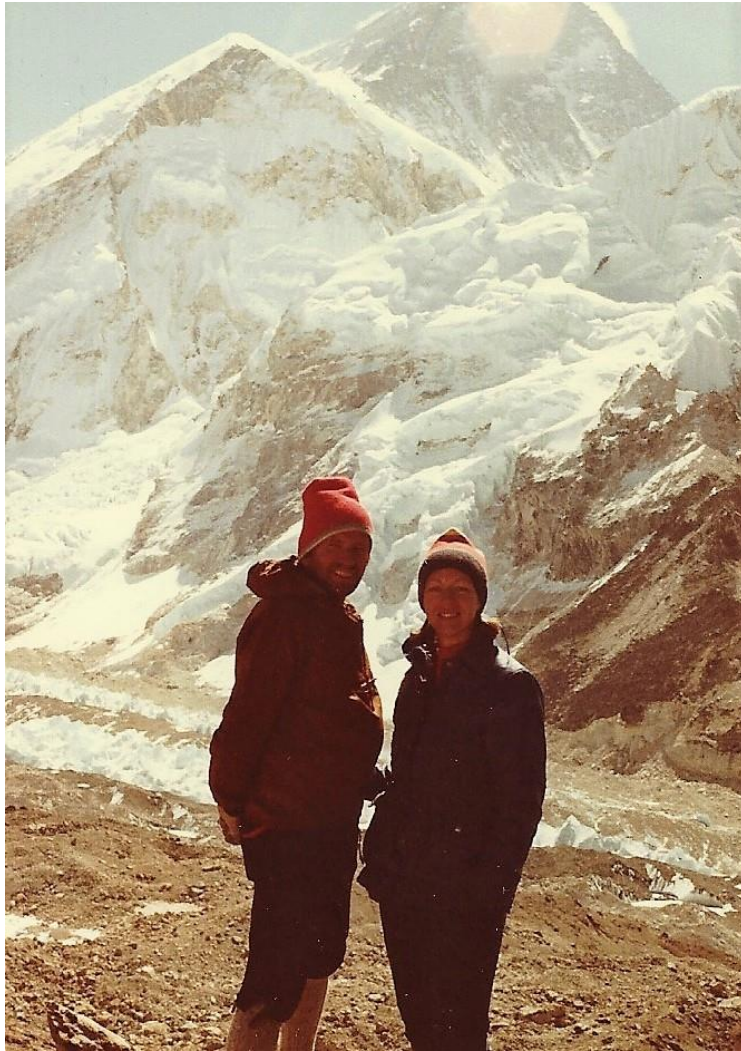


## **Sharonne Briggs – An Oral History**

**Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar at Woodridge Thredbo, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019**



***Sharonne and Ludo – Mt. Everest behind 1981***

**Sharonne Briggs (Formerly Rabina) Interviewed by Jerry Krejzar at Woodridge Thredbo,**

**25th July 2019**

*I am sitting at Woodridge with Sharonne and she is going to talk a bit about her early years and about when she met her future husband Ludwig Rabina. Sharonne could we start by asking you when you were born, and a bit about your grandparents, if you want to; and about your parents.*

I was born in Sydney. My parents had moved there from the Forbes area and dad was working on the docks but back to the start. Both sets of grandparents were friends and had farms in Gooloogong New South Wales which was about 50 km from Forbes.

Mum and Dad were good friends as kids and as they lived on neighbouring farms. He would meet her at the corner and they would ride their horses to the little Gooloogong primary school together. When Dad returned from his army service in Darwin in 1945, Mum had grown into a beautiful young woman and dad was besotted. They married the next year and shortly after moved to Sydney as his brothers had sold their family farm. Dad was a great stockman and having only done farm work, he was out of a job. His first Sydney jobs was at Morts Dock cleaning ships. They lived with his sister, her husband and children in a terrace house in Paddington, Sydney. I was born later that year. They were very young, my mother was nineteen and dad was twenty-three so I had a lovely happy upbringing with young fun parents.

*What about your early years.....*

We lived in Sydney until I was 3 and by then had a baby brother. When my Uncle Bob broke his leg Dad moved us up to Gunnedah to manage Bob's large property. Dad was a wonderful stockman so rounding up the sheep and farm work was second nature to him. When Bob recovered, we moved onto a large property called 'Quia Station' and we were one of 4 families living and working on the property. My first school was a small one roomed school at Emerald Hill with 9 students and one teacher. We had a carpool with the other families and a different mother each day would drive 30 minutes to and from school each day. Later we bought 5 acres on the outskirts of Gunnedah as Dad always had a few horses. By this time there were 6 of us. I have two brothers and a sister. Dad built a house for us and as I was a teenager I helped cut the fibro sheets and put the timber floor down. Years later I helped him repair the same floor from all the squeaks it acquired over the years. No adverse effects from the fibro. I left school at 15 and wasn't asked if I wanted to go onto year 12 – it wasn't the fashion those days. We were expected to work in a local office or shop. I completed one year of Tafe in Gunnedah and became a stenographer and legal secretary and worked for a local lawyer, Lionel Erratt of J.P. Bryant and Erratt. I found secretarial work very boring so went off to Sydney when I was nearly 18, planning to become an Interior Designer.

*That would have been a different lifestyle from the country.*

I couldn't wait to get out of boring Gunnedah actually. (Laughter).

