

Imre Lele – a ‘blessed and fortunate life’.

There is no doubt that while, in his words, Imre Lele has had a ‘blessed and fortunate life,’ it started in dire circumstances. At last night’s meeting, Imre held everyone spellbound with stories that covered life, work and Rotary.

Born in Eastern Hungary, six month old Imre survived the Siege of Budapest during late World War Two in which tens of thousands of civilians died. His mother, separated in the fighting from her husband, pushed baby Imre to safety across the last surviving bridge to safety, just before it was blown up.

Through an extraordinary coincidence, Imre’s father found out while on a journey to Dresden that his wife was alive. He got off the train and started walking south, while those on the train went on to Dresden in time to be engulfed in the tragic and widespread incendiary bombing of that city. Imre’s parents were re-united but sadly his malnourished mother contracted tuberculosis and died when only 26 years of age.

From a displaced persons camp in Naples, Imre with his father (now re-married) came to Australia, after the quota for Canada was full. They were sent to Bonegilla, a camp set on 130 hectares in north-eastern Victoria, which was set up for receiving and training migrants in the post-war immigration boom. Speaking no English, Imre soon attended school in Wodonga where his father found work as a carpenter and settled there. When his dad suffered broken legs in an accident when Imre was 14, his son took over the carpentry as best he could for two months. Imre’s building and handyman skills were forged during that time.

Imre told us of his frustration at being held back at school because of the language barrier. At age 15 he decided that he would only speak English from then on. Once living in Melbourne, he attended CBC in North Melbourne, won a Commonwealth Scholarship to Melbourne Uni where he completed a Commerce Degree. Most importantly, he also met Tricia and so started their wonderful family life together.

Imre also covered his very successful business journey as General Manager, including Laminex, ACI and AMCOR. His community service life started in Ballarat with Wendouree Lions for four years. He was involved in Scout leadership and Very Special Kids before joining the Rotary Club of Keilor for four years. For the past 33 years, Imre has been an active member of the Rotary Club of North Balwyn. Apart from his voluntary work locally, he regaled us with stories from his overseas Rotary trips to Vanuatu, the Solomons and Vietnam.

What a great night at Rotary. Bravo Imre!

Greg Ross