



You can't stop progress, but what does that mean for those who, literally, stand in its way? Fifty years of history disappears.

Story Trent Dalton Photography David Kelly

house of memories

This is the bedroom where she nursed her dying husband, John. It has pale blue walls and a wooden floor and a Jesus portrait overlooking a double bed that sags on one side, a sign of Eva Lopuszynski's 17 years of widowhood.

She's never understood how John stayed so calm in his final days. The prostate cancer must have caused great pain, but he never once raised his voice in anger or frustration or regret. He went quietly, with dignity. Maybe it was this motionless room that brought comfort. He refused to spend his last months in hospital, preferring this stuffy box with fibro walls that he built himself, with money earned pegging sleepers for the railway line between Darra and Corinda.

Or maybe it was the warm gaze of Christ. "I pray to Him before I eat in the morning and before I sleep at night," says Eva. "I am 82 years old and I have never once had headache. I have never once had backache. I have never once been sick. Do you believe that or do you not?"

She prays in Polish. She prays for her six daughters and two sons. She prays for her grandchildren. She asks God to watch over John in heaven. And she prays that progress won't be the death of her.

Eva ambles to the window and opens the blinds. Outside, progress has swallowed up the neighbours' homes. It's how she remembers Poland after the war, all rubble and disorder, fields of brown soil and chalky white rock. But it wasn't bombs that brought these homes down. It was the Department of Main Roads. Hers is the last house standing, a beacon of order – manicured gardens and well-fed trees – among a stretch of chaos. Eva mows the lawn herself, all 800 square metres of it. Despite a looming shadow of destruction, she trims and waters her plants every afternoon. If the house has to go out, it will go out with dignity.

A week after we chat, 2857 Ipswich Road, Darra, will be demolished. The heavy metal claw of a Logan City Demolition bulldozer will chomp through its walls. It will be hacked and bashed into disintegration.

Moving on ... Eva Lopuszynski's home, left, before the bulldozers moved in, Eva alone with her memories and the cleared site.

And with it will go 50 years of Eva Lopuszynski's life, a half-century of memories torn from their foundations to make way for the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. The four-lane road running past Eva's home will be expanded to six lanes, with provision for eight. She knows it has to be done. If her house has to go so thousands of Queenslanders can drive to work a little easier, so be it. This country has given her so much, maybe this is her chance to give something back.

But the future is so frightening. There's talk she'll have to move to a house in Redbank, further west and nearer to her youngest daughter. But she doesn't know anything about Redbank. All she knows is that a neighbour moved to Redbank after living in Darra for four decades and, two days after moving into his new home, died.

"This place is part of me," she says. "My life is here for 50 years. I will die here. I know people here. I see people at church every Sunday. I'm no good ▶

at making friends. I'm not the sort to go up to people and talk, talk, talk. It's not my business.

"I feel good here. No headache. No backache. I not take one tablet. I go over there to Redbank, maybe I have heart attack?"

In the bedroom, Eva taps a cedar dressing table. She stares into its mirror. "You feel this duchesse," she says. "Very heavy, very heavy, right?" Yes, it is too heavy for one man to lift.

"I want to tell you something," she whispers.

It was a strange thing for John to say. He wasn't normally a man given to superstition and hocus pocus, but he said it all the same. In this bedroom in his final days, he asked his wife to look at the duchesse. He said: "When you hear a noise coming from the duchesse, you will know it is me."

"Not all the time, just sometimes ..." says Eva, rubbing her right hand on the bottom of the duchesse, "I hear a noise right in the bottom. Do you believe me or do you not? Many people don't believe in that. But when I hear it I talk to him. I say, 'John, I know you are there. I'm very happy here. I know you help me however much you can'. I say, 'You know I have to go. You know that. I know that. I can't stay here. Everyone goes. I must go too. But you be with me when I go'."

She heard the noise two nights ago. She told John of her fears. She told him she was worried about moving, leaving 50 years of memories. "I said, 'I would like it very much if you helped me. God will help and will you please help me too?'"

I still haven't cried. What do you think is wrong with me? Maybe I'm happy to go. Maybe 50 years is enough.



Good old days ... Eva and husband John at their home in 1977. "Bit by bit, one by one, he brought our home together," she says.

IN POLAND, SHE BARELY KNEW HER PARENTS. HER mother died aged 36 when Eva was eight. Her father died soon after, aged 44. Her best friend had an abusive stepmother and when Eva was 20, her friend convinced her to run away to Germany.