*So, going on from Gunnedah, what did you do in Sydney?*

Secretarial work at 'The World Record Club' in Sydney. They made long playing records and reel to reel tapes of classical music and jazz through a membership mail order system. Each month music lovers received a new record. In the evenings I attended Interior Design classes at East Sydney TAFE which I should have finished because I am still renovating houses and loving it. I lived in Potts Point and had to walk through Kings Cross to get to TAFE. I was often solicited by grotty old blokes hanging around the Cross. Can't imagine why they couldn't tell a hippy art student, jeans and t shirt with large sketch pad and a box of paints under my arm from a hooker with a mini skirt and an empty purse. I felt quite safe wielding my heavy paint box in my hand and had no incidents. Of course it wasn't a dangerous place like it is now. As some of the other students were better artists than me I felt I wasn't talented enough so as I gave it away. I then changed day jobs and worked as a secretary for Trans Australian Airlines in the Elizabeth street office. We had cheap air fares but wages were low so when I needed extra cash for overseas trips I worked evening shift across the road at the newly built Wentworth Hotel, at all the big functions. That was fun. There was always big Gala events - Prime Ministers dinners, fashion shows, weddings etc. I learnt silver service and could fill a fancy plate with spoon and fork with the best Italian waiters. When I was twenty-one it was suggested that I went nursing. My reply was, "Oh never thought of that, perhaps" ..... and So, I went to the Sydney Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga, which was called 'The San' then and did my 3 year general nursing - which by the way I loved. It was a good fit. We were paid \$19 a fortnight with room and board. After general nursing I moved to Paddington, rented rooms in a terrace house and did my one year training at The Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington and became a midwife.

*How long did you do nursing?*

A few years in Sydney. I worked at Lewisham Hospital in Coronary care and Prince Alfred in Accident and Emergency before I moved to Thredbo.

*Before we get there, I will just add for the record here, that we have been friends for many a year and that I used to go to Thredbo a bit earlier, so I met Ludwig your husband; and became a friend to Ludwig before 1972. I met Ludwig in 64 and when I joined the Ski Patrol in 69, we became pretty good mates from that time on. I won't add much more in that respect, but I just wanted to say that Ludwig took over the role of running the Ski Patrol for the company, as you know; and he spent a large part of his life in Thredbo associated with the Thredbo Ski Patrol. But I will stop here because we will now go to 1972 when you met. Before we get to you meeting Ludwig, I do recall that when Ludwig came, he came as a refugee from Czechoslovakia in 1950 and he was with Brigit when I knew him. I understand that Brigit was a Romanian refugee when they met.....Can you expand on that.....*

Yes I can. They met in a refugee camp in Austria as she was running away from communism as well. They had the choice to go to America or Europe or this country way down the bottom of the map. As Ludo had been working against the communists in an underground movement, his boss said get out of here now; they know about you and will eliminate you soon. They both decided to go to Australia as it was further away from their troubles in Europe. The ship

they sailed out on was 'Goya', and arrived here in 1950. It was uncanny that 30 years later we found out during lunch with our then neighbour on Mt. Tamborine and good friend from Thredbo days- Frank Boltress - also a refugee from Hungary escaping from the communist regime - that he and Ludo had both come out on the same ship that arrived in 1950 and unloaded the ship's hold together, but didn't know each other at the time.

At that time male refugees given the passage to Australia were seconded to work on the Railway, and the women as housemaids. Refugees were boarded with families where the women worked. Brigit and Ludo went to North Sydney and boarded with a very rich Jewish family who were lovely people and the wealthy man wanted to get Ludo into real estate but he ended up working with his friend Emerich in a paint factory in Homebush. Brigit and Ludo wanted their own accommodation and rented a room at the back of an Aussie woman's house in Annandale Sydney. After they moved there Ludo noticed a little girl he recognised in the front yard of one of the houses down the street. This family just happened to be his best friend Emerich from his village in Slovakia who had also managed to escape and bring his family here. He had been the ships surgeon on the way out but never worked as a doctor in Australia because they wanted him to re-do his medical training here. He spoke 5 other languages but as one wasn't English it was impossible for him to retrain. Of course truthfully he was already trained to a much higher degree than the Australian doctors at the time. A bit of jealousy, but such a shame. He got work in a paint factory and worked there till he retired in his late 60's. Often when both families got together their landlady would yell through their door 'Speak English' the answer was 'wish we could' They spent amusing afternoons closely examining why 'She'll be apples mate' 'She will be an apple my comrade - but why would *she* be an apple??? And who is *SHE*. Ludo listened closely to women on buses chatting 'He said blah blah, she said, blah blah, -and concluded that "*He said, she said*", must be key phrases only to find out it was a load of gossip. One day he went into the city to shop at David Jones and spent a lot of time walking around the city asking for DARVID YONNAS until one bloke said "Oh you want David Jones, its over there". Ludo missed the European cheeses and salami and finally at central station a European opened the first Sydney delicatessen and sold beautiful cheeses. Prior to that he could only buy the blue box of Kraft processed cheddar cheese available that tasted like soap. Ludo bought blue vein cheese and his work colleagues on the railway were utterly disgusted when they saw him eating it. They pleaded with him not to eat it, that it was mouldy, off and smelt terrible and would make him sick. He took no notice and lived to tell the tale. Years later all the Aussies were eating Blue Vein cheese and salami with gusto.

Saturday morning's Ludo dressed in his favourite clothes from home to go shopping - his Austrian outfit Lederhosen, (leather trousers) with decorative braces, long socks and a jaunty little hat with a feather. The Aussie women home owners in the street watering their lawns in their dressing gowns with hair in rollers, mostly with a cigarette hanging out of their mouths would yell to each other, 'here comes the wog' and quickly run up to their front fence and crane over to get a gander at this strange bloke from overseas and laugh because they had never seen anything like it. He sure enjoyed the fun so he did it every weekend from then on. The women never missed a chance for a good cackle.

