

THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

WAYNE STINSON – An Oral History

Conducted by Helen Swinbourne

Tura Beach, NSW, 30th June, 2018

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This interview with Wayne Stinson of Merimbula, was conducted by Helen Swinbourne at her home at 5/1b Golf Circuit, Tura Beach, NSW, on June 30th, 2018.

We will start with your mum. Tell me about your mum and your early life.

I was an adopted war baby. My birth mother gave birth to me in 1945 and she was one of those women who got pregnant. She only briefly met my father who was a service man. They had a good time. We asked my mother "What did he look like?" and she said "I don't know, he never took his hat off" which brought raucous laughter from her daughters. We always laugh about it. This was my birth mother, and I don't think she realised what she had said "He never took his hat off." She had no choice. She was a young woman of 23 and she was a RAN in the Navy and got pregnant. She went to a place called Dalby outside of Brisbane. As I found out in all my research to find her, that is where they sent all the girls that got pregnant in that period. When I was a young man, she showed me all the adoption papers when I was nine. So that was the worst thing she did in my life. We walked down the back steps of the boarding house we were living in and said over her shoulder "Look at this" and it had a name Barry Arthur after it, and she just walked away. She never spoke about it again in her life.

I knew I was different because I had bright red hair and a zillion freckles and I was adopted by her and her husband Gordon, and then she had a son, and he was like the father. He had olive skin and black hair. So we had the same name but different people. But the sad thing is that she would never, ever talk about the adoption, so that when I mentioned it, she would break into tears and cry and say, "You don't love me" and all those types of things. It was really, sad, and I really, never got to know her. It was the saddest thing in my life that I never got to know the woman.

But then she got divorced because her husband was a drunk, an alcoholic. He beat her and he beat me. He was a tram conductor in Brisbane, so she decided to get divorced. I went to live with my grandmother for eighteen months or two years. I used to see her occasionally and then she went to live by herself. That is another sad thing in this period. I had no idea what she did and how she got by. She had two friends in her life. There was no Centrelink, there was no help and all she could rely on was the child endowment. There were no other benefits, nothing.

Then she met another man who was a gardener at Government House in Queensland, and he was a drinker. But she said to him "I will marry you if you give up the grog." And he said, "I will." I never liked the man. He was not a very, strong person personality wise, but I always gave him ten out of ten because he gave up the grog. He never drank again, not once.

Was she happy?

She was happy because she had someone who could bring in the money, etc. We just moved from house to house, or from boarding house to boarding house. Then I finished school when I was fourteen and started work the next week as an apprenticed electrician and it was all just because I saw someone threading wires through a wall and I thought "That looks interesting, I might want to do that." There was no vocational guidance at schools in those days. Most of my friends left school at fourteen because there were economic pressures, there was no money, no nothing. We all lived in a very, poor suburb of Brisbane which is now one of the up markets. The house we used to live in was an absolute dump, and now it is worth a million dollars and it has hardly changed. When I go to Brisbane, I feel that it was just at a time in

my life - I was not very happy there. I did it for a while but being an electrician just was not me. I did it for a while so I could bring home five pounds a week or whatever it was, which I gave to my mother and she gave me some pocket money. It was not a lot of money. I rode a bike to work. It was essentially slave labour. There were three apprentices there doing different things and it was all slave labour.

So I wasn't very happy at home and I thought "I'll get out of this, I'll try joining the air force." I really had no education as such, and I did the psychologist test. It came back negative and they said "No, we can't accept you." I asked "Why?" and they said, "It is just because you want to leave home", for no other reason. And that was that. So, I kept working and in February 1966. I am jumping off the track – before that I had booked on a ship to go to England and I wanted to go to England. That was during conscription and I was in the first call up. I knew nothing about Vietnam, I knew nothing about the war and my mother's comment was "Well your father went to war, so you have to go to war." She knew nothing. In those days everybody lived in their own little suburb.

Anyway, I had to find out whether I was going to war or whether I was going to England. I could take you to the building today, etc, etc. and I said "Blaa, blaa, blaa, etc etc" and he said, "Wait here." And he came back and said, "You can go to war." So, I was not conscripted. Across the road from where I was living, there were three young blonde girls who were beautiful, and they had a brother. Their mother was fantastic, and she taught me how to iron a shirt as my mother was at work. He wanted to go to New Zealand, and I said "Oh, I'll come to New Zealand with you." We went to New Zealand catching the Fairstar boat or similar from Sydney to Auckland. Once there we got jobs in the wool stores. We worked in the wool stores. This is 1966 and we left on decimal currency day.

This is instead of England?

Yes. We got jobs in the wool stores and then someone told us about Mt Ruapehu. I had no idea about Mt Ruapehu or even what it was, and they said, "You can work there for the winter." So, we jumped on the early train to go down to a place called National Park, a small community with a railway station, which I think is about forty kilometres from Mt Ruapehu. We arrived after midnight, slept at the railway station, I had never been so cold in my life. Got up at 6 o'clock in the morning and hitched to Mt Ruapehu. We still did not know what we were doing, but we got jobs immediately, but after two weeks the other two lads decided they could not stand the cold and they wanted to leave. They came back to Australia. I stayed three winters and two summers working at Mt Ruapehu. I worked on building a new chairlift one summer and did other work, and worked on the lifts during the winter time and that is where I got my taste for skiing.

We used to ski in gum boots and on short skis which were cut offs from the longer ones with cable bindings to go to work and ski around on. We used to put newspaper in our gum boots because it was so cold. We had terrible uniforms and the whole thing, but when you are 24, we thought we were in absolute heaven. It was so much fun and that is how I got into skiing.

After that I decided to come back to Australia. I went down to Shepparton for one summer until I decided what I wanted to do. So I thought "I'll go to Thredbo, it's a ski resort and see if I can get a job."

That was the beginning of my Thredbo career. I went to Thredbo in 1969. I walked into John Olsen's office and said "Hello" and he said, "What do you want?" I replied, "I'm looking for a job." He asked, "Where have you worked before?" and I said "Ruapehu" and he said "You have a job ". John had been a barman at

the Chateau Tongariro for a couple of years and knew that if I had worked on Ruapehu for 3 winters and 2 summers I could certainly work Thredbo.

He thought that you were a stayer.

Without any further questions, he knew what I could expect, etcetera, etcetera, because Mt Ruapehu was extremely, extremely tough, because it was the type of mountain which had extreme, extreme ice conditions. We used to have to go up and do what we call “de-icing”. You would go up in a rubber raincoat, rubber pants and gum boots with ice crampons and half a dozen pick handles, to climb up the towers and knock the ice off. The reason for the pick handles was that it was always fogged in and there were many crevasses and cliffs, and if you walked along a trail and throw a pick handle in front of you, if it disappeared you knew you were on a cliff edge - great OH&S in those days – you would back-track and you would look around for another way to go. Thankfully, we never ran out of pick handles. There were three or four of us. You would find the tower and they were mainly pomas in those days.

Did you ever rope up an employee?

No. We always stuck together. Then you had to climb the tower and we had crampons on so that made it easier – or even more difficult. Well mainly it was just fun, and we were all mountain men and that was what it was like. You would find the towers and belt the hell out of the cables which would just go “zing” and the ice would come off at once. Then you would go to the next lift.

Just to clarify it, we were back to Ruapehu?

Yes. I want to clarify the reason just why John gave me a job, do the job, cope with the cold and that I was a stayer and be happy with the job. I started in the job in April 1969. There were very few people who worked there. There was John Olsen, and a chap named Frank Boltress. He worked on the chairlift and he was a Hungarian man. We did some mountain work with John and I found out very quickly what John was like. He liked to try things out. He could not stay with one thing. He liked to move on to something else. But one day we went up to the Basin T-Bar. This was after I had started working there. There was this old water tank up there – a big round, rusted water tank up there – and it was down near the bottom of The Basin – and he wanted to get rid of it. I do not know if I should really tell you this, but it was a long time ago. I asked, “How are we going to get rid of this?” and he said, “Roll it up on its side and roll it over the side under the gully under the Ramshead Chairlift”. Where it went, I have no idea, but it is probably still down there, somewhere, in bits and pieces. So that was a long time ago, about forty or fifty years ago. So that was my first experience of John doing things. I have to say though, from my time working with and for John it was one off.

