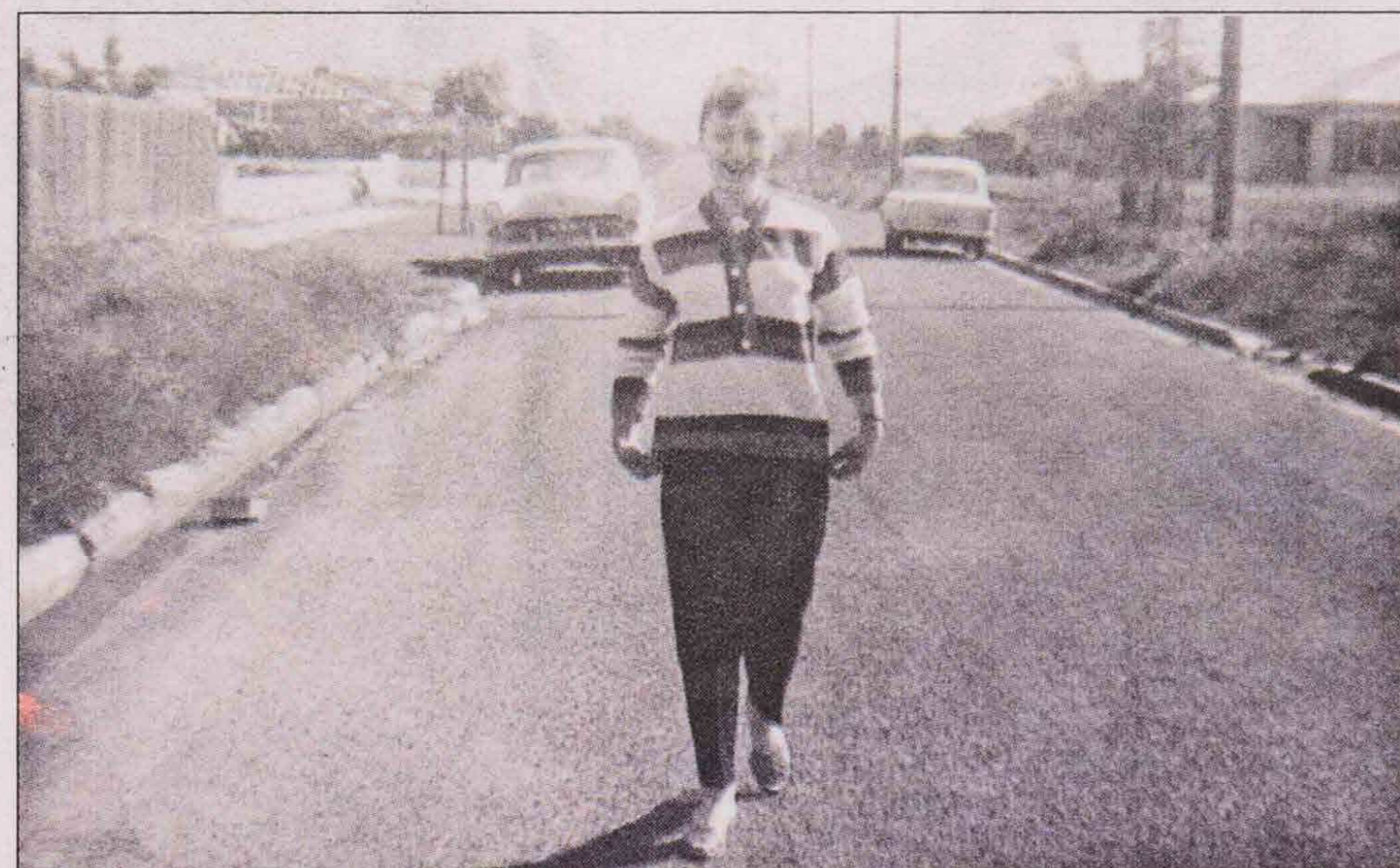
