Adolph Hanich 1941 - 2016

Adolph in 2015

Adolph was born in the Yugoslavian village of Krndija in November 1941. His family belonged to the Danube Swabians, who were descended from 18th-century immigrants. These had been recruited to re-colonise the area after the end of the Ottoman Empire. During World War Two, however, ethnic genocide was employed in part to clear the area for collectivisation under Tito. Adolph was named thus as a symbolic gesture of protection. Nevertheless, in October 1944, as the Russian army approached, he and his family fled the conflagration on horse-drawn wagons. After a difficult 17-day journey they reached Vienna, Austria. The latter provided safety but the next 7 years were difficult since, as refugees, they remained unwelcome. They stayed long enough for Adolph to attend primary school. Then, in 1951, they were accorded refugee status by Australia. The family boarded a converted troop ship and sailed to Sydney. Since the ship was crewed by Italian sailors they ate a lot of pasta!

When they arrived in Sydney they had a new problem - no one in the family could speak English. So young Adolph was informed that he would be the family translator. His father found work in a factory but never really recovered. Back in his own country he'd been a proud, successful and well-respected farmer. This had been his life and the foundation of his identity. But now with only a low-grade laboring job he lost his dignity, his will to live, and subsequently died. Adolph attended primary school in Blacktown and secondary school in Paramatta. He did well and won a scholarship to the university of New South Wales in 1960. His cousin was studying chemical engineering and so, inspired by his example, he decided to pursue the same course of study. He followed a combined part-time, full-time, program while earning on the side to support himself. He married Margaret in 1962 and was also active in student politics. He became a student union councillor and graduated in 1965.

For the next 15 or so years Adolph worked for a series of companies, beginning with ICI in 1966. He and Margaret moved to Melbourne in 1969 to enable him to manage a new plant then under development. Their son, Quentin, was born there in 1970 and daughter, Meaghan, in 1971. His next position was with the British

electronics Plessey, still in Melbourne, where he remained for a couple more years. Then 1974 he moved back to Sydney to work with Hino, a Japanese company that imported bus parts that were assembled in Australia. His final 'applied' position was with the UK based Rentokil company. In 1978 the whole family moved to the UK for a few months in order for him to receive the requisite training. Then, upon his return to Australian Adolph became regional manager for some 20 national Rentokil subsidiaries throughout the Asia Pacific region. He tells of his surprise some time later at being summoned back to London only to hear that his immediate superior had been sacked and, consequently, he was also out of a job. In 1982 he was back in Melbourne where he was to remain for the next 26 years. He became a partner in the Melbourne management firm IBIS, led by Phyl Ruthven. Then in 1984 he moved to Deloitte's - a high-end international management consultancy - where he also became a partner. He spent a happy and productive decade there travelling widely and working on a range of business and industry projects, consultancies and reports.

His daughter Meaghan's illness during 1993 and her death in 1994 affected him very deeply. He became a mental illness advocate and later President of the Schizophrenia Fellowship. At the same time he continued to pursue his other, wider, interests. For example he made a pilgrimage to Sikkim in India to meet Buddhist adepts and immerse himself in their views of reality. Partly as a result of these experiences he undertook several demanding periods of in-depth meditation in Australia that served him well thereafter.
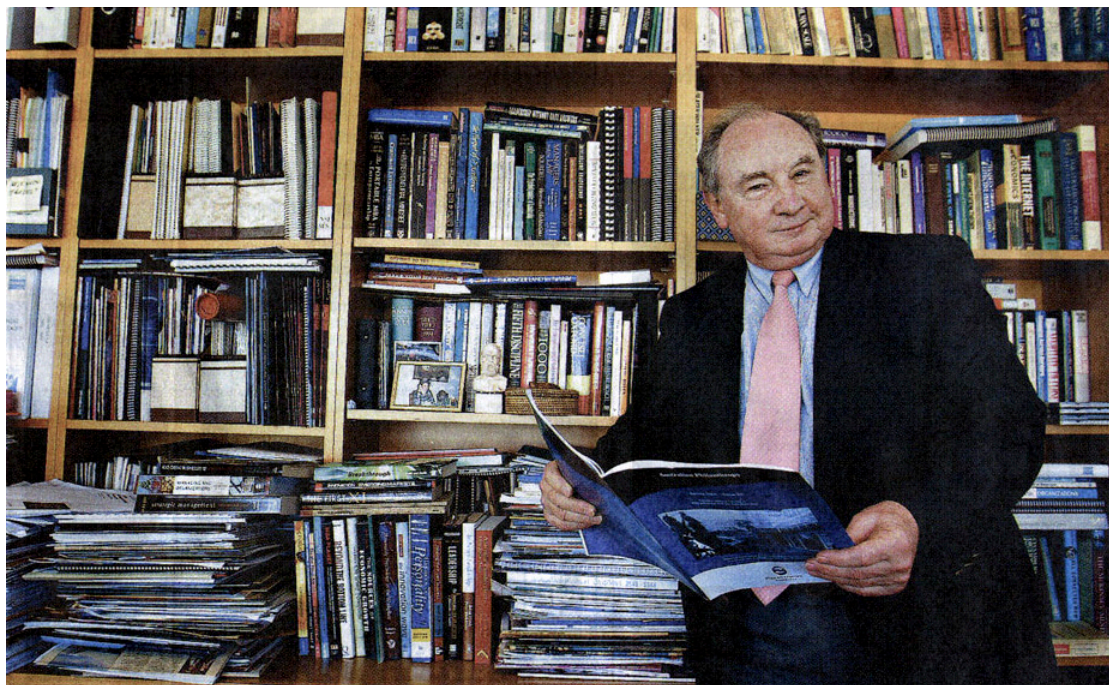
Adolph in his office at the Swinburne AGSE, 2004