1969 was a really, bad year and I think there was about twelve on the lift crew or something like that. I left after that winter because I still wanted to go to England and I always had a dream to go to Persia. I had saved enough money in New Zealand and in Thredbo. In Thredbo those days, it was free rent. You were not being paid much.

Where did you live?

We lived in the old Staff Lodge. There were rooms underneath the Staff Lodge where lift operators stayed. The hotel had the top floor for the staff and receptionists who worked there. One of my fondest memories was, at the time it did not mean too much to me, but now it does. There was a French chef working there

in the hotel, and there was a guy working on the lifts, and he was so slow that we called him Flash Gordon – if you are familiar with the Flash Gordon cartoons. He was the sort of person you saw in cartoons. But one night I heard all this noise in their room next door, and I knocked on the door and I asked what had happened. What they had done was that they had killed a wedge tailed eagle and they were trying to stuff it. I didn't really know much about wedge tailed eagles in those days – they were just eagles in the sky. So, these two characters were trying to do...

A bit of taxidermy?

A bit of taxidermy on the floor of one of the ground-floor rooms and they were trying to stuff it. It is a bit off the track, but it was part of my Thredbo experience. I will never forget those guys, this Swiss chef, and this guy we called Flash Gordon. But there was worse to come. Two weeks later I saw this liquid running through their door. They had killed a sheep and they were trying to tan the skin with this tanning fluid.

In their room?

In their room! They were interesting days in Staff Lodge. I never told this to Randy Wieman because there were just specific questions.

Now when you say Staff Lodge, you are not referring to Bottom Station are you?

No. Staff Lodge was when you came out of the Bistro area and walked up the steps and the Thredbo Post Office was part of this building.

Was that the old hotel or the new hotel?

No Staff Lodge was a separate building. But having said that I do recall perhaps that this staff lodge was perhaps the original hotel. No doubt someone such as Kasee could confirm this. As you walked up from the hotel towards Snow Goose and Kasee's, on the left was a building, and that is where the Post Office was as well - that was 2625. I have a picture of that as well with the post code on it. And that was....

It has all changed. The last time I was there was in 1965.

The Post Office was still there then. Staff lodge was there. Staff Lodge was still there in the mid eighties. That was where all the hotel and mountain staff lived. The Post Office was there, and it has a little self-serve laundry on the right.

I am diverging.

After '69, I told John I am going travelling for two years, and I will be back in two years in '72. He said, "Come back and you'll have a job." This is slightly off track, but this is what happened – I met this Canadian guy in Thredbo in '69 and I told him where I was going, and he told me "you need to go to Bali first." I had never heard of Bali and he just raved about it. I had no idea where it was or what it was. I did not even know about Indonesia in those days. You had to go overland, because everyone went to Europe overland via Bali and I did not realise where I was going.

The hippy trail

The hippy trail is that was what it was called. There was Thredbo to Melbourne, to Adelaide, to Perth, caught a bus to Port Hedland. I hitched from Port Hedland up to Darwin and I think it was ANSETT that used to fly once a fortnight or once a week to Dili on Timor. I eventually got to Darwin, island hopped across to Dili – it was Portuguese Timor in those days – from there we island hopped on different planes and finally finished up in Bali.

I had no idea where I was going – there was no internet – there was nothing. I arrived in Bali in at the end of November in 1969. It was not that long before they massacred thousands of people in Bali – and mostly the Chinese, because they did not like the Chinese. They built barb-wire fences around their compounds and you could still see remnants of it. Then it was just overland up into Sumatra and to Java, and then across to Singapore. In Singapore I hit the uprising in Malaysia where they had slaughtered thousands of Chinese as well. I had been expecting some issues as a Peace Corp worker had told me about the killings in Malaya and in particular Kuala Lumpur. There was 6 pm curfew in KL at the time which meant “off the streets by 6 pm” and of course there were curfews throughout Malaya as it was called then. The insurgents also blew up a rail bridge between Malaya and Thailand before I arrived.

So it was then on to Europe after that. I went to Bangkok and stayed for three weeks because it was the most amazing place I had ever seen in my life. It was at the height of the Vietnam War and Bangkok was the R and R destination for one week only, for all the young guys that served in Vietnam. There are always lots of things that happen in your life that you can remember specifically, but you cannot remember the things around them. I guess a lot of people experience that. One of the things that I remember was a fighter pilot, a Phantom pilot, and the Phantom was the plane in that period, and he was twenty. We got to know each other, and we hung out a bit, and he said, ‘I am going back to Vietnam to die.’ That was his attitude – of all those people of that period. I will never forget that. Whether he died or not, I have no idea, but he was younger than me and he was flying these fighter jets and in a war that like most of them had no idea what it was about and that was what he felt was going to happen to him.

I hope he did not die.

I have no idea but there were lots of things that happened on those trips. There was no travel insurance. Nobody knew where you were. You could have died. The only thing that you looked forward to, apart from the travel, was getting to the post office, to the Post Restante which people our age would know, and get a letter that was weeks old, and that was it. Everybody travelling, would sit around and read all their mail. It was interesting times and I survived it.

Then there was the skiing. I worked in a ski resort in Switzerland for eight months.

Which one?

A place called Villars Sur Ollon – my French is terrible of course – but that was fantastic. I met a Canadian guy hitching to the beer festival in Munich and he said, “You’ve got to come down to this resort.” I said “Why” “Because there is a British girls’ finishing school there. It’s full of young girls.” That was a good enough reason to go. It was the only reason he was going. He was Canadian. He was right. There were a lot of young girls there and they were great and pleased to see us young hippies as we were called, because we had long hair and ponytails, and we were travelling. We got a job on the building site and the company that owned the building company, virtually owned the resorts, the town, and the ski school. There were three areas rolled into one: Villars, Barbalouez, and Roc d’ Orsay.

The big construction company which pretty well owned everything, was called P J Finger and they had a finger in everything in town, which they did! They gave us jobs on the building site and said, "You've got jobs for the winter." So, a bunch of us all worked on the ski lifts after working on their building sites in late autumn. But one of the sad things was that there were Italians, Spanish, Turks also working there but we were treated differently, because sadly, they, the Swiss were very racist in their attitude. They treated us differently to the other people. They could not understand why we had given up work to go travelling and wanting to work in a ski resort. A group of us rented a chalet called Sunnybank and then others moved in with us and there were up to 20 people at any one time living in Sunnybank.

We employed a Canadian couple as our cooks and cleaners to run the place, employed meant they had free rent and board. It was probably closest to the best ten months of my life, absolutely, fantastic, and we had a great time. We did a lot of strange things just for fun, probably things we should never have done, just coming home probably drunk, but the people in the town just loved us. It was a fabulous place to do more skiing and meet lots of people from different nationalities. In the group that I lived with, in the house, I was the only Australian – Canadians, Dutch, Americans, English, everybody from all over the place, a couple of Kiwis as well. We had a no problem with drugs. There were never any drugs in the house, but the beer made up for it. The local police – this is another interesting thing about Switzerland off the track slightly – they let us work there without visas because they needed us. The day the season finished, there was a knock on the door, and they said, "You have five days to leave!" So, you had the job, but the season was over and they didn't need us anymore. The year I was there, they had a referendum to give women the vote. It went through with 99.99 percent in favour. I am off the track.

No, it is part of social history - part of your life. It influenced you.

They were a very racist country. There were Swedish dentists who were working down in the valley, off the mountain. They had a huge problem because they were servicing anybody. They were servicing the Turks, the Italians, anybody, and they were ostracized so much that they left because the locals could not understand why they were helping these people. I had experienced racism up in northern Australia when I was hitching up there, but this was much worse. It was terrible, absolutely, terrible. Wherever you went, you saw it. In the town because you saw these people working in restaurants and cafes there, all the Turks, they would all sit on this promenade on their day off, and they were all dressed in their suits and their ties and they just sat there and talked, and nobody talked to them. We would walk past and say "Hello, blah, blah." It was really, sad, all these people and they just sat there. But that was just the way it was. But it was a fantastic place.

