

ALDO & ANA SIKETA

Aldo and Ana Siketa were born on the Croatian island of Lastovo, off the Dalmatian Coast in the Adriatic Sea. Communist Yugoslavia controlled Lastovo when Aldo, his brothers Ivan and Mario plus four companions secretly planned their departure in 1951, seeking freedom and a new way of life.

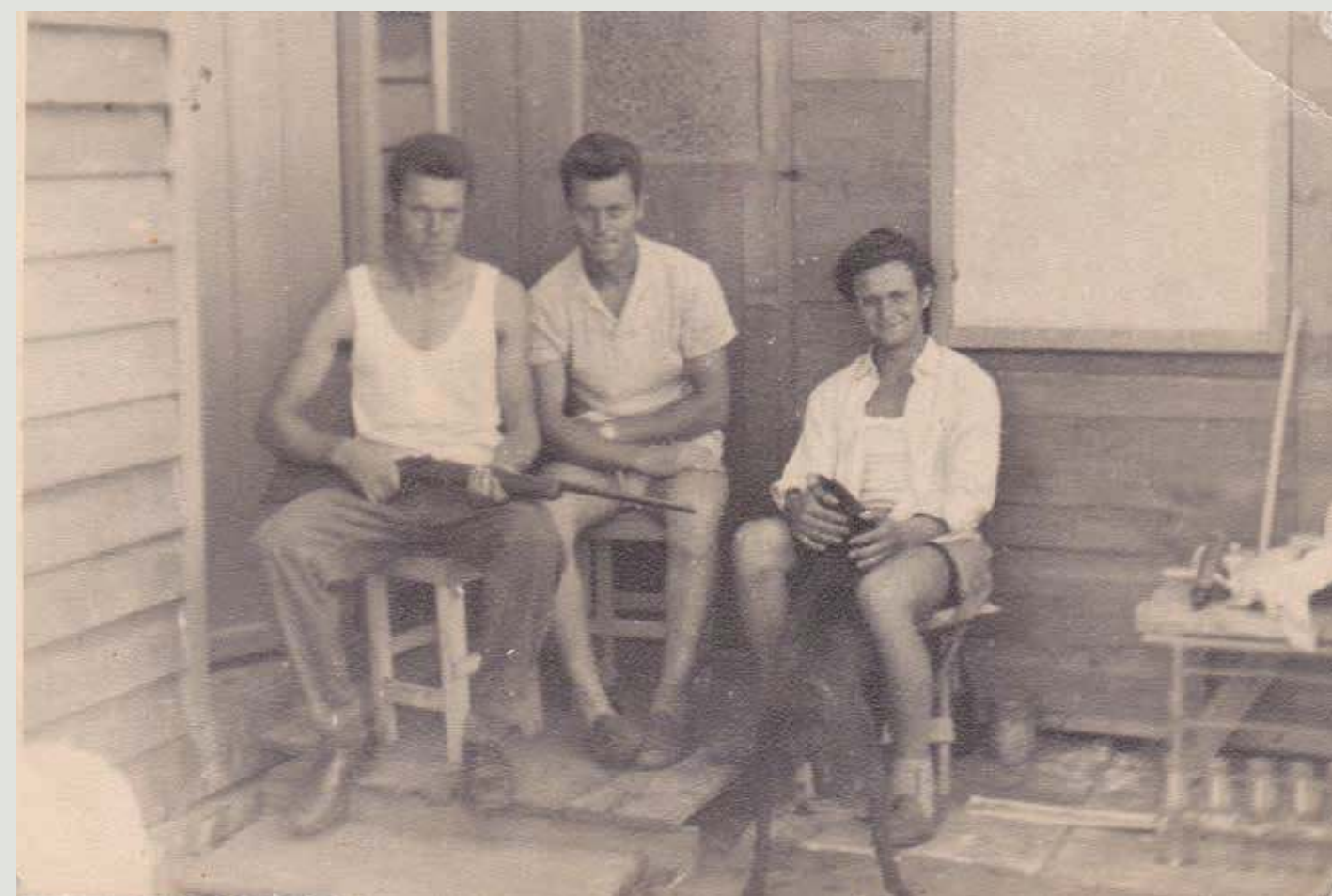


In total darkness, in an open boat called 'Harmony', the six men ran the gauntlet of Yugoslav navy patrols, arriving at the Italian port of Trane where they were taken to a refugee camp near Naples. There they spent 2 years and Aldo [pictured left] worked as a Security Officer for camp consular offices of the USA, Canada and Australia.