*Gee! You know I can relate to that because you know my background, and my background when I came as a seven year old; and so I had to pick up English which I did pretty quickly, but I was*

*embarrassed about my mother, because she had that accent a bit later down the years; so I can understand.....*

They were given free English lessons but the teacher expected them to speak like Queen Elizabeth so they gave it up and learnt as they went along. Later they bought a unit in a block of four in Woollahra, only to find out that the man that sold them the unit was a conman. He didn't own the units but sold them and kept the money. The other three unit owners also lost all their money. Not put off by this bad start they saved for a few more years and bought a lovely house in Lane Cove. They had been there a few years when Ludo discovered the snowy mountains and Thredbo which reminded him of his hometown in Slovakia Trencianske Teplice. He went down often staying in the old post office building that was then the first hotel I think. Eventually they rented their house out and moved to Thredbo.

*I am glad that you remember these finer details. Let me just ask, can you remember the year that was?*

Yes, it was 1961.... He got a job digging the foundations of the Alpine Hotel, and then in 62 he got a position as a lift operator and from then he was employed by Kosciusko Thredbo Pty Ltd.

*So, he probably told you some stories when he was a 'liftie'- he used to be the one that would ring the bell and get them all down. Did he tell you some stories about that?*

He told me one funny rude story, I don't know if you want to hear a rude story, but the lederhosen he wore when he was a liftie had two side-flaps; one on each side with buttons at the top. One young lady tourist came up on the lift and was talking to him and said 'why do you have two flies?', and he said 'because I've got two.....' and she said 'oh really?' Of course he thought it was really funny.

He loved being up top of the mountain spending all day looking out at the views while he waited for the next person to come up – he took his best friend Tania up there too. She was a black and white Samoyed. She would run up the lift line to work and back down again at the days end summer and winter. After lifts – yes, he was slopes manager.

*Just before we get to 1972, as I said when we became friends in 69; to cover some of his record on the Thredbo Ski Patrol. When he joined the Ski Patrol he became the first paid patroller; and the company wanted him to become responsible for recruitment, the conduct of rescues, and he served as the patrol's treasurer*



(L to R) - Tommy Tomasi, President, Adrian Studley, Captain, John Rumble, Secretary, Ludwig Rabina, Treasurer - TSPA mid 1960's

*for four years and President for nine; and he was of course involved in slope grooming, cutting of ski trails, race management, collated the weather reports and snow data for the Bureau of Meteorology, and spoke on radio in NSW and Victoria. Also Public relations, information office and looked after VIP's to the village and his last job was a bit of real estate, selling the Thredbo's Alpine apartments.*

Yes he certainly had a variety of jobs.

*So from 1962 onwards....*

After moving from Sydney they lived in Cootapatamba lodge and Brigit worked in the ticket office. Ludos dog Tanya would take off up the mountains and would not come back for days. Cross country skiers saw her at some of the remote huts. He trained Tanya not to look at him when he ate, because he did not like the dog checking out every single mouthful, He would say, don't look and she would cover her eyes with her paws. When she was still a puppy and because it was so cold in winter she had to live inside their apartment and she was trained just to stay by the door on her mat and not to move around into the loungeroom. He came back early one day and he felt the bed and it was warm. The dog slept on the bed all day and got off it in the afternoon just before they got home.

*A good story!*

I met Tanya in the seventies, and we went walking in the mountains together but she died soon after with kidney failure because she was so cute many skiers shared their meat pies with her on top-station'. She was lovely and very protective.

*(Laughter). So, we have covered Brigitte's time with Ludwig, and now, let's get to your time, in 72. How did you meet?*

Through a girlfriend of mine from Sydney - we worked in the Wentworth Hotel together - and she was on the Smiggins Ski Patrol. We decided to drive down to Thredbo in summer and had lunch at top station, Ludo was there. She had met him at ski patrol functions. Carol was going down to work for the season and ended up in Smiggins running a service station and restaurant. I had skied at Perisher and Smiggins and thought 'well I'm a bit sick of nursing I might go down to Thredbo for a season and learn to ski properly.' I applied to work at Black Bear Lodge for Jan and Jari Nekvapil as a housemaid and waitress and moved down in 73,

*So, 73, so you were living there then, what are your recollections of Thredbo at that time.*

I moved into Black Bear Lodge winter of 1973 and ended up living in the village for 13 years. So, 73 was the worst snow season in history - we didn't even have snow at middle station; we were actually skiing on mud most of the time. Reverend Roger Bush blessed the mud that year not the snow.

*I have to make a comment here because that was the only season I missed. From 64 to the present I missed 1 x season 1973.*

Well done Jerry, it was shocking. It was the worst season but carnival week was good; we had a lot of fun. Living in Thredbo was so different to living in Sydney. Much more carefree but lodge work was a bit of a grind.

*Did you make the same friend's way back then that you still have now?*

Yes, I always enjoyed chatting and socializing with Frank Prihoda. He came and stayed with us when we lived on Tamborine Mountain in QLD. Was great to catch up with him and hear all the Thredbo news this week. We enjoyed talking about the Nekvapils of Black Bear. Sasha's husband and Jan were brothers and they were Czech as you know. I remained friends with Jari and her son John for a while. My daughter Claire knows Sashas granddaughter- in- law in Melbourne Kemi. She went to Kemis cooking classes –a very accomplished cook.

*What about the Reichinger's?*

Over the years we have enjoyed catching up. Yes I like to think we are still friends.