They had a Club Mediterranean there. Lots of French used to come there. On the mountain they would not talk to you in English, so I had to learn a little bit of French to work on the lifts. My French was hopeless. There was a couple of men who used to ski at my lift all the time who would only speak French and I would say "Good morning" in French and vice versa and at the end of the week he said to me "Have you seen my brother?" in French, and I replied in English, and then he spoke to me in perfect English "Have you seen my brother?" It was staggering, because he needed help, he spoke to me in English.

In the early part of your life, you learn a lot about people and travelling is the best education you could get in those days. I often wonder how I survived the trip over and back actually, because in Pakistan on my way to Europe I was attacked at a railway station and all sorts of other stuff, and only because of a policeman with a big cane, I survived. If I had been killed in that particular incident, nobody would have known. The body would have been tossed somewhere. There was only the passport that was some sort of evidence. Then I came back after two years and it was via Asia again.

It must have been an anti-climax after all that adventure?

Yes. But I remember getting to Calais and then getting off a ferry at Dover going straight to a fish shop. I brought fish and chips and a bottle of milk. That was before my Swiss employment and I worked in Torquay in a hotel for a while and then I travelled around the British Isles and did all the usual things. I saw fantastic rock concerts in the 1970s in Bath. It was similar, to Woodstock and there were many tens of thousands there. Yes, I was lucky in that respect. I had a wonderful Canadian girlfriend, and we came back together overland to Singapore. She went back to Canada and I came home, doing lots of interesting things along the way. She was harassed along the way in the Middle East constantly. It was a battle.

I had seen this harassment when I first went through Afghanistan, I met this French couple, Monique and I can't remember his name, but she was a strikingly tall French lady and she always carried a piece of plastic water pipe with her just to beat them off. They would want to touch her, grope her, and she would wack them off. It happens all the time. It happens today. So that was it. I came home, I went and saw my mother and that was it. And I came back to Thredbo in 1973. I was there until the day I left.

What an adventure.

It was an adventure, an extremely good adventure, but it was educational, extremely educational. I learnt so much about the world. Everything was an effort. You had to do it on your wits. The only way you found out something was from the people you met and at your next stop. For example: Berridale to Dalgety. You are staying in Berridale and you'd see a sign "Go to Dalgety, it is fantastic." "Oh, I have never heard of Dalgety, I will go to Dalgety." You would get to Dalgety and there would be more notes on the wall "catch this bus, catch that bus to go there." So that is how you got through it otherwise you had no hope. The people were fantastic on the way, absolutely, fantastic, apart from the episode in Pakistan, people responded to you and wanted to talk to you.

I was hitch hiking in Malaya and two young girls picked me up. They were school-teachers, and they wanted to know who I was and where I was from and why I on the road with my thumb out. Then one thing led to another and I finished up in Langkawi which is an island off Malaysia and a very well-known island but in those days, it was just an island off the coast. Their father was the mayor of the local town and they said, "Do you want to have dinner?" I was heading off to Bangkok. "Sure", I had no idea where I was going, of course. Got there, had a big seafood dinner. He said "Do you want to go to Langkawi. It is beautiful, they have this fantastic waterfall there, called the Seven Wells." "Sure". They put me on a fishing boat that night. I arrived at this fishing village and slept that night on the school porch, Next morning I ran into some schoolteachers, who were on school holidays and they wanted to know who I was, and what I was doing on this island and they just took me under their wing and off we went to the seven wells Then back to the mayor that evening on another boat and went off to Bangkok. I am off the track, but I could talk about this forever.

Well, back to Thredbo and your job.

Back in 1972, I went back.

Back to the lifts?

Yes, back to the lifts. Well, that was my background and that was all I knew really. I had no desire to work in the hotel. That was really no fun at all.

With maintenance in summer?

Yes, I stayed right through because there is always work in summer and John was still the Lifts Manager. Errol Hanlon stayed on as well and we were involved in much of the general mountain maintenance work. There must be a million rocks in Thredbo to blow up, as Errol and I spent many summer hours drilling rocks on the mountain to blow apart.

Oh yes, yes.

Errol and I would also work on Crackenback during the summer. There was a lady working in the Thredbo Hotel, Sandra and she was the accountant and the way it used to work, we would get the lift tickets off her, take the paper ride lift tickets and a float. We had to sell the tickets and be operators at the same time. Then in the evening we would take the tin and the money over to her in the hotel and give her the money. We were lift operators – we were not ticket sellers - and sometimes we would be out in the money under a couple of dollars or something. She was somewhat critical when we were out in the takings, and we had to remind her we just were not selling tickets, but also operating the lift as well. You have got people coming down on the lift and you had to get them off, then sell tickets to the next lot and so on. They were interesting times.

So you got to meet a lot of characters at Thredbo?

Yes, but I forget most of them of course. You mean like the skiers?

I mean the workers.

Oh yes, the workers.

The Thredbo identities?

Yes. Some things gel in your memory, like with the Thredbo staff reunion that we just had two years ago. That jogged a lot of memories because everybody was putting their photos up so it went from the early seventies right up until early nineties, this reunion. I had a lot of photos that I pulled out, and people said, "That's so and so" and I could not remember their names but suddenly it came back to me.

I hope you wrote it on the back of the photo.

No. I probably didn't because when I looked, there were lots of people that I took black and white photos of, and often there were a lot I couldn't remember but some I knew them so well, but I could not remember their names. Often as is the case today, you only got to know peoples' first names. You were not interested if they were Smith, Jones, or whatever.

Who were the most memorable staff members?

This is the difficult thing. You just can't remember - one memorable staff member we worked with was a chap called Frank Burke, sometimes called "berserk", and he was an Englishman, and he was a West Ham

soccer fanatic. I put up lots of photos of Frank on the Thredbo reunion Facebook site. He used to work as a barman, he was a Keller door bouncer, he was a lift operator and he worked for us in the summer as well. Everybody loved him, he was a major character. He is long gone, sadly. One of the things I wrote about Frank – I remember one day when Errol, John Olsen and Frank were laying hay bales on the mountain for erosion control and this is how long ago it was: we used to take drums of tar up the mountain, break open the drums, and we would mix it to a consistency so that it would flow through a pump, and spray the mulch with it so the straw would stick.

Oh yes.

Every day we were black, we were covered with tar all over the place. You had to prime the pump so to speak, to get it to work properly. Errol and I were standing to the side and John on the pump, and Frank was doing the priming to get the tar to come out. That was the first mistake. The next one was that John yelled out to Frank “Stop! Stop!” and Frank didn’t stop so John got covered in tar and the next thing we see is John drop the hose amongst many expletives and started chasing Frank and Frank was literally running for his life. But Frank was famous for these little things. I was in charge of the group cutting Funnel Web ski run and this was in the summertime. Frank was boiling the billy for us but for some reason he had mixed diesel into the water.

Did it kill you?

No, but he was Frank, and he was one of those endearing characters of Thredbo. Everybody loved him. He always thought he was tougher than what he really was. There were many people. There was Frank Prihoda – he was there for a million years. There was Hubert Engel. Freddy Gegg – I remember he and Hubert Engel ran Eagle’s Nest for many years and they were not very well liked, because they were uncompromising in everything they did. They used to have these trays that they would put on the back of the chairs and put their pastry in the back. They would cover the pastries up and they had to go up to the top of Crackenback to Eagles Nest cafe and because they were not very well liked, so when the pastries got to Middle Station or Kareela – the lifties would take out some smoko items so when the trays got to the top there was always some empty spaces in the trays. They would ring up John or they’d ring up me and we would say “We have no idea! Maybe the crows or the ...” One day one of the trays fell off the carrier below Kareela so Hubert and Freddie went down and recovered what they could of the pastries.

There was always fun and games like that, where as Rudi Schatzle had a completely different style and attitude. He would often have a lot of supplies to get to Merritts or Eagles Nest and would ask us to start earlier than normal to get his goods up the mountain. As we were always accommodating with his requests, he always had what he called “spillage.” He always had drinks and pastries which he would dish out to the operators. Everything got to the top. Nothing was stolen. Nothing was pinched. Nothing was eaten. Damn smart operator Rudi was. I had many dealings with Rudi over the ensuing years, always easy to deal with.

