

**THREDBO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## **Nan Adler, on behalf of the Adler Family – An Oral History**

**Interviewed by Edie Swift, Sydney, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2015**



**Larry and Nan Adler**

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**NAN ADLER – AN ORAL HISTORY**  
**Interviewed by Edith Swift, Sydney, June 25th 2015**

Today it is June 25th, 2015, and I am interviewing Nanette Adler and we are going to talk about her husband, Larry Adler as well. We are at her house in Sydney. I am Edie Swift and I am interviewing for the Thredbo Historical Society.

***We can now talk about your parents and your grandparents, if you can remember***

Well, my maiden name was Craig and I was the eldest daughter of Jack and Isobel. I had two sisters, Dienne and Sue Anne and younger brother, David. My grandfather David Craig was the founder of Boral (Bitumen Oil Refineries), that is now one of our major public companies. He was a well-known entrepreneur in his time, involved with starting Caltex Oil, Smith Chips and Lifesavers here in Australia. My mother's maiden name was Torbett. Her father was Moderator of the Presbyterian church. Her grandfather, Robert Davidson, was also a Presbyterian minister at Port Macquarie. He was well known in the area and was elected to federal parliament as a member of the liberal party for the Northern Rivers region. A position he held for many years.

My parents married during the war. They were serving in the Army 2nd 3rd Casualty Clearing Station in the Middle East and were married in Palestine in 1941. My mother was a trained nurse and together they had four children. It was just after I finished my nursing training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital that I went on a holiday to Charlotte Pass. It was here learning to ski and that is where I met my husband, Larry.

***How did you learn to ski? Were you taking lessons up there?***

Yes, I took lessons and Larry was my instructor. Of course, everybody always laughs that I married my ski instructor. Larry, whose real name is actually Dudley John Adler (nick named Larry after Larry Adler the harmonica player well known at the time), was a South African. His father Joseph was a dentist from Johannesburg. His mother Margot came from England and together they had two sons, Dudley and Julian. Both boys studied Pharmacy. Like all young Australians, Canadians and South Africans in the 1950's-1960's after graduating everyone headed for Mother England. It was a rite of passage to work in London hitch hike around Europe, stay in youth hostels, belong to the overseas visitor club in Earls Court and play rugby.

Larry was no exception. He ended up in London as a pharmacist and it while touring Europe staying in a youth hostel in Norway at the age of 27 he saw snow for the first time.

He fell in love with skiing and ended up with the job of peeling potatoes for the remaining winter so he could stay and learn to ski.



It was while in Norway and it being so cold and with no hot water in the youth hostel, Larry grew a beard. Out of the blue he noticed an advertisement for film extras in the movie the Vikings, starring Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis and Vivien Leigh. They wanted strong males with a beard who could row a boat to be a Viking. Larry applied and for the next 6 months toured with the company landing further small parts in the film and helping with production. He was asked to attend the opening of the movie on Broadway which lead him to apply to do a ski instructors course in Canada while there. This resulted in him being offered his first job teaching skiing at Mt Tremblant in the Laurentians 80 miles outside Montreal. For the next 8 years he worked as a ski school director with Ernie McCulluck, a well know Canadian ski racer, during the winter while practised pharmacy in Toronto over the summer months.

In the early 60's a fellow Canadian ski instructor, Heli Summerau, invited Larry to fly over to Australia for



*Larry teaching at Mt Tremblant - 1960*

the southern hemisphere winter season and teach with him in Charlottes Pass.

What was it like at Charlotte Pass then, and what year was that?

He came to Australia in 1960. There were just two instructors at Charlottes Pass. The Chalet was owned by the NSW Railways Department. There was an old rope tow and people in those times still wore the lace-up boots and skied on 2m length skis with bear-trap bindings. Primitive by today's standards but it was a delightful, family friendly area.