*Now around this time Sharonne I understand that you had some, hotel and house-keeping experience, do you want to talk about that?*

(Laughter). Well it was all very nice to have a job in winter but when summer came you had to scrounge around to get whatever you could; so, I remember the few months in The Bistro was absolutely dreadful. You just spent all day with food slops down your front and on your shoes, it was awful. I was offered a job as a housekeeper in The Hotel, which I took and that was ok but I had to cook room service breakfast and it was very interesting who you ended up delivering the breakfast to, but that's confidential you know. There was staff to manage and lots of hard work, but it was an interesting job for the summer.

*But when you think about it these are the typical jobs in the resort.*

Yes, that's the hospitality industry. Like the lodge work in Black Bear -lots to get done before you could go out skiing. Make the beds, clean the rooms, go skiing, come back and do dinner,

*How was working at Black Bear*

Black Bear was a great lodge. It was very well run and well organized. Jan had been in hotel's and he was very pedantic about how smoothly the evenings ran and very particular. Jari was a beautiful chef and her cooking was renowned in the district. When the word got about Jari was cooking in summer she filled her restaurant. My job was to serve the wine and drinks and make the Irish coffees to Jan's special recipe. His special guests then had slivovitz at ten o'clock and he would ask me to sit down with him and his guests and chat.

*Did they do things like the accordion that they did in Candlelight?*

No, they didn't have the Bavarian Oompa Oompa bands, but they had beautiful cooking and Jan. It was just impeccable the way he ran the place. The Irish coffees that I had to make were difficult;

but I got to master all that because I was trained in 'Silver Service' at the Wentworth Hotel you know. Ha ha

*See there are things I don't know about you. That would have been some experience, at Black Bear; you met some characters eh?*

Jan and Jari Nekvapil were fabulous, and I do remember Harold Droga who was manager of the resort at the time, he often came for dinner for Jari's cooking and Len and Trish Evans of course who became good friends of ours. We spent a beautiful few days at Lens home in the Hunter Valley with our two girls Claire and Julia and enjoyed Len and Trish's cooking and true hospitality. Their home was set up with a beautiful guest wing, each room more interesting than the other. Len had collected memorabilia for years in Sydney and had it all arranged in each guest room. Fantastic.

*Wasn't Harold a Czech?*

No, he was Hungarian with a Danish wife Vibeke. She had a small art shop in the lower concourse.

Jan and Jari's youngest son John was coming to Sydney where I was having a break in summer. Being a young chap I said I will take you out for dinner and for a bit of fun I took him to an illegal gambling casino; You had to "knock three times, and ask for Joe" – and they slid open the hatch and let you in after checking. I snuck him in the door and that was fine, it wasn't going to be anything but sitting down and having a look around and leaving quickly. To my absolute horror there was Harold Droga, Thredbo's managing director and good friend of John's parents. He walked across and said 'Why have you bought this young John Nekvapil here' and I said 'we were just leaving, goodbye' and I rushed him out the door (Laughter). I was talking to Frank about it! It was fun at the time, no repercussions thank goodness.

*You have covered every facet of working in a resort. Incredible.*

Well not all of them of course and I never worked on the lifts.....Now in 1974 I started a new job.

*We are going to talk about from 74, and try to document your medical experiences, or most of it. So, John Shedden who I remember was a very pleasant, nice Scottish GP; who had a practice in Jindabyne and Berridale, and of course ran the Medical Centre when you started. So, what are your reminiscences of John?*

Well I only met him twice. We had a very quick interview for the position of Registered Nurse in the Medical centre. I was suitably qualified because I had done Accident & Emergency, and so he said 'you can have the job'. So, I started work in the winter of 74. It was a very unique system; he actually asked a few GP friends if they would like to come up and ski for a week and work in the Medical Centre. They had no training in orthopaedics at all. I was fortunate that Dr. Dick Tooth, a regular skier and friend of Ludos was also an Orthopaedic surgeon. He was happy to train me to diagnose orthopaedic injuries. This was needed as the GP's didn't come across ski injuries in their Sydney surgeries very often – or never.

*Just for the record; Dick Tooth was at the time, in those years, the Thredbo Ski Patrol honorary doctor who more or less advised Ski Patrol on guidelines on a whole matter of (medical) things; and that was before Nick Crombie and Steve Breathour took the job. So, the Ski Patrol owes quite a lot to Dick Tooth.*

Yes he was a great friend and we had many a funny night at the doctor's lodge where Dick was a member. He never worked in the Medical Centre but just advised.

The rostering system for the doctors was organized by Dr. Shedden's G.P.friend. The G.P's would arrive late Saturday afternoon or Saturday night and leave the following Friday lunch time or early Saturday morning. So, the busiest day of the week was Saturday, and I didn't have a doctor but just had to muddle through.

*That means that during the week there was no qualified medical practitioner.*

No, there was a doctor on duty all week – he did morning surgery 8-9 am then skied till lunch time when he would relieve me for an hour's lunch. He skied all afternoon till surgery 4-5pm. He carried a two-way radio while skiing, and I could reach him if I had an emergency.

*Was that a Ski Patrol radio?*

No we had two that belonged to the surgery. We could also contact ski patrol on this radio.

The afternoon surgery could also be challenging – a case of tonsillitis sitting next to a dislocated shoulder so they had to be triaged. The old surgery was very small with only 2 beds and the waiting line went outside the door. If there were any emergencies' or if the Ski Patrol brought down an akja with an injured person I would radio the doctor to come down and attend to the patient. If he was lucky and nobody was brought down, he would have a good day skiing. The GP's were told they would have lots of time to ski – sometimes that happened.

*That was a rotational system wasn't it?*

Yes a different doctor every week. Some of them highly trained specialists. One was a plastic surgeon, so I brushed up on my suturing.