It was not that the boys were terrible people. They were a lot of fun in some ways. They would just stir them up. Hubert and Freddie, that is. Hubert Engel and Freddie would always come down the lift with a money bag – just a bag you got from the bank with the coins in it and their takings for the day in it. One day they dropped it off the lift accidentally near Kareela and could not get off until Middle Station. So, there was this massive panic and they wanted to get off at the Middle and they wanted to get back up there before the word spread and all the lift operators would arrive and get the cash. They were characters in their own right. Herbert was a good operator, but Freddie Gegg was terrible, and he ran Eagle’s Nest.

We were in there one day having morning tea and one day one of the lift operators had a milk shake and he said to Freddie "There's a cockroach in my milk shake!" and Freddie came over and said "So!" and turned and walked away. Freddie really didn't help his case. That is what the place was like in those days and I think it was Freddie with the missing hot dogs as well.

They used to put all their frozen hot dogs in plastic rubbish bins to go to the top. Then one day someone put all the flags for the NASTAR racecourse in the same bin on top of the hot dogs in the same bin. And they said, "You've got to ski this bin down to the NASTAR course." They took it off not realising that the hot dogs were in the bottom of the bin, so all the hot dogs got skied down to race-course and all day everybody got accused of knocking off all the hot dogs. Then in the afternoon when the races were on, they pulled all the flags out and there were all the hot dogs. A total accident still did not appease Freddie though. There are lots of stories like that.

Errol and John and I did all the maintenance on the mountain during the summer months, the mowing, painting etc in those days when mission brown was the go. John, Errol and me, rebuilt the middle station and think it was the summer of 74 rebuilt Middle Station So John was in charge and we were the helpers.

Errol and I asked John "Where are the plans?" And he pointed to his head and that was it. So, we had to get the old one down and so we cut a few of the uprights and then said, "What now John?" and he went and got the old bulldozer, which was called the John Deere, hooked it up and chained it to the station and the whole thing just came crashing down. There was no plan of demolition. So, we pulled that down and then we had to get all the timbers up and line it all up and it was still in John's head.

We had these massive uprights which in the old terms, were eight inches by eight inches hardwood. They weighed a ton. And the plan in John's head was somewhat wrong to a certain extent so much so, that when we chiselled out the uprights to house the bearers and put the framework together, we found out that the platform when decked out would be too high. There was no way we were going to lower the uprights to re cut them, so we did them whilst they were up in the air and a mongrel job it was. Then we had to buy bolts and nuts to bolt everything together before laying the deck. In those days there was a man called Jim Malins who was temporarily in charge of Thredbo for a very brief time. During his time Thredbo was in an austerity drive and anything which needed to be bought had to be approved by him, boxes of nails etc.

How frustrating.

It was frustrating with the delays in waiting for approval to come via what was called the internal mail and of course no email etc way back then in the end, John said "We need all these nuts and bolts to bolt everything together. Go up to Wood Run, there used to be a station which was called the Wood Run but it was pulled down before I got there even, and you will find lots of bolts and nuts of the same type". Well Errol Hanlon and I tramped up through the scrub, talk about Burke and Wills. They were there all galvanised of course, right length and diameter and the right shape, so Errol and I packed them all up and hauled them back to middle station and so it went on for a while, nails paint etc. This is the truth!

Recycling.

It was recycling in the true sense. Everything was like that. It was so bad. Even in the old hotel, even if you were staying there and you wanted a fresh towel, you had to pay for it. If you wanted your sheets changed, you had to pay for it. This was their cost efficiency dividend as they would say today. All that sort of thing

did not last long of course, because it was a total nightmare. Thankfully Jim Mailins did not stay long, and things returned to normal, for want of a better word.

I must tell you one story about summer maintenance. One year, in their wisdom, senior management decided that Errol, John and me, should no longer do any rebuilding maintenance on the hill. This was nothing to do with the Middle Station thing which no one was aware of, so they gave the village department (they were responsible for maintaining the village, roads, sewerage, water etc) the job of replacing the downhill safety net at the top of Merritts chairlift and we thought "Well what do they know? We were somewhat put out by this, but we said, "We shall see." They had to rebuild the safety net on top of Merritts Chairlift. The safety net, which when you are being downloaded, catches you in the event you fall out of the chair after being loaded So off they went, three guys from the village department and we watched the work in progress and thought "They've missed something here." Wrongly in retrospect we did not say anything because there was this thing with departments. Each department was their own kingdom.

What they had forgotten about or did not realize, that as the chair left the flat station, the cable was headed in a downward direction and they had built the net flat and level and did not have the net following the angle of the cable. Turned out that the end of the net was too high so that peoples' legs were hitting the net as they went out from the station. That was the end of their mountain buildings maintenance involvement. Sometimes it was "Key-stone Cops" stuff. There were memorable moments on the hill like that.

Another not so memorable moment which turned out well due only to poorly maintained safety equipment, occurred whilst Gary "Cords" Cordova and I were preparing rocks for blasting at the top of Crackenback. Maintenance was doing work from what was called a work carrier at Tower 17, which was the four towers group together, just before going into Eagles Nest at the top of Crackenback. The procedure was to have a safety belt on with a rope and a carabiner at the end which was attached to the carrier just in case you fell out for some reason. Well, this day, for some reason Neil, one of the maintenance guys hooked his carabiner onto the guide rail of Tower 17 and not on the carrier. When they were finished, they gave the okay for the carrier to be moved. We heard the screaming of "Stop! Stop! And as I looked up, saw what was happening with the carrier being pulled at angle due to the belt attached to the guide rail, I was running to the stop switch inside the station knowing that I was never going to make it when the webbing belt, I am guessing it was about 2 to 4 inches wide, suddenly snapped and the work carrier was swinging wildly but Neil was freed. It snapped because it was so rotten from oil etc which had penetrated the belt over months and perhaps years. That, plus the fact that Neil was a strapping and fit young man, was no doubt the difference and I doubt that he would be here today. By the time the other maintenance person realized what was happening and reacted to grab the radio etc, the carrier was on the move. Next day we saw the massive bruising on his body from the belt. A very, very, lucky young man he was.

It was very, hard work in those days because a lot of it was foot work. There were not many vehicles and things like that, but we were all young and it was fun. The Middle Station and that was probably the two highlights where things went wrong. We built a little bridge at the top of Crackenback at the cross-over to Merritts Creek on the walk to Kosciuszko which was fine. There were no problems with that. We did a lot of work on the mountain. There used to be a deck on the top of Merritts and it was terrible when the winter came because it was always icy or snow so we decided to replace all the timber and put down all the open metal mesh so that the snow would just fall through. That was a big improvement. That was the type of work we were doing in the summertime - lots of the painting and that sort of thing. It was interesting

times. Then the work force just got bigger and bigger. The machinery got bigger and better and all those sorts of things.

Are there any of the skiers that you particularly remember –the visitor - the guests?

No, because a lot of the skiers – it is a sad thing – a lot of the skiers you would see on the weekends – you never really got to know their names. You would say, “How are you going today” and that sort of thing. A few I got to know, and I got to know a lot of the volunteer ski patrollers – they were really, good people – the ski patrollers with the work they did. There were lots of interesting characters there.

Who were amongst the interesting characters that you best remember?

Oh, George Weiss and George Freuden. They were just funny. They were really, funny people, you know. I can't tell what people used to call them. It was not really rude but that was their nickname. But their heart was in the right place, and that was the right thing. They were keen and they were dedicated to the Ski Patrol. They all were. I always thought that the Ski Patrol did a fantastic job and they still do. I got side-tracked slightly. There was always this thing with Thredbo management and others that they did not need the Volunteer Thredbo Ski Patrol. It was always a battle to get something. I would always argue the point at management meetings “Where would we be without them and whatever they want, you have to consider it, you know?” It was always a battle to get that understanding with different people were in charge.