Downstairs in 2857 Ipswich Road, Eva opens a photo album. The pages are sticky with age. She runs a thumb along a grainy black and white photograph. A beautiful young brunette sits on the steps of a farmhouse in a German dirndl dress: wide skirt, coloured apron and blouse. "We worked for a lovely husband and wife on a farm. We cleaning, cooking, baking, gardening, taking rubbish out. Most of the time we do this ..." Eva stands and milks an invisible cow, giggling at the fact her technique hasn't faltered in 60 years.

Shortly after World War II, she married John in an American-run holding camp in Germany. The wedding ring was made of silver. Few could afford gold. Their two eldest children, Robert and Irene, were born in the camp. "The Americans said, 'Where do you want to go?' America wouldn't take my two children. England wouldn't take my two children. So my husband says, 'We must go to Australia'."

In 1951, the Lopuszynskis arrived at the Wacol East Dependants Holding Camp for Displaced Persons, otherwise known as Wacol Camp, in Brisbane's west. They stayed for four years, living among 2000 people sharing timber huts with a total of 340 rooms served by communal toilet and bath facilities. "It was freezing in that camp," Eva says. "The water outside in your bucket would freeze. We would stand in line for bread and milk. It was like a prison. But we work. Very hard, very hard, very hard."

John worked on the railways and Eva found a job cutting sheets of plywood in a timber factory in

Yeerongpilly. "It was a man's job. "Look at my hands," she says. "They are worker's hands. Very hard, very hard, very hard."

In 1957, the land at 2857 Ipswich Road, Darra, cost the couple £200 – about \$4500, accounting for inflation. John enlisted some Polish friends to help erect a home. It was literally four walls and a roof set on concrete stumps. "Inside, there was no lights," says Eva. "There was no [interior] walls. We had no money to finish the house. We had one tap for the house in the front yard. For a fridge we had a box that we dropped ice blocks into to keep things cold."

By the flame of a kerosene lamp, Eva taught herself English. She landed a job in a Kelvin Grove laundromat. She took the train to work, travelling on the line her beloved husband helped build. One day, she disembarked at Central Station where she bought herself a lottery ticket. Two prayers a day for some three decades paid off. She won £100. "When I come home, my husband is so happy. We could now put the lights on, you know. We had electricity!"

In the upstairs hallway, she runs her fingers along the fibro walls. "Slowly, slowly, my husband built each room," she says. "Bit by bit, one by one, he brought our home together."

Eva walks to the second bedroom where four of her kids slept in one bed. She moves to the third bedroom, where the other four slept in one bed. She recalls the endless games, the whispers in the darkness, wrestles, boxing matches, the giggles of girls that carried to her room. She runs her hand along an uncovered mattress. The bedroom is silent; so still that a floating dust particle causes a scene.

John built a life for the family. He fashioned a garage area where his teenage sons would spend every spare hour tinkering on a prized 1969 Falcon



GT; where distant relatives would gather for huge Christmas feasts, with roasted onion and sauerkraut and Polish wild mushroom soup and potato and cheese pierogi and golabki (stuffed cabbage) and baranina (roasted lamb) and bigos (cabbage and meat).

John fixed a chicken coop. Eva planted orange trees and mandarin trees and palm trees and a vegetable garden. John built a kitchen big enough for ten, as long as one child ate on the floor, an honour bestowed by Eva on a rotational basis. Eva cooked on a portable kerosene stove. "I learned to do a lot of different soups," she laughs. She moves to a spot on the lino by the sink, beneath a picture of Pope John Paul II. "This is where they would sit when there was no room."

She walks to the lounge room where her daughter Barbara stood for photos on her wedding day; where her second son Ted stood proudly in his army uniform before he went away to National Service; where Judy, Lucy, Julie and Tammie played before Holy Communion.

Eva was 70 years old when she painted the walls blue. John had been gone five years. She painted the fibro walls and the ceiling entirely herself, arching her neck and balancing atop a rickety ladder. Room by room, she brought new life to the house.

She remembers dancing here with her husband just before dance class at the Polish Club, ten minutes walk away near Darra railway station and the cement works. They could do the traditional dances: the Polonez, the Mazur, the Oberek. But they lived for the tango. Eva closes her eyes and dances, led by an invisible John. Yellow light washes through the windows. "La, la, la ... la, la, la," she whispers.

SIX YEARS AGO TWO MEN KNOCKED ON THE FRONT door. Eva knew they were official types by the way they dressed. They said they were from the

Department of Main Roads and that her land was flagged for resumption. She was later issued a Notice of Intention to Resume.

If the State Government wants your land it can take it. However, it must adhere to the Acquisition of Land Act. The homeowner can and should claim for full market value of the property based on market values in the area; stamp duty on their new home; all removal expenses; conveyancing fees for the new property; legal costs; postal redirection; and electricity, telephone and internet connection. The process can be at once rewarding and painful. It can be unsettling and inconvenient or motivating and life-changing. Only one thing is certain: in a boom state deep in a traffic crisis, we'll be seeing more of it.