*I had the feeling that it was organized by a GP from Brookvale.*

Yes Alwyn Keiran.

*Yes, that system was in place for about two years, then when Dr Shedden died Geoffrey Cocker and Andrew Gibson took over the surgery in Jindabyne*

*Was that before Steve Breathour came?*

Yes I think Steve bought the surgery from Geoffrey Cocker.

*What year do you think Geoff came?*

It was 1976.

*Great. Now let's pause there, and before we go to Geoff Cocker and Steve Breathour; what were the stories that Ludwig would tell you about his work on the mountain; do you recall much?*

I do recall one about a ski-racer; they were doing a ski jump on the main slopes, he jumped and fell. The second jumper came over, landed on the first guy's leg just as he rolled over and his ski edge just about cut the first skier's leg off.

*His femoral artery. Actually, it was two ski patrollers.*

Oh two ski patrollers, I thought the guy was a racer.

*No, the guys were Bill Yaok and Jerry Shirley.*

That's right, Jerry Shirley was on the pro-patrol.

*That's right, both of them were, in fact Jerry Shirley did that jump between Sponar's and Merritt's Falls; there's a big cornice there; he didn't realize that Bill Yaok was still underneath, and I know the story very well because I was patrolling at the time, so we will share the story. So, what happened, of course Jerry liked to jump, took off, could not do anything but land on Bill Yaok's leg and sliced through his femoral artery. Hugh Smythe who was an exchange patroller from Whistler- in Thredbo for one year (who ended up as the President of Whistler actually), got Bill Yaok in the armpit, quickly tourniqueted as much as they could and virtually took off - got him down in about one minute, schussed the mountain, the armpit was actually full of blood. This is what I heard from the people that were involved; I don't know what happened from a medical point of view.*

Well I remember it was a good outcome so the Patroller obviously did his job well.

Some stories he told me were quite sad. Several fatalities. There were some tragic cases on the mountain and he was the company's representative giving evidence in court.

*This was the company's employees.*

No, they were skiers that had tragically died on the mountain.

*I see, so that's some of the stories that Ludwig happened to have discussed. Anything else?*

There was another night I remember. I had dinner ready and he didn't arrive home. Of course I was a little perturbed when he came in totally worn out about 3am – this started an animated discussion. He just said “didn't Brian give you the message?” WHAT MESSAGE??? ‘I've been out on a search and rescue all night – as lame as it sounded it was factual. Some guy had been reported missing as he hadn't arrived back at his lodge and his skis weren't there (skis at the lodge or not, was always a reason to perhaps search for someone – after all who goes on a date with their skis) This chap had gone out on a romantic evening and took his skis to her lodge, so the search was a big waste of time for everyone.

*Where were you and Luddie living at the time?*

We were living at Bobuck apartments.

*We paid you a visit or two.*

Yes so you did. We always had plenty of trout for dinner as our old mate John Barclay, also a long standing member of the patrol, had a trout farm at Adaminaby. The Freudens were there too. George always went out on the veranda to smoke in the freezing cold. We had many a good dinner at that place with a kitchen the size of a large packing box. Ludo used to air the place out after guests left, this meant me washing up with my parka and beanie on while a whipping freezing wind filled the unit and took out whatever evil he perceived lurked in the room. Oh he had such a thing for fresh air. He would have slept with the windows open if he could in winter. He never put heating on at night. We had to stop that when the girls were born. Far too cold for a bub so we actually had the flat heated for a change in winter – quite nice really. My brother came for a visit from Perth and nearly froze in the bathroom so he sent over a heated toilet seat. Very nice.

*Back to the Medical Centre. Do you want to go into when Geoff Cocker came along?*

After John Shedden , Geoffrey Cocker and Andrew Gibson bought the practice and then Geoff continued the roster system from the GP's from Brookvale and Manly. It was two years I worked for Geoffrey then it was Steve Breathour who bought the Thredbo business. Steve was full time in the surgery which was a much better system. I worked for Steve for two seasons.

*I do recall when Steve came along, he got the position of a trainee on the Ski Patrol for a while, carrying his radio.*

I don't think he liked skiing.



*No, no I don't think so, but of course he took on the responsibility of the Australian Ski Patrol Association snow-safety guidelines from Dr Nick Crombie, who was also involved before Steve Breathour as we know. So, he actually formalized the ASPA guidelines, and they bear Steve Breathour's name on them for the ASPA.*

Sharonne Rabina and Dr Nick Crombie manning the  
Thredbo Medical Centre - mid 1970's

Dr Nick Crombie was one of the doctors who came up just for the week or two; He was great to work with. We were having a laugh last night at the awards about the system in the early days. Dr. Dick Tooth had trained me to diagnose ski injuries and to pass the knowledge onto the GP I

was working with for the day. The GP's didn't see ski injuries nor were they trained to diagnose them. I would go in and examine the patient and go out and let the GP know what the diagnosis and treatment was and they would go in and deliver the bad news to the patient. Thank goodness this was short lived as of course they became experts immediately.

Some of our doctors were specialists and of course they taught me many useful techniques – like suturing from a plastic surgeon, it came in very handy. Dr. Nick Crombie also taught me some little gems to be used in the surgery when you have no doctor. Simple things that worked. In the old surgery before it was rebuilt had two beds and no x-ray facilities. One day Geoff bought up a defibrillator. I never used it personally but it was there if we had to.

Eventually the old surgery was pulled down and along with Ludwig's office on the corner. The new Medical Centre was built, and that's when Steve Breathour bought the surgery. I worked in there with him for the first few seasons. It was so good to have a permanent doctor who was very knowledgeable and great to work with. PLUS we had an X-ray machine. That made a huge difference.