When Wayne Kirkpatrick came along, it was different. He could see that. I am jumping the gun a little bit, but Wayne was probably the best thing for Thredbo, for the staff and for the resort. I actually give him a lot of credit – he was an entrepreneur – he was customer first. I often use a lot of Wayne's comments and sayings. One of the key ones was “Whatever we do, ask ourselves the question ‘How does it affect the customer’.” And that he did not want us to be product orientated, but customer orientated but that has all changed again now. But it is the same with lots of businesses today. He made the world of difference to the place.

Eventually they saw reason with the volunteer ski patrol, I guess because in some cases it came across a bit heavy because they wanted to do things their way, sometimes without seeing the overall picture. But as I say their heart was in the right place. They were keen, they were always up early, for them it was an adventure, and that is why they were called “Weekend Warriors”. That was their nickname as well. They were very, good for the resort and I used to say, “Where would we be without them!”

And what about the instructors?

Well, they were a different kettle of fish, you know. The instructors when I first went to Thredbo, they were Austrians. They were classic Austrians because they were treated that way because they were classic Austrians, put on a pedestal and everybody always fell in a heap when an instructor came into one of the lodges, especially the women of course. They held a special place in Thredbo. When I first went there would not have been more than a dozen of them.

Right.

When the Austrians would come to town it was like the reincarnation of Jesus Christ – they were gods.

You could not put it past Leonard!

No Leonard was fantastic. He was a typical Austrian, but he was very, good. He was an amazing character. I have never seen anybody ski so much without a hat or without glasses, but always had a cigarette. He always had a cigarette – skiing down the slopes with Elyne Mitchell, he always had a cigarette. Standing in the lift cue, he would have a cigarette.

He lived a long life. He died a few years ago!

I really did not know. What happened to him?

He died about five years ago.

Oh really? He was the epitome of “knees together please”. Perfect. Everybody who could ski wanted to ski like that. Everybody aspired to ski like him. Everything perfect, skis together, it did not matter what sort of snow or what. They were a different era. Then one year which surprised me: they had a couple of New Zealanders working on the ski school and that was the beginning of non-Austrian period. I made a comment, to one of the girls whose husband was a New Zealander, “How did you manage to get into the Austrian Ski School?” It was because they were doing different things, this New Zealand couple. Then from there the ski school just got bigger and bigger. But they were all characters in their own way, and a lot of them were farm boys you know. Suddenly they get this offer to come to Australia and make good money and get invited to all the lodges where they got dinner and as the song that goes “.....you get money for nothing” and all the freebies.

I remember as a young girl being told “keep away from the instructors!”

The ski school got bigger. Because they could not get all the boys to come over, they had to get other instructors. There was always this friction between the Austrians and the others in the beginning but as each other got used to each other it became a lot better.

How did the women go, the female ski instructors?

I always thought they were not very well welcomed. They were just needed, and they could not ski that well. That is not my opinion, but I got that impression. They did all the lower classes and the kids. They were not probably as treated well as they should have been. I guess because the Austrians were so good and they come from that Germanic background if you like, when the treatment of women back then probably was not what it should have been. I have to be careful what I say here. But that was the impression you got and even the Austrians with the other male skiers there was still “We are the best, etc, etc” and which they were.

Having said that, though in that group there were some really, really, nice characters. They realised that there was something more to life than being an Austrian ski instructor. They could have fun and get on with the people. There were many, many that I got on well with and I would say “Good morning, and how are you going?” to and all that sort of stuff. It was all good friendly stuff because on the mountain you had to work together and that was the thing. When a ski instructor got stroppy with somebody else or got above himself, he was not very well liked or even helped. We were all on a job and that was how everybody looked at it so “I’m the lift operator and I have to get you on the chair, and I have to get you off the chair! You are the ski instructor and have to teach the people.”

The ski school year by year just became huge and it lost a lot of its community touch as such. When I first started it was an all-male thing on the lifts. It never entered our heads that we should hire females. Then one day in the seventies, one of the girls came into the office, and I will not mention her name for different reasons, and she said, "I would like to work on the lifts!" I looked at Olsen and Errol looked at me and we said "What?" because girls just did not apply because of the cold and the wet and pulling t-bars in those days was tough work, old technology, poor gearing etc and also getting people on and off the lift.

She gave her reasons and Errol and I looked at each other and said "What the hell. Yes, let us give her a go! What have we got to lose?" That is how we operated, and I have often said to people recently "We were the forerunners in Thredbo. Women, they were treated the same as the males: if you were a lift operator, male or female you were paid the same, no gender pay gap. You were expected to do the same work and be just part of the team.

Any way we employed this girl, then another girl came over and wanted to be a lift operator, so we said, "We'll give two a go." Because they were skiers, they knew the lifts, so they knew what expect. One day we put one of these girls on the Basin T-bar and was a tough gig in those days, short t's and poor gearing and sometimes the rope jammed, and it would literally rip your arm off. As we were responsible for lift operations no one else was informed of our decision. Then one day the Austrian maintenance manager came over to the office and said in his gruff Austrian way "We have a problem!" We will not mention any names. We said, "What's the problem?" "There's a girl up there working the Basin." "So?" "She's pulling the T-bars." "So, what's the problem? Is she working? Is she going a good job?" "Yes, but she is a woman!" "So?" And that was it and he walked out in a huff. He could not understand it. That was the beginning of the very first girls who worked lifts and they worked hard, because in those days the T-s were not spring-loaded like they are today where they come out nice and gentle. You had to reach and pull it down.

Yes, I remember.

Sometimes you would reach and pull, and it was locked, and it would pull your arms out of their sockets. The Basin T-bar was hard work. After that, one of those girls got on the pro patrol and she became the first female pro ski patroller and again that was that. "Well, girls don't do pro ski patrol." And it led on just like that. Then more girls applied for the job because they did not want to be a bar person or house maid and seemingly the girls had more fun on the mountain. We had lots of girls come and apply for jobs on the lifts. We soon found out that the girls were just as good as the boys. They could handle the conditions, the rain, the cold, and everything else.

They were your first, courageous girls?

Yes, to come and ask.

Can you give me her surname?

No, for different reasons. I don't think it would be fair to her at this point. Anybody listening to this would know who I am talking about. There is another girl I am happy to mention and that is Janet Staniforth. We lost her a couple of years ago and she was another girl who worked at Winterhaus with Mark Francis. Because her friend got a job on the lifts, she said, "I'll come, and I'll work on the lifts" and Janet got a job. Then there was girl called Lee Caulson and then Annie McGregor, and the list became endless. They could handle the cold and everything else. Part of the reason was that they had fun because in those days we

were all part of a team. We all worked together. We all wanted to ski, and we all knew that there would be time for skiing sometime. That was part of the appeal of working the lifts.

But we always made sure that either Errol or John or me, were on because we used to run the lifts after work for skiing. So if the skiing was really good, and you could ski to the bottom, we would run the Merritts Duplex for that mob over there, and we would run the Basin T-bar over the other side, until dark on the hill. After work, everybody would converge except for the couple that had to stay at the bottom and send people up and we would ski the Basin or the Merritts Duplex.

Talking about skiing down the hill, tell me about the flare runs.

There were so many stories about the flare run.

I know how the first flare run came to be – that was very, very, early.

That was very, early. I cannot remember when they actually started the flare runs.

I think it was on Christmas Eve.

Was it?

When Charles Anton and Charles Pelz were running it. I understand the flares were pretty, primitive.

That is a long time ago, but even into the '70s the flares were pretty dangerous. The flares were really, bad. I remember even going to torches at one stage because they were really, dangerous - you could burn the parkas and everything - even get burnt. I remember that part of it. But I think the flare runs really took off when Roland Wanner became the ski school director. He was another person like Wayne Kirkpatrick, another entrepreneurial character, and changed the whole focus of the ski school and it was no longer stodgy and that type of thing. It was all about having fun. He did a lot for Thredbo in that respect.

He improved the flares, did he?

Yes, many types were tried.

What sort of flares?