THREE DAYS LATER, EVA IS IN TEARS. SHE HAS returned from her solicitor's office confused about the sale of her house. She doesn't understand the paperwork, but her English is not strong enough to convey her concerns. She's afraid she has committed herself to the house at Redbank. Her son Ted consoles her. "It's alright, Mum," he says. "You don't have to do nothing you don't want to do."

"I don't want to go to Redbank," she says. But she has to be out of the house in two days.

Within three days, Eva is gone. The house has been fenced off. A sign reads: "Demolition site. Danger. Keep out."

The heavy metal claw of the Logan City Demolition bulldozer has busted a hole through Eva's bedroom. A man in an orange work shirt hacks holes into the blue walls with a crowbar. The small brick fence fronting the home has been knocked down, the manicured gardens dug up. Dirt holes have replaced vibrant flowering plants. The palm trees have been shifted. The green metal front gate is missing.

Eva is not here to say goodbye. "She better come soon," says the man with the sledgehammer. "There'll be nothing here in two hours." The man says he demolishes three homes like Eva's every week. In the second fastest-growing city in the Western world, the demolition business is booming.

It takes four knocks before Eva answers the door to her new home. Her face is sweaty. She's out of breath. And she's beaming. "Oh, come in," she says. "Come see my new home."

She points to an air-conditioning unit. "Look, look," she says, excitedly. She walks to a sleepout adjoining the main bedroom. She spreads her arms. "Feel that breeze, unbelievable." She enters the lounge room, casting her eyes over the polished floors. "Look at these floors," she says. She raises her eyes to a ceiling covered with new downlights: "Look at these lights. Beautiful. Look at this verandah. Look at these built-in cupboards. I can do so much with this place. I can't believe it. It's amazing."

Ted has been helping with the move. He rolls a cigarette on the front porch as Eva busily pulls tissue paper from her belongings. The green gate from the old house is resting by the porch. Her old plants are

by the driveway entrance. She walked them here in a wheelbarrow. She only had to walk 100m. Her new home is also in Darra, just around the corner from 2857 Ipswich Road. At the right angle, her old back stairs can be seen from her new front porch.

"It is bloody amazing," Ted says. "Main Roads already owned this place. The solicitor and a couple of guys from Main Roads got together and they said they'd swap Mum's place for this place. Just a clean swap. See, they need Mum's land and Mum needs their house. They'd done maybe \$10,000 work on this place. She's going to be so happy here."

In the kitchen, Eva dusts off a clock. "I still haven't cried since I left," she says. "I still haven't cried. What do you think is wrong with me? Why haven't I cried? Maybe I'm happy to go. Maybe 50 years is enough. There's nothing over there now. This is good for a woman my age. No stairs. I'm happy. Happy, happy, happy."

She drags a heavy box along the floor. "The furniture men work so hard," she says. "They cost \$600 but I give them \$650. I say, 'Here's \$50 for the beer'. They work very hard. Very hard. Very hard."

Eva knows the wreckers have arrived. But she's not going up there. She doesn't want to watch her old home being demolished. "I not like that," she says. Better to remember it how she left it, with dignity.

Eva straightens the picture of Pope John Paul II, now hanging by the rear door. She smiles, then walks to her bedroom. "Look at the walls," she says. "There's no denying it, the walls are the exact blue

of her old home. The cedar duchesse rests against one. A framed black and white picture of John sits atop it. It looks like one of those old photographs of World War II fighter pilots, full of verve and promise.

"Are you religious?" Eva asks. "I work hard all my life. My mother and father die. I have no bread, no food, no clothes, no shoes. We have not one penny. I take eggs to Jewish so I can buy other food. I go to school. I look after cow. I learn language with no light. I pray every night and every morning. I pray for kids, I pray for grandchildren. I never been sick in all my life. And here I am in this beautiful home. Who help me with that?" She shakes her head and asks again: "Who help me with that?" ■

Discover Kula - a modern beach shack experience. Architecturally designed and surrounded by the best the Sunshine Coast has to offer - quality dining, national parks, uncrowded beaches, shopping and golf. Kula is an idyllic beachside retreat.

The opportunity for quality beachside living has become very rare. Yours is here to embrace... not just as an investment but as your second home... and a new way of life.

Redefining the beach shack

Boardwalk Boulevard, Coolool QLD

Proudly developed by **TURRISI PROPERTIES** and **CherryCollins.**

Register your interest now - www.kula.com.au

Graeme Sharp 0412 743 671

Ray White project marketing QUEENSLAND