*So, progress in terms of equipment.*

Oh, that was really good; and the fact that he was there all the time as we were getting much busier.

*What you saw was that instead of a rotation of doctors it was better to have Steve being present continually.*

Yes, and he was very knowledgeable and excellent with his accident & emergency training, and his orthopaedics.

*Well he was qualified as a cardiothoracic registrar at Westmead; he would have been on top of most things.*

He was excellent, excellent.

*What was your experience in the Medical Centre in summer?*

In the early days when John Shedden and later Geoffrey Cocker were running Jindabyne Surgery we had no doctor in Thredbo in summer

*No GP.*

No GP in summer. I wasn't actually working in the surgery in summer but had the keys to the surgery and the drug cupboard and the staff knew to come and get me if there was a medical problem. I coped best I could and liaised with Geoff Cocker then I would send them down to him in Jindabyne or straight onto Cooma or Canberra, depending on the severity. The ambulance was despatched out of Jindabyne in winter but had to come from Cooma in the summer and took about an hour to arrive. So, I just coped with things that happened and sent them on if necessary. Some of the summer cases were traumatic. One of the mountain crew, cutting a tree on Merritts had his moving chainsaw fall across his throat, cutting out a large channel of skin and just missing his jugular veins. One vein had all the flesh missing around it but was not cut. This was a miracle. I

was dressed up in my best dress as it was Melbourne cup day and the girls were having a luncheon in the hotel. I was hurried into a truck and flew up the mountain to Merritts. The trip up and back with the patient was dramatic and dangerous. His mates drove him straight to Canberra hospital where he could have a plastic surgeon repair the wound. I sutured up a horse from the riding school who had cut his neck on barbed wire. He didn't come inside of course, but did a big jump when the first suture went in and scared the wits out of me. I think Steve x-rayed a dog's broken leg too. I had to do a bit of dentistry as well when one man broke his front tooth in half – I used blue tack to stop the pain from the wind when he inhaled. Ha-ha

*How long did that go on for?*

That was for four summers until Steve Breathour brought the surgery then he was there all year.

*Seventy-seven by the sound of it.*

Well actually the dates have faded a bit.

*We know that Ludwig was a lover of the outdoors, he loved trout fishing, he loved nature and walking, all those things associated with alpine and the mountains. Seeing we are talking about summer; you can maybe expand what your life was like in summer.*

It was fantastic. I moved up from Sydney and I wasn't really used to walking, and Ludwig used to walk up the mountain because he could; and I would think 'why would you want to do all that, it's a lot of hard work', but once I got into walking, and we went to Kosciuszko lots of times, and to Seaman's Hut, we were continually walking or cross country skiing around the mountains and really enjoying it. Always going up to Dead Horse Gap; it was fantastic. I don't know how many times I've walked up Merritts path. He loved running and later in life frequently went in the City to Surf race in Sydney. He came up with the idea of an up the mountain race in Thredbo.



Ludwig Rabina - mid 1990's

*You are talking about 'The Kosciuszko Classic' that he started in 1976.*

No. The running idea started long before that with "The Crackenback Challenge" originally 'Up the Mountain'. It's still Australia's steepest race and he started that Easter 1968.

*1968?*

Even as early as 12 years of age and won several junior cross country running races in Slovakia. He got the idea for running up the mountain first and then included the Kosciuszko Classic and so the idea of running week was conceived with some of his running friends from Canberra – the most notable being Brian Lenton. The first National Running week commenced 1981. Brian has written his book 'Thredbo 50 years of Running from 1968-2018' In his book he mentions Ludo as

the founder of Alpine Mountain running in Australia and awarded him posthumous Life Membership of the Australian Mountain Running Association and Thredbo National Running week in 2018.

The Crackenback challenge changed a few times over the years. The original course 1968 -1983 went from Valley Terminal to behind top station -2 km straight up. 1984-1988 there was a long course to avoid a revegetation area 2.125 km and then since 1989 the short course is back again. I ran in this race once and nearly died at the top so gave it away.

*So next was the 'Kosciuszko Classic' in 1976*



Kosciuszko Classic - Running Week Family

The Kosciuszko Classic is Australia's highest race. Ludo was the founder and the first race was Australia day 1976.

I ran in that twice, and we ran all the way across to the mountain, up the road onto the top of Kosciuszko, back down then back to Thredbo. A thirteen-kilometre run, well that would have been in 1981.

Ludo didn't run every single race but when he didn't run we did the timing, and then he gave the presentations, and the trophies. One year we had been to the Himalayas and just arrived back. He badly wanted to go in the Kosi Race by hook or by crook. He felt unwell as he had a bad case of *Delly Belly*. He ran the race but stopped frequently for explosive toilet stops but finished anyway. That's runner's determination for you.

*Well I recall we did a couple of trips with the Freudens down to Tom Groggin Station, trout fishing, and then we had a picnic, several times.*

He loved trout fishing. We often went down towards Khancoban on the river or we'd go to Lake Jindabyne, wearing our waders. Yes it sure is a beautiful area in summer too. He knew all the flowers; we often walked right around Lake Albina and looked at the flowers that were absolutely beautiful- such a unique area. In Europe he was a mountaineer. In Trencianske Teplice, his village he was always outside, climbing, playing water polo, walking or skiing. He knew mountains, the weather, how to read the terrain etc. When we decided to walk to Everest Base camp we embarked on an intensive training program. We ran to Dead Horse Gap and walked up Crackenback with bricks in our backpacks. Finally when we did the walk we were fit enough. We did the trip to Nepal twice.