Flares that they use on boats. Then there another lot of flares that came out – I cannot remember what they were exactly, but they were so much better. And they lasted a lot longer – that was the other thing. In the early days, often half the flares would go out. But they were really, dangerous. They burnt a lot of holes in the uniforms and people got burns from them as well. In the early days there was never a check of the chairlift at the end of the day to verify that it was empty, no one on it. The top operator would ride the lift down and the lift would run with nobody on it and nobody at the top.

Like a lot of things in life, nothing changes until something happens. One year somebody got on the chair after the top operator had left and I am not sure whether the ski patrol did a proper sweep of the mountain or not in those days. These days the ski patrol does a sweep, and the operator stays at the top to make sure that nobody can get on the lift whilst it is running. I cannot quite recall if there was a proper sweep by ski patrol in those days.

I am talking about the mid 70s and after that it changed. After a couple of incidents, things changed. One case was that one person got on the chair at the top of Merritts after it had closed for skiing, and the lift operator stopped it at the bottom station, and nobody knew that someone was on the chair. The alarm was raised. In those days it was probably a bit haphazard when alarms were raised and as to how you did a search. Eventually they found that person and I think they died. I think the person was stuck over Merritts Creek and that was where they stayed for the whole night. After that it did not even change either dramatically because someone was stuck on Ramshead chairlift with the same thing – they were halfway down towards Tower 10 Station, but they survived. I remember Maintenance going up and calling out “I think there is somebody on the chair over on Ramshead!” and there was somebody on the chair. After those couple of episodes, it was changed. Even in summertime you walked along the line or skied the line. Then also the sweep became a lot more thorough looking for people who may be lost, or till on the mountain.

There was the sad case of a young woman losing her direction on the Powder Bowl finishing up in Stanley’s Gorge and I remember being involved in that search because I knew the area a bit from walking up the creek and leading some ski instructors up the creek at night to go up the creek to look for this poor woman. My worst fear at the time was coming across her and it was not something I was looking forward to. They did not find her on the first search. They found her in the morning and that was a very, sad episode.

Also, the bus crash, which doesn’t appear very much in Thredbo’s history. The bus was coming up, and this again was in the early seventies, coming up from Victoria in a blizzard and it actually – there is a guard rail section on that part of the road now – the bus hit the ice and went off the road. It was about halfway between Dead Horse Gap and Thredbo. There was a number of people killed. A young girl crawled out of the bus which went over the edge towards the creek. She saw the lights in the distance, which was Thredbo, walked down the icy road and raised the alarm. There was a number of people who didn’t make it.

There were serious injuries. It was a very, difficult operation and one of my sad memories of that, is that I was in the surgery just being a person helping people out and I was holding this poor woman’s hand and all she could ask me was where was her husband and I knew that he had died because they told me and I could not tell her that, of course. I will never forget that – it was a very, sad moment. It was a very, dramatic time because Thredbo was not that well organized for things like that in those days. It all worked out and it was a demanding time for all involved. These days it would be so much better because you have mobile phones and all that sort of thing. In those days we did not have things like that. I do not think we had walkie talkies back then. There were sad times then.

But the lifting changed a lot because of things like that. My worst experiences were when I was a lift supervisor. There were two tough decisions I had to make: one I had to make was when I was doing a lunch relief at the top of Crackenback, I was loading people downhill - it looks easy, but it is really, difficult to get two people on a chair, holding their skis and going out. I got the people on the chair going out and one of the people slipped, and I reached out over the back of the chair and grabbed the person, and we were going out over the snow, and thankfully the snow drift extended a long way out and Tower 17 was ahead, and I do not like heights, and I remember looking back at the lift operator and he was essentially frozen, just looking at me. I thought “I have two choices: go or drop.” So, I just let go of the person I was holding who dropped into the snow along with myself. Thankfully, we both okay. I said to the operator “Why didn’t you stop the lift” and he said, “I couldn’t.” He was frozen.

But the other one which I will never forget, I think it was in '74 and I was at Kareela Station and the snow was up to and over the fence which was around the station and I was skiing down, and I saw the skier being loaded downhill. Again, it was a difficult station to load because it had a short platform and there was not a lot of room for error and I saw the person fall out of the chair just after leaving the station. The person was by himself. I just skied over to the fence to press the stop button and looked: this person was hanging on to the main (hanger) bar and below Kareela if you remember there was a monstrous drop and I thought he was hanging on so well I thought "I will let this go" because stopping the lift may have thrown him off onto the rocks below. If he did not fall off, what then? I can remember standing there and thinking, as people were yelling, "Stop the lift. Hold on. Hold on" and because there was so much snow that after the big drop, that if he dropped, he would be OK.

The ski instructors saw it and they skied down and were saying "Hold on! Hold on!" until he got to the tower below and then they said "Drop!" and he just let himself drop down into soft snow below. But I think it may have been Rod Dunning who went past him going up as he was going down and he said "he was hanging on like it was a day trip. He was totally calm." He dropped his skis of course but he was just hanging on to the centre bar. And everyone was saying "Stop it! Stop it!" and I thought "Then what do you do? You could not rescue him. I was such a relieved person because I thought afterwards "Why didn't I stop the lift." Just instinct, I guess. It would not have mattered because what you said, you would have been at fault. So, there were two rather tough decisions I had to make.

The other thing about lift operations, it was about night drive. They used to have night drive running on Crackenback and that was to stop the icing of the lift and it would go very, very slowly, if you are familiar with the night drive. But the Bottom Station was never fenced off and it was always open to anybody or anything. If people had had too much to drink or they had a nice girl or boy and they wanted to go for a moonlight ride on the chair, they would get on it. It would take you half an hour or longer I think to get to Mid Station, and they would sit there. And then the alarm would be raised "Oh my friends are on the chair and they are stuck!" That would happen, more often than not, before they stopped night drive. They actually shut the station off after that. There were lots of things like that in the old days.

Did the introduction of snow making have any effect?

Oh yes. When we put snowmaking in, Delta Engineering, the Canadian company that installed the system said there will be "One year out of twenty when you won't be making any snow." So far that hasn't been the case, but John Olsen always thought you could make snow way back in the seventies. He said, "If it is cold enough you can make snow." John was an experimenter. He loved making things and trying things. We had an experiment station set up in them in a clearing by Creek Station and it worked. It made snow. Then he would get up to where the Snow Cat Shed is just between Snowgums and Crackenback – and near Lovers Leap and this was just before John left. He would set up sprinklers on the top of the Cat Shed and when it was really, cold he turned them on and made snow. And he said "It has to work! It has to work! We can make snow." He had all these little things going all over the place, to prove it. As I said we had pipes going up to Creek Station to make the snow and we actually made snow.

After John Olsen left, and Wayne Kirkpatrick took over with Albert van der Lee in charge, you might remember Albert – he was the entrepreneur - so he went along with other people to develop plans for Friday Flat and we had to have snowmaking. We had to have snowmaking and it was hugely expensive in those days, massively expensive. Because of Wayne's marketing plans and entrepreneurial skills and writing business plans convincing people, everybody said "Yes, we will build Friday Flat, but we have to have snowmaking." So, we built the snowmaking as well. It was the best investment Thredbo ever made.

In the early days it was very, very labour intensive. We had up to about thirty snowmakers working at night moving all the hoses around the mountain, so it was not very productive. You would get a cold spell moving up the mountain then it moved over, there was an inversion, and it was no longer cold – so you probably lost thirty, forty or fifty percent of your capacity because of the inability to manage it. Over the years – even before I left – it got more automatic and more automatic and now when you just press a button, and it tells you temperature changes and the guns come on automatically - without snowmaking it was all sweet clover, and the resort would have closed in those odd years. In 1973 there was no snowmaking, there was no snow. I think we opened Merritt's for two weeks in the middle of August for the school holidays and that was it. We skied the top to Kareela and patchy snow in the Basin. That was it for the whole year. So, when we got to the point of developing Friday Flat, all those years came up and '73 was probably the worst, I played tennis every day on my day off. As I said Merritt's opened for two weeks. But snowmaking – it is the same the world over as everybody knows.