The Siketa brothers applied to migrate to Australia and in 1953 were relocated to Bremerhaven Germany. They signed a 2-year work contract with the Australian Government and were provided free passage on the ship "Seven Seas". On arrival at Port Melbourne, they transferred by train to Bonegilla migrant camp.

Ivan obtained work with the railways while Mario and Aldo were sent to clear Queensland bush, followed by seasonal pea picking in NSW. Aldo then moved to Geelong to work at Ford, first in engine reconditioning and later as a Crane Driver.

Mario joined Aldo in Geelong where they lived in a bungalow behind a shop in Walsgott Street with several Italian migrants. The Government released migrants from work contracts if they had employment, ultimately allowing Ivan to join Mario and Aldo. For additional earnings, the brothers went weekend pea picking in the Colac district.



They bought land in Kildare Street, North Geelong, purchased the bungalow at Walsgott Street, relocated it to Kildare Street and erected a house using Ford packing crates.

Aldo wrote to Ana in Lastovo, paid her fare and they married in Bell Park in 1956. They lived at Kildare Street with Mario and his wife, Milica.

The brothers sponsored their parents and siblings to Australia, who then took over the Kildare Street house and Aldo moved to Brooklyn.

Preferring to stick together and hearing there was work near Mt Gambier, Aldo went with his father and brothers to investigate. Jobs offered were conditional on an immediate start, leaving Ana (who spoke no English) and new baby Antoinette in Geelong for over a week without knowledge of where they were. Understandably, she was very upset by this. Ana briefly joined the men in Dartmoor but returned to Geelong to go pea picking for extra money, leaving Antoinette with Aldo for six weeks and resulting in Antoinette not recognising her on return. The family also went seasonal grape picking in Mildura, leaving the children with their grandmother. These jobs were necessary for survival.

Aldo re-joined Ford's workforce in 1959 and travelled between Geelong and the new Broadmeadows plant for 2 years while the family lived in a rental property in Newport. Until she was 5yo, Ana made Antoinette's dresses from clean-boiled rags from the factory. She received many compliments on how nice Antoinette always looked.

Despite many relocations, Aldo and Ana always returned to Geelong where they preferred to raise their family. They moved back to Kildare Street and had another two children. Aldo worked at Ford and Ana at Grosby Shoes, then Henderson Springs, taking alternate shifts to ensure one parent was home with the children but if shifts coincided, the Italian family next door babysat.

In 1966 Aldo and Ivan bought the Fruit Shop in Hughes Street which they operated for 8 years. Ana and Aldo worked together and the hours invested in the business took a toll on family and social life. They had by then sponsored Ana's mother and brother to Australia and all lived together, Ana's mother helping with the home and children and her brother in the Fruit Shop. Aldo and Ana supported them financially for 10 years without government assistance, under an 'Assurance of Support'.

The Siketa brothers assisted many people from Lastovo with re-settlement in Australia.

The brothers formed a business consortium they called 'Lastovo Trading Company' which included butcher shops, Fruit Shop, supermarket, piggery and a potato farm. Company downsizing saw Aldo take employment with ASCOM and when retrenched there, took early retirement and gave his time and energy to the Geelong Croatian community. Over 3 decades, Aldo was instrumental in the formation and development of the North Geelong Croatian Soccer Club and Croatian Cultural Folklore Group "Lado" and was President within each for nearly a decade. He was also very involved in establishing the Croatian Community Centre in Cox Road.

Aldo represented the Croatian Community on the Geelong Ethnic Communities Council for over a decade, was a volunteer and leader for social groups for the ageing Croatian, Italian and Macedonian communities, facilitated by the GECC.

In 2012, 2013 and 2014 Aldo returned to Lastovo with Antoinette and Bruno, to attend the unique annual event called Poklad, celebrated from Saint Anthony's Day to Ash Wednesday.

Aldo [now 84] and Ana [79] head a strong family unit as parents to 7 children, 21 Grand Children and 3 Great Grand Children, most of whom live in Geelong and support the Geelong Football Club.

Aldo and Ana still reside in the Bell Park house that hosted many functions for North Geelong Soccer Club and Croatian Cultural Folklore Group "Lado". Ana often says: "If these floor boards and this garage could talk they would have many stories to tell, but would say... enough – we are tired".

Aldo and Ana continue their loving family support by running errands for their children, caring for grandchildren and providing Sunday family lunches at their home.

Aldo jokingly says – "On today's menu we have..... all same price".



Left: Aldo, Ivan and Ana with co-workers in the fruit shop



Top: Ivan, Aldo & Mario in front of their bungalow and below left, Aldo in front of the new Walsgott Street house and his bride Ana



Left: Ivan, Aldo & Mario Siketa



Aldo and Ana Siketa and their family members - spanning 4 generations