*That would have been quite a trip; you loved every facet of the mountains. Now what about the fact that he did the snow data for the Bureau of Meteorology; radio stations in NSW and Victoria?*

Yes, he did. Out the back of Top station they set up a weather station that had the wind velocity and wind chill, temperature barometric pressure etc. He took up his cloud chart that told him of low, middle or high cloud etc. He would compile his notes and in his thick accent say 'this is Ludwig Rabina from Thredbo Village', and he did that for years. His girls actually have some of his weather reports on tape. Of course his girls don't think he had an accent.

After my years in the medical centre I was looking for an all year round job and took a position for Thredbo Chamber of Commerce in the Thredbo Resort Centre. It was an information and booking centre for all the commercial lodges. I was there till Claire was born in 1982. The winter after Claire was born I worked at Alpenhorn Lodge for Margo and Neil doing bookings so I could take baby Claire with me. It was hard work pushing her pram through the snow – should have had skis on the pram. In the summer I did bookkeeping for Trish Hecher at Bernti's lodge. In winter 1983 I worked back in the medical centre with Steve Breathour and Claire went to the kindy at Sequoia lodge which was very small and cute – It's a much larger lodge now as its been rebuilt. As I was pregnant with Julia in 1983 and suffering bad morning sickness I remember helping Steve with a large wound. He was suturing and I was cutting the sutures and mopping up. I was becoming very dizzy and thought I would faint. I asked the radiographer Maxine to cut the sutures and she said 'I don't do blood' but put a stool under my butt so I wouldn't fall down if I fainted. So kind Maxine. Julia was born early January 1984.

*I believe that you moved to a farm from Thredbo?*

Yes we did. We were in Bobuck and as you know it was a very small apartment.

*Where did they go to school?*

They weren't school age yet, they were only little toddlers so we were there for the first five years and then after that we went to Queensland.

*Can you remember the year exactly?*

Yes, 1987 we moved to Mt. Tamborine up behind the Gold Coast.

*And when did Ludwig move up there?*

He came the next year, because he still had the job here in Thredbo. Lend lease then asked him to run their educational recreational ED REC seminars which he did from our Mt. Tamborine base.

*What did he have to say about that?*



The Rabina farm at Kalkite

He loved it and he was the perfect person for it; he was very organized. Lend Lease employees and their spouses were given a holiday at Batemans Bay, Port Macquarie, Thredbo, Newcastle or Coffs Harbour.

They had education seminars in the morning pertaining to their jobs, and all sorts of leaders came to teach them. In the afternoon they had recreation.

Ludo organized all that; tennis, boating, fishing and whatever they chose to do. He'd run with them at dawn, then run an exercise class and after lunch he'd go out on some of the activities with the group..

*So that position was called?*

Education and Recreational Director.

*And that was his last position if I'm not mistaken? .*

Yes that was his last job for Lend Lease. After that he retired and was full time dad.

*Yes, we should add your comments about the children.*



Rabina Family - Bushwalking and skiing

Ludo was very involved with our two children. I can remember when Claire our eldest daughter was nine months old; he put her into a back pack and said 'We're going to walk up the mountain for the day and have a snack at Black Salees.

I remember she screamed all the way up hating every minute of it, and when we got to the top he said ' I will never make her into a bush-walker'. Lucky he wasn't a prophet and she became a great a bush-walker. She was fine going back down.

The girls attended primary school on Mt Tamborine . We spent a lot of time bush-walking, camping, skiing and running with the girls. They loved to participate in running weeks and of course skiing here. They both ski and snowboard and love it. He took them out camping and up to Noosa when I was working and studying. I did three years study at a college on the Gold Coast and became a Naturopath. I had my surgery at our house as was quite busy – he would pick up the girls from school. He was very involved, in all of the aspects of their life. A good dad.

*Great. Anything else you would like to mention in respect to him and the kids?*

He liked quiet in the evenings when the news was on, it was important to him to keep up with local and international politics. Julia commented he had to listen to every news broadcast from seven o'clock to ten. Very true. We always had a dog. Tony Eames – Pro patrol, gave us a Blue Heeler dog and he was delightful. Patch had so much fun with the kids and Ludo had him trained like an Army Commando. He was bitten by a rough skinned snake and died. We found another half Blue heeler, Patch 2 at the pound and he was Ludos constant companion. He taught the kids how to do dogs. He was a good teacher.

*Well I must say having met both Julia and Claire for the first time after so many years; I must say they are really nice young ladies and you have done a really great job, both of you, in raising them.*

Yes they are great girls and they love the outdoors, love going camping, and now have their kids here learning to ski for the first time. They're teaching their kids the same skills.

*That's Ludwig's legacy isn't it?*

Yes he left all that with them and they think he was a fabulous dad, they love him muchly. (Laughter) It's a shame the grandchildren didn't get to meet him.

We decided to go back to Slovakia in 1994. He hadn't seen his family since he left in 1950 and now communism was over as unbelievable as it was. Did it end in 1993?

1989

Was it 89? But he wasn't sure that he wanted to go back and be caught, so we waited until 94.

*Right, was that's the reason.*

Yes. In 1994 we went back to Slovakia for 3 months. He came from a family of five, Ludo being the youngest. He had two brothers and two sisters. Now only one sister was left. His sister and he were just overwhelmed after forty four years of not seeing each other. It was very interesting, and great to meet a lot of his family. It was hard for us all because they didn't speak English, or us Slovak.