Snow making is expensive of course. The saving grace for Thredbo is that they have access to water and the National Park came to the party. They were able to pump water out and put it back in from the mountain, so to speak. There were objections from the Snowy Hydro because they rely on the snow melt for Lake Jindabyne and for all their forecasts. So, all those objections were overcome. It is probably the best investment Thredbo has ever made, as you know, and other people would know. If you look at it, today there would be nobody are skiing. Now all the costs have reduced dramatically – the labour, the maintenance, the electricity – and then you have all the other expenses like snow cats that are only good for three months of the year and for the rest of the time they are in cotton wool. But that is the business. One thing is: that when it snows it is a licence to print money. I was on the lifts for a long time.

Let us go back to your career. You said you were on the lifts for a long time, what happened next?

Well one day I just decided I really wanted to do something else. I really wanted to do something else. I had been a lift manager. I had done my time on the lifts. I felt I wanted to do more so I went and saw Albert van der Lee and said, "I love the lifts, I loved working with John and Errol, it was fantastic, but I want to do more." At that time Wayne Kirkpatrick was running the snow reporting and the courtesy business and that, and in the summertime, he reminded me that he was working on the golf and they were cleaning up the golf course and picking up all the rocks on the golf course. So, I went and saw Wayne, and Albert spoke to Wayne and he said they were looking for somebody, so I went and saw Wayne and we had a chat and an interview as such and he said "Right, you can work for me. I want you to go to a ski show in Melbourne for two weeks." "What, me? I've never been to a ski show!" "You'll be fine. You know Thredbo. You'll know what you are talking about, so go down." I said "OK, I'll go to do the marketing at the ski show."

So I got a bit of advice on what to expect and what you talk about, and that. I loaded up the "old Jim" with a lot of brochures and went to the Melbourne Ski Show. Then other people, who were in single booths like me, were for their first time at a ski show. Wayne gave me confidence, and I knew more than what other people knew, and he was right because I knew Thredbo. So, I went to another ski show at the same time at Newcastle. I met Russel Fairfax who was working for Perisher then. He was in the same boat – he said, "This is my first ski show and I don't know" "You'll be fine Russel!" I got to know Russel, and again I had to – like most other people, I never liked speaking and I thought "Gosh, how am I going to talk to people about Thredbo." I used to be terrified. But they kept coming back. You know you know more than they know. I had to give a talk first to all these travel agents around that area and then Russel had to give a talk, and so I was first, so I just went on and on. And I said to Russel "How did I go?" and he said "You were great. You told them everything." I was really surprised you know because to me I just sounded terrible.

Then I was doing snow reporting on the radio which is another thing when essentially you are a shy person, and you have to get on the radio and talk about the snow. We used to ring up at six in the morning and tape it. In the beginning I would do three, four, five, six or seven tapes on what the conditions were like and what to expect. And Russel over the road, was doing the same thing. I remember working with Wayne, he would just come down the steps from his office and he would do a snow report “Hi, I’m Wayne Kirkpatrick from Thredbo, a beautiful day, this is raining, that is raining, and the snow is fantastic. Come on up, quick!” off the top of his head. I had to write my notes, so I knew what I was saying. I did that for two seasons, I think. It was really, difficult because you would wake up in the morning and you had to be in at six or something like that. It would be dark or raining and you would look out the window.

It would hardly be daylight.

And it was. It would be really, dark, and it would be raining, and you would be saying “Where is it?” and you would be trying to be as honest and as positive as you could be. The difficulty with Thredbo was that because of the elevation it could be raining in the village and just up the next ridge it could be bucketing snow and at night you did not know that. I think there were only two snow cats then I think, and they had no communication, so you had no idea what was happening – it was gut feel and that sort of thing. After a while I got to know somebody in the weather bureau in Canberra so I could ring them at night and try and get an idea as to what the freezing levels might be at a particular time. He was very, very, good this guy. I knew him for many, many years. He always told me what the freezing levels were at Albury and Wagga Wagga, so you had an idea where it rained snow. I did that and I did the snow reports for quite a while, all marketing sales.

Then the people who were running the ticketing office were going. I will not mention who they were. Wayne asked if I would run the ticket office. “Oh, ticket office?” “He said “Yes you can do it.” This was when there was just Valley Terminal. “Okay, I will.” I took over the ticket office for the summer and a winter. The girls there, they were happy. They did not have a problem with a man taking over because they knew more than I knew of course, these were the supervisor girls, but we all gelled. We had great times. I was always happy to defer to them and they were happy to listen to me from my experience and my knowledge of sales and marketing, and the expectations that people have. They were great, the girls. They were absolutely, fantastic.

Then we developed Friday Flat, so we had to design the ticket office so to speak – organise things like safes because security was terrible in those days. I do not think this is a problem now. In those days, a ticket office girl would take the banking from the previous day – there was no ATMs or EFTPOS in those days – so it was all cash and credit cards. You can imagine there was a lot of cash in those days. One morning, this is in the first winter, this is historical, because this is how Thredbo used to operate. One day this girl disappeared, and I said, “Where is so and so?” and they said – this was a learning curve for me – “she’s gone to the Westpac bank to do the banking. “What?” They said, “She’s taken the banking over to the bank, that’s what we do.” And I said, “Not after today”. She would just pick up the banking, put it in a backpack and off she would go to the bank. Mind boggling when you think about it and I said to the supervisor “Has there been a time when she hasn’t come back, and she has gone overseas?” They all laughed but she had not of course. After that I started going over with her and that to me still was not good enough.

At that time, we had the police there and we were all got along very well. They were the cops and knew their job, and they knew that people who were doing what they should not have been doing, but they ran

the place tight. I would ask "What can I do about this?" And they said, "Well we will walk across in the morning and see what needs to be done, blah, blah ..." and so on." They did things they really should not have done, but that was thirty years ago, and it does not really matter now. They were part of a community but acted accordingly. They used to walk over with girl each day. As you can imagine that after a very, busy weekend there was an enormous amount of money to be banked. So that was really, good and took a load off my mind to think that the welfare of an employee was being looked after and that banking was also being looked after.

After a couple of years and with a change of police personnel, who had a different view of being security for the ticket office. They went back to Jindabyne, so we had the issue of change and money. So then Chubb – I think it was Chubb – got involved. They would take the banking from the hotel because the hotel also had the same thing, walking to the bank. We would ring up and order the change etcetera, so one thing led to another. But they were the days, the type of days you know, when you did not have the thought that this is silly.

I guess the decision to retire from Thredbo must have been difficult for you.

Well yes. I was there in the ticket office at Valley Terminal and we only had a small work force. Then Friday Flat became a much larger work force with ticket staff increasing around three quarters fold. Thredbo was going to be a different kettle of fish for new and old skiers to Thredbo with the advent of Friday Flat and the associated lifting, car parking and restaurants. To offset this and to ease people into the new Thredbo we introduced a courtesy team for Thredbo when Friday Flat opened. We had information booths at Friday Flat and Valley Terminal they were called "Rockets" and they were a brilliant innovation. The initial crew for Courtesy was 12 for the first year and their role was to man the information rockets at Valley Terminal and Friday Flat as well as free roaming to assist the visitors. It was without a doubt and interesting and challenging time for us at Thredbo.

If organizing that part of it was not demanding enough, I was given the task of organizing courtesy buses for the village as well as from the new car parks at Friday Flat and there was about 6 weeks to do it and I knew nothing about buses. I eventually got the small village courtesy buses through a business in Cooma and they supplied the drivers. I was then able to buy second hand large "Panther" buses through a company in Canberra. Luckily, they were surplus to their needs and were well priced, but the drivers were our responsibility. We bought 3 plus 1 for spare parts. Upon telling the maintenance department what we were about to buy, they thought we were crazy but then they were told that there really was not any option as time was short. They were very against it suggesting that it would not work but I did say "you will make it work." They certainly very, interesting times back then.

When we were building Friday Flat it seemed a natural that we needed communication with Valley terminal. Valley terminal was where we had computerised data entry for the day's work. We were partly computerised but did not have computerised ticketing which was in its infancy. All the data was inputted which gave us many reports on the day's sales. As we were building Friday Flat, I was involved in what was required as far as ticketing meant, number of windows, layout of ticket booths, safe requirements, and the purchase of a safe. Safes of course are expensive, but we were able to buy a second hand one, which was a little bigger than we wanted, and the safe room was built for it. I was able to convince the architects that requirement for future technology be put in, extra cabling to the ticket booths and other areas etc.