With a solid background in industry and business Adolph now found a new home in academia, initially as a part-time strategy adviser to Prof. Iain Wallace, the V.C. of Swinburne University of Technology (SUT). He and Wallace had known each other for some time as they'd both been on the board of Knowledge Victoria (an

organisation set up to encourage the development of knowledge-related projects within the state). At the same time, and for many years thereafter, Adolph also sat on the board of a little-known entity called the Telematics Trust that provided independent seed funding for promising start-ups. In 1999 he went full-time as head of what was then known as the Entrepreneurship Centre in the SUT Business School. Finally in 2001 he took over the reins of the new Graduate School of Entrepreneurship (AGSE), a position he held until his retirement in 2005.

Predictably, however, retirement was not a passive state for Adolph - far from it. In fact he wasted no time taking on two substantial new challenges. First he went back to university and undertook a post-graduate degree in psychology that qualified him to become a family counsellor. He first practised in Melbourne and then Thirroul, NSW, where he moved in 2009 to be close to his family. Grandson Gabriel had arrived in 2006 and granddaughter, Lily, three years later. He subsequently adopted a more locally focused life and became fully involved in his local U3A (University of the Third Age) group.

Adolph with Lily and Gabriel, Thirroul, NSW, 2010

He continued to work happily and successfully as a counsellor for another decade, only winding down in 2015 when his health began to fail. The other challenge he'd undertaken during this period was re-learning the German language by, again, enrolling in the appropriate post-graduate courses. This was no mean feat. While always modest in such matters Adolph acquired sufficient fluency to begin reading German history and literature. Part of his motivation was to research and assemble further details of the history of his family village and background in Croatia. Late in 2015 he travelled back to the area with his son, Quentin. While they were there they uncovered further family documentation and also met up with relatives and others with roots in that time and place. The visit provided a valuable sense of completion for Adolph.

It is difficult to sum up someone like Adolph in a few words. His interest in family history is, perhaps, partly explained by something he said to his nephew, Eric. That is, 'to understand where you are going, you need to know where you are from.' One of his close friends also threw some light on his character when she shared these words from their journey to India. She described him not only as 'a wonderful travelling companion' but also as 'a pleasant mixture of acerbic wit and tolerance, with a true openness of spirit.' The latter showed in many ways, not least in his continual attempts 'to understand all sorts of different life worlds.' He was deeply knowledgeable, always understanding and never, ever, judgmental. Virtually everyone who knew him refers to the great richness of their conversations with him on a vast range of topics and the sheer pleasure of his company. I can certainly attest to both.

In 2015 Adolph contracted a serious illness. For a while he seemed to recover under treatment. But by December it had flared up again. He was admitted to Wollongong hospital in early January 2016. When I heard how ill he was I flew down as soon as possible and spent most of Saturday January 23rd there with him. He was obviously weak and in considerable discomfort but his mind and spirit remained undimmed. We spent our final hours together reminiscing over old times, our many common interests and the numerous experiences we'd shared – especially at Swinburne - over more than 20 years. He passed away two weeks later.

Adolph will be sadly missed - and yet his spirit lives on. It continues in the lives and work not only of his immediate family but also everyone who had the privilege of knowing and working with him. He was one of those rare individuals who can truly be called a precious 'gift to humanity'.

Richard A. Slaughter
Brisbane
March 2016