I can remember it was fifteen pounds (approx. \$30 in today's currency) everything included for the entire week, accommodation, lifts and ski hire. We all travelled from Sydney on the train to Cooma. It was overnight, it must have been hours and hours because we arrived in Cooma in the early morning. I remember we all had a huge Australian breakfast of steak, bacon and eggs with white toast in the old Paragon Restaurant opposite the railway station. Then went by bus to Perisher and snowcat over snow into Charlottes Pass arriving late afternoon. It was quite a long trip but a real sense of adventure. We all stayed in dormitories, one for girls and one for boys and dined at big long tables with white starched tablecloths and silver cutlery. Grace was said before the meal, afterwards we gathered in the lounge room, rug rolled up and danced the night away. The dancing in those days was the old favourite barn dance, waltz and Pride of Erin. The girls all sat around the walls waiting anxiously for the boys, especially the ski instructors, to ask them to dance.

***Who was there? Do you remember some of the people?***

There was Stan McQuinn the manager of the Chalet and I remember Kenny Rouse who played the piano. Then there was Brian Davidson, ski patroller come barman, a well-known Chalet identity and Bondi Life Saver. Nice girls did not drink alcohol and I can remember feeling bold sitting in the bar stool in the Chalet bar listening to all his stories of the mountains, often highly exaggerated, trying very hard not to fall to the temptation of having a drink. Everyone knew of Davo's reputation of persuasion with young ladies. The male staff quarters nicknamed the Boulevard of broken dreams. There were three other ski clubs at Charlottes Pass beside the Chalet, as I remember at the time Kosciusko Alpine Club, Southern Alps and Ski Club of Australia.

***Do you remember Sasha? Was she there?***

Sasha had left for Thredbo at that time. But I did get to meet her years later at Thredbo and remember her with much fondness.

***Who were the ski instructors at the Chalet in those days?***

In those days, it was just Heli Summereau and Larry and then when I went in 1963, two more Canadian instructors, John Hannah and Bob Maclean and later Hans Ambush, known as Big Hans, an Austrian from Cooma, joined the team. I can remember Hans being a big man that skied like a ballet dancer, so light he seemed to float down the hill.

***Where did you go from there? You know after you met your husband?***

After the Chalet, I headed to London with some old nursing





*Nan & Larry 1964*

friends, and Larry returned to teach at Mt Tremblant. While in London and working night duty there were endless long-distance phone calls to Canada, with me crying how cold and miserable I was. In desperation and with the cost of the phone calls going through the roof, Larry proposed. He always jokes that it was cheaper to marry than pay the phone bills. We got married at Hampstead Heath, in the old St Johns Presbyterian Church, with a small group of nursing friends and spent our honeymoon driving through Europe before settling on Jersey, one of the Channel Islands, for the summer. Larry managing the St Helier French pharmacy and I the emergency department at the general hospital.

This was in 1964 after which we headed back to Mt Tremblant for Larry's last year ski instructing before returning to Sydney under pressure from our parents to so called "settle down".



*Larry the pharmacist - 1964*

### *In what year was that?*

It was 1965. Not long after our return we purchased a pharmacy at Long Reef Collaroy on the Northern Beaches. With our connections to skiing it was not long before we had request from friends and people in the industry to start a ski shop.

Larry was spending his spare time repairing his friend's skis in our garage at home, and it wasn't long before they were coming into the pharmacy wanting him to fit ski boots between scripts. One thing led to another and we converted a small corner beside the dispensary and filled it with ski accessories and gloves, socks and hats.

A year or so later we decided to turn our hobby into a ski shop, starting upstairs in the two-bedroom apartment above the pharmacy. People thought we were "crazy", a ski shop on the northern beaches in Sydney, a hot country – upstairs above a pharmacy "but we were young and had a dream". No business plan, no money but it took off

and we grew and grew. It was 1976 that we officially formed the company Adler Nominees Pty Ltd trading as Larry Adler Ski Shop and moved the ski shop from upstairs into the small supermarket space next door to the chemist.