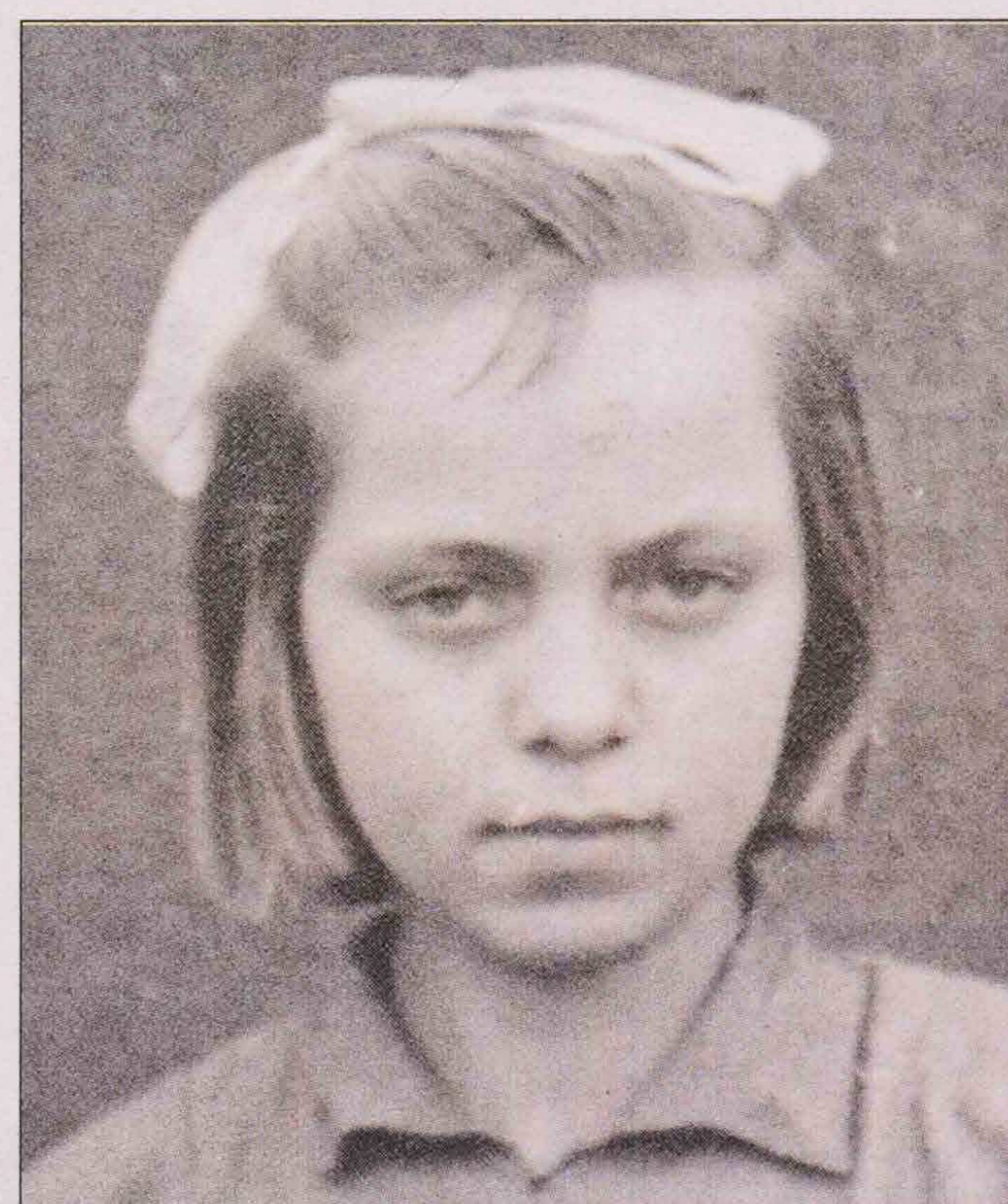
SPECIAL FEATURE: Part 4