That was the easy part, next I had to convince Wayne Kirkpatrick that we needed extra cabling to Friday Flat from the Valley terminal for real time connection as the server for the data inputting originated in

valley terminal ticket office. Remember this was in 1987 and no wireless etc in those days. This was not a cheap exercise but for then and in the future, it was absolutely, essential.

It was felt at the time by the powers that be at the time that sending data by bus to be inputted to Valley terminal would somehow be okay. After months of regularly requesting the funds for this link to happen, I was asked "Do you really believe in this?" "Yes" I said and then I was told you have the money get it done. It was a harrowing time and at times I thought that it would not happen, but it did, and we never looked back. Many requests were always looked at on the basis, nice to have, need to have, must have. The opening of the Friday Flat area and the associated infrastructure including snowmaking was a truly, exciting time for Thredbo and surprisingly to some extent it went exceptionally well in the first year.

The Friday Flat ski hire was also opened at this time and was run by a company out of Jindabyne.

It was after a few years it was realised that Thredbo should be operating this facility giving us control over the product not to mention the revenue generated. It was at this time that I was asked to manage the ski hire operations, again no experience of running this type of business. Luckily for me I was able to find and hire Graeme Holloway to manage the ski hire and with his knowledge and experience in this field, we were able to keep the ski hire ticking along nicely and to be the business it is today.

Then came the World Cup in 1989 and what a fantastic time it was to put Thredbo on the map as it were with the running of this fabulous event. It was a difficult time, being an average snow season, with everyone working their butts off to make it happen. The night before the opening day it looked being a disaster as the weather was extremely warm with drizzle and the courses were starting to suffer and there was even a suggestion of covering the courses with tarpaulins, a left field idea. Then that night the weather changed, and the mountain froze so that in the morning it was rock hard with a nice day to boot and the event was huge success.

1989 was also a very sad year as we lost 2 of our Thredbo family at the beginning of winter and though it is 30 years this year (2019) it seems like yesterday. After Wayne Kirkpatrick left Thredbo, David Osborn who was the general manager of Falls Creek was hired to replace Wayne. David Osborn was a completely different type of person to Wayne Kirkpatrick, chalk and cheese one might say one being an entrepreneur, and the other being one might say, an accountant. The culture of Thredbo management, in particular to Falls Creek once again was chalk and cheese. Thredbo believed that management, to be part of the business should know how the business is travelling, particularly with regards to skier and ski school days and so on.

But before that, and what completely changed Thredbo, I did not mention this to Randy, but it was afterwards that I thought about it, the biggest change was moving the staff to Jindabyne. That was for economic reasons and the value of the beds in Thredbo and that's how land value to some extent was determined, being taken up by staff accommodation for only a few months of the year. From that day on, Thredbo changed forever, because if you had three or four hundred staff living in the village, they created the atmosphere. They spent the money in the village. They did not spend it in Jindabyne. If you had a bad start to the season or bad seasons or average starts, the staff would create fun for themselves and this flowed on to the guests.

Yes

Carnival Week was a prime example of that. Carnival Week started out 1973, because of the poor winter from beginning to end. We just had a few things like table tennis competitions and that, and then each year it became bigger and bigger. I met many people that I knew and people that had worked in lodges,

had booked their holiday for Carnival Week because they had such a fun time being part of the whole event you know. It was strictly run by staff, organised by staff, the whole thing. Over the years, the Company became involved then the whole thing changed. It was a balance thing – if it was a bad season, you had all those staff, it was fun, there was always something happening. Everybody went out at night. They did things, they had a competition, whatever it might have been, and the customers in the lodges knew that but once the staff went, the whole vibe went. Anybody reading this would agree with me 100%. It was to Jindabyne's benefit, because those three hundred or so people were going to Jindabyne. People had a different feel about Thredbo - the staff.

Another great aspect of Thredbo was the weekly NASTAR staff races. Lodges, shop keepers and departments of KT would all provide teams for this weekly event and it was an excellent way to meet others who were working in Thredbo outside of a bar environment. It was a fabulous time for all involved. Those who were a part of it would never forget. Great days

Then it changed again for all different reasons: OH&S became a reality. Staff could not ski after work. They could not ski in their lunch hour. Basically, they could not ski at any time whilst working. Worker's comp became a big issue and cost factor. The way of life for Thredbo had to change. I understand the realities of life today but that was the fun part of Thredbo. All those little extras, that made the job much more bearable, and if you like, enjoyable. It became more of a business than it had previous, it was always a business. I am not speaking out of turn that is just the reality of it and everybody would agree with me. Old skiers often comment about that. How it changed dramatically after the staff left - sad.

Slowly the attitude to the volunteer ski patrol was changing as well. The volunteer ski patrol to some were a bit of a nuisance sometimes, but all in all their attitude and desire was always in the right place and in fact were a great bunch of people. I was always of the opinion that we needed the 'vollies' or weekend warriors as they were called, as we did not have the necessary number of Pro ski patrollers to effectively patrol the mountain particularly on the weekends when rostered days could be covered by the 'vollies.' During my time managing the ticket office I suggested to Wayne Kirkpatrick "I believe we, KT, should introduce an incentive program for the volunteer Ski Patrol, and in doing so KT would recognize the efforts and dedication of the 'vollies.' It would be run by the 'vollies' and managed by them and KT would provide the benefit. They, Ski Patrol would give me a name and KT would provide them the benefit." The incentive reward at the end of the season was to be a season pass for the patroller or patrollers to do what they wanted with it. It was an appreciation for their efforts. I think it was ten or fifteen days they needed to patrol. I nor KT had an input into as to who would be the recipients.

I ran this idea by Joe de Falco and George Freuden outlining our reason and outlining that KT would not have any involvement in the process except providing the letters of congratulations to the appropriate people. They thought it was a great idea and that they were being recognized for their efforts. There would be a season's pass at the end of it for the volunteers. I think it was George or Joe di Falco who gave me the names at the end of the season, and I would write the letters and say, "Well done, congratulations, thank you for your help" and they could give it to whoever they wanted to or whatever.

Was it a battle to get it?

No, there was no hesitation. Wayne Kirkpatrick saw the benefits. In all instances, if you could provide a business case so to speak on an idea then there was good chance it would happen. And to this day I believe it has been retained.

When did you return?

A new resort centre accommodation centre was built and the new general manager, David Osborn wanted me to manage this facility and in particular the accommodation side of it. So, I went from the ticket office, ski hire etc, to the new resort centre, but felt that I was a real estate person which I did not want to be and to be somewhat isolated from the business that I believed I was good at. I was put in a position where I couldn't say "No." I did not want to do it but after a time I decided that my heart would never be in it so decided to leave KT. I was happy with the decision, though sad of course.

I always said to Wayne Kirkpatrick and he knows this, that he was the best thing for Thredbo. He was always about educating people. At end of season conferences, we would talk to people at conferences about managing people, negotiating skills and the whole thing. Some managers would say "Another conference, blah, blah..." and I would say I would attend a conference every day of the week if someone would want to educate me, I would be happy to do it because I learnt so much.

I missed Thredbo, loved the people, loved the seasonality of it. People would often say "What do you miss?" and I would say "The people I worked with" but also the seasonality: the first drop of the autumn leaf, the first snowfall and then the burst of spring. It really was a fantastic time to work in Thredbo, exhausting at times and very, hard work at times but very, rewarding. There is a very, special place in my heart for Thredbo.

Have you been back?

I have been back a few times skiing and passing through, and I did see in the year 2000 at the top of Kosciusko. For what it is worth, and it is difficult not to run a critical eye over what I see, you see things that make you sad. I have always said that the best thing to happen to Thredbo, in my opinion, was Wayne Kirkpatrick. Along with developing the resort he was always about developing the skills of the managers. Always remembered "Whatever we do, how will it affect the customers?" A good mantra to work by. There does not need to be anything else said.

Thank you very much Wayne.



Wayne Stinson, friend and Gary Cordova