We cut an arch way between both business and Larry spent his days running between both. We have lots of photos of Larry in his Ben Casey pharmacy coat fitting ski boots between looking after little old ladies with their scripts. We were rapidly running out of space and during the mid 1980's purchased the little old corner store where our flagship store is now located. Still in Long Reef only a few hundred yards away along Pittwater road, we wanted to build our dream "purpose built ski shop". We had been travelling overseas skiing at leading resorts in USA, Europe for years and taken thousands of photos of ski retail outlets. Our main brief was 'it was to look like a ski lodge, be warm and comfortable with a fireplace' Persian carpets, leather couches and fresh flowers. I had also been collecting ski memorabilia and antiques for a long time and wanted to create an atmosphere that customers could relate to, come into the store and feel at home. The store was completed in 1991 and 2 years later we opened in Thredbo.



*The 1st Ski-shop in the pharmacy in 1967*



***Where did you buy your skis from?***

We purchased most of them from the Australian importers. In the late 1980's my eldest son had his own importing company, LA Imports and was the Australian distributor of HEAD. We now purchase direct with various importers. We have for over 30 years had exclusive rights to Strolz custom made ski boots from Lech Austria and still to this day specialise in the foaming and problem boot fitting. Larry has been the official boot fitter to the National team for as long as I can remember. Between both of us, with my nursing, and Larry his pharmacy background, both very interested medically and believe strongly in the importance of properly fitted ski boots Without which you will not enjoy skiing and sore feet will spoil your holiday absolutely.

From the very beginning feet and the correct fitting of boots became a passion with Larry. For years he studied and attended dozens of podiatry seminars. We also got to know the Strolz family in Lech am Arlberg in Austria and had our staff work there to learn about design and manufacture of Strolz boots. In return Strolz family members have spent time in Australia promoting and training custom made foam techniques over many years.



*Larry fitting boots in 1984*

To get back to your question, we also import the Level ski and snowboard gloves. Also, the well-known and very popular Japanese ski and outdoor brand, Montbell. Bogner and Norwegian Dale sweaters. It is a very small industry worldwide. Everybody works together, everybody seems to know, whether its Japan, America or Canada, who you are. We all meet up at the trade shows interestingly most of the companies are family owned, with children of the original founders following in their parent's footsteps.

***And what do you think of these skis that came out with a huge shovel, and that came in?***

There was a big change and when it happened we haven't seen a big change since then. But that has worked very well. It is very hard every year to think "What next?" It's like when snowboarding came in. It was a big change. Then the answer to that – the ski companies came up with big wider skis so that people could still get that same sensation as snowboarding. I think the figures now keep changing but skiing is about 60% of the market and snowboarding is 40% but falling.

***Do you do the snowboarding?***

I don't but my children have snowboards, and are very good but they prefer skiing. The young one's love to snowboard, it is trendier. Larry being an instructor and most people in the industry believe that children should learn to ski first and get their balance before snowboarding. You shouldn't do it in reverse. In fact, I know at the Chalet, and whilst I am not 100% sure, I am pretty sure at Perisher and Thredbo, it is the same, that small children under the age of seven will only be given lessons on skis.

***Do you have the snowboards in your shop?***

Yes. We do

***Where do you get those from?***

We buy them from Australian distributors.

***And what do you think with these new skis now? That have the wide shovel? What difference did that make to the skiing? Were the boots the same?***

Boots when I started in the 60's were the old leather lace-ups. Then the market went to plastic and buckle system. There are improvements every year with various functions. There is foam moulded inners, heating



systems, walk modes, boots are far more comfortable now, better fit and high performance. There is a boot for everybody, all sizes and shapes and custom made for special problems.

***You don't do the cross-country skis in the ski shop?***

No. We used to do cross country. It is such a tiny section of the market, about one percent, not worth the stock holding from a business point of view. We decided over ten years ago to allow somebody else who specialises, to do it and do it properly. We decided to concentrate on skiing and snowboarding.