ONE-WAY TICKET



THE SIKETA FAMILY ODYSSEY

# Pierina's new shoes



TOP: Pierina as a child migrant in a passport photograph. ABOVE: Teenager Pierina Siketeta steps out near her new home in Walscott Street, North Geelong.

**O**ne pair of shoes meant the world to Pierina Siketeta. It was the late 1950s and she was growing up in Geelong with little tangible wealth as a child in a Croatian migrant family. "The first few years in Australia were very hard," the now Pierina Pedretti, 60, recalled at her Belmont home.

"But then we got used to it. We were always together, a big family having lunch or whatever. "I remember when I was 16, Mum bought me a beautiful pair of dress shoes. "When mum bought me them I felt like I was a queen, not like now when you can have everything you want."

Pierina was born the youngest of Anton and Philomena Siketeta's 10 children.

She spent her formative years on the family's home island of Lastovo, Croatia, and was 14 when her family migrated to Australia in 1957.

"I went to school over there and then school here for a little bit," she said.

"Then I was 15 when I went to work at the wool mill behind the glass factory in North Geelong.

"I spent six months spinning wool and then left to work in a shop at 16."

Pierina knew no English when she started school; other kids teased her.

"It took me a long time to grasp English," she said.

"Even now I can't write it well. Croatian is phonetic, but in English one word can have different meanings.

"It was better when I went to work and there were Polish ladies who were really nice. The job we did we had to do together."

The Siketetas mixed with other migrant families in the Geelong North area, so Pierina has vivid memories of their sense of community in

a new land. "There were a few families from Lastovo

**Geelong's Siketetas are one of Australia's largest Croatian families. They left an island paradise in the 1950s to find a new life in**

**Australia. Today's story is the fourth in a five-part series on their epic journey**



danny lannen

here in North Geelong; it was like we were back on the island," she said.

"I remember people sitting on fences talking and being always together. It was something people don't have now"

Her family would barbecue fresh fish the Lastovo way a couple of times a week, and the meals would transform into neighborhood gatherings.

"In that time, because there were only a few of them, the families were very close," she said.

Her parents opened their home to about 16 boarders at a time. The boarders were young migrant men and were treated like sons.

**P**ierina's shift from working at the wool mill to working in a supermarket delicatessen in Walscott Street, North Geelong, was decisive. She married the part-owner, Italian migrant Guido Pedretti, and later left work to care for their four children.

Guido and his family later sold the shop when he returned to his building profession.

Pierina remembers her early years on Lastovo. Many are coloured by recollections of the Adriatic Sea.

She accompanied her father on his fishing boats. He used dried pumpkins to help her learn to swim. He hollowed out the flesh, tied the buoyant shells around her waist and let her play in the shallows off the whitewashed, stony beaches.

The sweet memory lingers, and even today Pierina harbours an abiding affinity for the sea.

"All the beaches were rocky, but wherever you

went you could swim, and it was all in walking distance," Pierina said.

"To be on an island where we were you had to love the sea, fishing, swimming and nature. The water was beautiful and clear."

**P**ierina remembers that her childhood life was simple. "When I was born people lived from their farms, fishing and had animals," she said. "People didn't have to buy much, but of course we enjoyed everything. When you haven't got much, every little thing is special."

She fed the farm animals — pigs, lambs and chickens — before school. When she got home from school, it was soon time for bed.

Her father spent much time fishing, and she remembers her mother was always with the children and was always busy, washing, cooking, ironing with the old flat iron.

Pierina would love to visit her father and other fishermen when they barbecued part of their catch at the port. She would deliver them wicker-covered bottles of wine.

"Once I broke one," she said. "Didn't I get it! "But Dad was such a wonderful person, such a great dad and happy person.

"Everyone knew him for his goodness."

Pierina was too young to remember her brothers, Aldo, Mario and Ivan, running away from Croatia.

Their departure changed the Siketeta family destiny and led their parents and siblings to Australia.

Now Pierina firmly acknowledges Geelong as home and couldn't imagine herself living back on Lastovo.

She appreciates that her children have travelled overseas, walked the lands she and Guido knew as children and measured the degree of separation from life in Australia.

"I think they are richer because their parents are migrants, just by seeing their parents working hard to achieve something and bring them up," Pierina said.

"Guido always tells them how hard it was to leave his mum and come. They do understand it was hard for us. They think my dad did work hard, and there is a way you can achieve something and not go on unemployment.

"The kids know that they like to have good things, and to have good things you have to work."



Guido and Pierina Pedretti, migrants made good.