We of course went to the High Tatras mountains and the low Tatras and all the big and small mountains around his home town where he had walked and skied as a boy. Julia was 10 and Claire was 12 and we did a huge walk up the mountain. You could walk or take the gondola. Claire walked on ahead with Ludo and could keep up with him. It was too much for Julia so after I talked her all the way up, gung ho dad said 'So let's get going on the walk down, we don't want to be walking in the dark.' I'd had enough and said we will take the gondola down so you had better do your 'Thredbo Push to the front of the cue shuffle' and get us to the front of the line or you can walk down on your own. We were at the front in no time.

After that trip Ludo went back to Europe every two years and spent 3 months there getting to know his family. On one of the trips in 1996 an old school friend who looked like him was detained by the police for the whole day and interrogated him because they thought he was Ludwig. The Cop said to him 'Rabina – Ah finally I've got you, I've been looking for you for years'.

*But that was already democracy.*

I know, and the guy said 'Thanks to you Ludo, I spent all day in the Police Station trying to prove I wasn't you'. Another incident - he had a visit from the KGB about five or six years after he had moved to Thredbo. The guy wanted to know if he ever went to the city, he said 'No I'm working here, I bushwalk, trout fish and ski. The agent said do you ever go to the city, Ludo said no, hate the place, never go near the city. In actual fact every 2nd weekend he was in Sydney with all his other friends who escaped communism, writing anti-communist propaganda before spreading it around the city.... He didn't want any 'Reds under the Bed'

*He must have committed something; did he talk about what the issue was?*

Do you mean what was his crime to make him leave Czechoslovakia? He worked vehemently against Communism by joining an underground movement. He frequently took documents and people across the Czechoslovak border out of the country. He worked against the communists, from when he was eighteen to when he was twenty. He jumped off trains in the middle of the night and was chased by dogs, crept across ploughed areas at border crossings hoping not to be mowed down by the trigger happy guards in the machine gun towers. He took whole families and children who had to be drugged so as not to cry out, out of the country. Eventually when the group leader was tortured and killed the communists then knew who was in the group. A message came through to Ludo 'They know about you and they're going to kill you, you had better leave straight away, you must leave'. He went back to hide out in Austria. The refugee camps were all full and he became a homeless 'stateless person' He had no papers, no identity and no country. After 6 months of living on the streets eating out of garbage cans, he was able to get refugee status. The camps were all too full and he had to wait till they had sent people overseas to get a place in the camp. In the camp he met Brigit and they teamed up as she was running away from communism in Romania. They could go to Europe, America or to that place way down the bottom of the map a long way away. So Australia it was. And he said that's far enough from Europe, we'll go there, we should be safe there.'

*Well that's interesting as we have done a full circle. because we've got to the reason why he left Czechoslovakia in 1950 when of course Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia; and now the circle completes in that its now become Slovakia again; the split was in 1991, and Ludwig has the desire to become re-attached to his homeland.*

Yes he went back to Slovakia every few years for 3 months each time.

*But I'm talking about after that, what happened then.*

The girls were going to Trinity Lutheran College for high school on the Gold Coast and we were continually driving down so we sold the house on Tamborine and bought a house on the Gold Coast. The girls finished High School and were about to move out to get jobs and he wanted to go back to Europe.

*2005?*

Yea, that's when he went, and that was the best thing because he met and got to know about one hundred family members that he connected with; he had a huge family. He was so pleased to

finally meet them.

He also had an opportunity to find out more from the communist era. He was told by a friend 'Go and visit a man who has documents about you.' A group of men had collected documents that the communists had left behind when they fled. After proving his identity he was given a 300 sheet dossier written by the communists on him and what he had been doing for the past two years as a courier. His group thought they

were doing everything in secret when in actual fact the commies knew the lot. After reading the papers he said it was like reading your own diary – how bizarre. What a scary regime.

*So, you got the impression that he wanted to return because of the mountains or because of the culture.*

Both actually. He unfortunately had back surgery when we lived on Mt. Tamborine so wasn't able to do as much walking into the mountains. He walked around the park each afternoon in his stubbies, which upset the locals as they dressed in long pants and nice shirts to go on their afternoon walks – he was an Aussie so he was casual something they don't do well in Europe as you would know Jerry. lucky if you get the European men to take off their socks when they wear sandals. He really enjoyed being with his family and the beautiful classical concerts and operas that performed at the concert hall in Trencianske Teplice.

*So, it was eighteen months he spent there.*

Unfortunately, he was only there two years. He had a cancerous kidney removed in the first few months of his arrival and later he died from Hodgkin's Lymphoma. We wrote and phoned each other. I sent over some natural treatments but to no avail. We talked two days before he passed. His ashes were sent back here.

*Just describe that a bit, were there a lot of people in Thredbo who knew about it, or just family?*

About the Memorial service?

*Yea about the Memorial Service*

I had remarried and Bill and I and the girls flew down from Coffs Harbour to give him an Aussie send off. At the service Bill said he didn't get to meet Ludo but it was his privilege to be the girl's dad now and he would look after them for him – and he has. It was only small and private. George and Hillary were here and some people came in who knew him, some of the runners from running week and some of the locals.



The Rabina Family

We had a wake after. Later the girls and I went up the chairlift to his favourite place; the tarn pictured here and sprinkled his ashes. That would have been important to him and was very important for the girls.

*Great. well Sharonne that's a fitting end to our interview and get together; from my point of view it's very pleasant to sit here and discuss Ludwig's past and your past. It's been very pleasant; and I would just like to ask your permission that the interview be transcribed and that you allow the Thredbo Historical Society access for educational purposes so that we can let the public read (The Oral History) in the Thredbo Alpine Museum. Is that OK?*

Yes that's great.

Thank you