***You have various stores – there is another store besides the Collaroy store?***

We opened our new flagship store in the early '90s, then two years later opened in Thredbo. We were in Thredbo for twelve years when we decided to open in Nuggets Crossing, Jindabyne, as it was the gateway to both Perisher and Thredbo, larger premises with year-round trading. About the same time, 2002 we had the opportunity in Kent St Sydney CBD to take over the Patagonia store, then within a matter of months the Snowgum store was closing in Archer St Chatswood so we secured that site as well.

It was a hectic 12 months opening 3 stores in such a short time, but they have all done very well.

In 2007 an old school friend of my sons approached us with the opportunity of starting a store in Niseko Japan. He had a development site in a great position, near the ski lift. We jumped in primarily as a rental outlet for all Australian who were going there in the thousands. At that time, it was very economical to ski there with the best powder snow in the world. Today after a decade of huge infrastructure and high-rise unit developments, prices have risen and Niseko has become extremely popular with the wealth Singapore and Hong Kong market.

In 2009 Rebel decided to get out of the ski industry and close their Jindabyne outlet.

We were growing at a rapid rate and needed more space for rental, so took over their space and “Larry Adler Rentaski” was born. Now in Jindabyne we have two large stores. – One our retail boutique in the front of Nuggets Crossing and over the other side of the parking area the “Larry Adler Rentaski”.

***Do some of your family work in the ski shop?***

Our children grew living and breathing the ski shop. They have always worked in the store helping mark stock, going to trade shows etc. Every holiday they were taken skiing. We are members of the Kosciusko Alpine Club and spent every school holidays either at Charlottes Pass, Perisher or Thredbo. The children all race and were part of their school ski teams. When leaving school, they spent time working in Whistler Canada and past the Canadian ski instructor's certification.

They obtained further experience in the industry working with Strolz in Lech Austria during university holidays. While attending university all of them worked part time in our stores together with most of their friends. My eldest son Larry worked in the business for ten years before he left to join the IT industry. He now has his own company and looks after our website and social media.

The other three children are all in the business so I count myself very lucky.

They love it and have huge dreams between them.

My second son Craig, is very like his father. He loves the boot fitting and workshop. Very technical and hands on. He manages our Chatswood store.

My daughter Skye, the next in line, did graphic design and looks after our marketing and merchandising. Then my youngest son Scott is the financial controller and equipment buyer.

***You are also in the business?***

Yes. Larry my husband, is now retired but loves coming into the store and spending time talking about old times with customers. I love the industry and have been skiing for 55 years. It is hard to walk away but I am giving more and more responsibility to the children who are doing a great job. I still love travelling and doing the fashion buying and designing new stores. Our whole life has revolved around the snow and we have many friends worldwide that are connected in some way to the ski industry. The ski industry has been very good to us.

***And you do get to ski in lots of places?***

I do. The ski industry is a life style obviously. It involves a lot of travel and with luck time to ski. We work very hard and long hours. It never changes, we live from one season to the next. When it is good it is very good. When it is bad it is horrible. We chew our finger nails down to the bone waiting for the first snow fall every season. I make no apologies with my children or staff, when it snows there is heaps of work to make the most of it and ride out the low times. No different to farmers with drought. The ski industry is the same.

Well thank you so much. This was so interesting.

Would you donate this to Thredbo Historical Society?

Of course.

It is very interesting. Thank you.

ORAL HISTORY CONSENT FORM

I, *NANETTE ADLER*, donate this oral history to the Thredbo Historical Society.

The Thredbo Historical Society may transcribe the tapes if they wish. The tapes will be open to the public, as will be the transcript.

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Interviewee.....*Nanette Adler*..... Date.....*25/6/15*.....

Interviewer.....*Edie Swift*..... Date.....*25/6/15*.....