



## Michael Nekvapil – Sasha’s Lodge - Reminisces



### *Sasha's Lodge - 1959*

*Photo: Karel Nekvapil - 1959*

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*Michael Nekvapil – Sasha's Lodge - Reminisces*

Our going to Thredbo had a deeply personal background, most of which I cannot allude to here. It gives some context to the building of Sasha's Lodge.



*Antonin Sponar & Sasha Nekvapilova – Czechoslovakia - late 1940's*

do yearly from 1952 to 1958.

It was Toni who invited Sasha to be the instructor for The Chalet; and it was Sasha who introduced Toni to Eric Nicholls.

In this first photo, taken in then Czechoslovakia, in the late 1940s, my mother, Sasha Nekvapil (ova) is with Toni Sponar. They were the two outstanding Czech ski champions of the time. By January 1949, both were refugees, living in St Anton am Arlberg, in the Austrian mountains, along with my father, Karel Nekvapil, and my uncle, Sasha's brother, Frank Prihoda, each with their own story of escape from Czech communist rule. Together they forged a survival bond which, soon after, continued in their new home country of Australia.

Here they are together at The Chalet, both as ski instructors, a role Sasha continued to

Toni had the vision that the site of Thredbo could be developed as an international ski resort. The meeting with Eric later led to Toni's official engagement to begin the physical establishment of Thredbo Village.

In 1958, when I was 8 years old, my parents drove me to Thredbo and told me that this is where we were going to live. A single child, knowing subconsciously of my displaced beginnings and having only lived in Melbourne, I looked around me. I saw the three or four buildings already established, the long grass, the endless bush, I heard the silence. I had just experienced the hole-



*Karel & Sasha Nekvapil – The Chalet – Mid 1950's*

ridden muddy dirt track we had driven on and the time taken to complete the drive, even from Jindabyne. My heart sank. It was to sink lower when I realized a consequence of this decision was to be boarding school.



*Bela's Corner - Thredbo mid 1950's*

Bela's Corner in the mid 1950s; to give an idea of the state of the road:

By June 1959 the first half of Sasha's Lodge was completed, ready for their first ski season in Australia. The three of us lived in one room with a single bed and a double bunk.

Karel's previous work as a hotelier,

both in Brno and in Melbourne and Queensland, prepared him well to run a ski lodge, with Sasha's help.

It was Karel who had this vision for how a migrant family might find a livelihood in their new land, founded on their life in their old land. Sasha was anxious about the financial commitment to move to such a remote part of Australia, dependent only on Toni Sponar's belief in Thredbo's future and on her husband's creative gamble. I would have agreed with her at the time.

It was a genius move. It allowed them to work out of their cultural heritage and provide an experience that some Australians were longing for. Most fortunate, they were respected and admired for their 'being different', a change from the initial discrimination they sometimes experienced in the city.

It's a remarkable thing, given the centuries of cultural life and history of Central Europe, the books that could be written on the complex relationships between Hungary and Czechoslovakia and their shared border, to find, in two separate personal cases, as the dust of homelessness settled, that a family of Czechs was given a block of land, in the middle of nowhere,



*Kornel Deseo (Candlelight) & Karel Nekvapil (Sasha's Lodge) – Thredbo early 1960's*

next to a block of land already somewhat established by a family of Hungarians, with a shared common border, the 'fence line', source of many future disagreements.

Suzie and Kornel Deseo were the first to build a ski lodge, Candlelight, for accommodation in Thredbo. Sasha and Karel built soon after. A microcosm of world history, landed in the middle of nowhere, Thredbo Village of the late 1950s. Despite their various disagreements, I favor this photo showing that Kornel and Karel had more in common than their day-to-day differences. I can't begin to think how each was confronted daily by their cultural histories and that the resolution was to be forged in the mountain bush.

By 1961, the second half of Sasha's Lodge was built. It could now accommodate many people. Karel ran the kitchen and the quality, and quantity, of food provided was celebrated.



*Sasha's Lodge – Thredbo - Mid 1960's*

Sasha began to import ski wear, storing it in a wardrobe in the front room, as seen at the front of this photo.

The wardrobe, soon was insufficient, was taken over by the small room itself.

Eventually an entrance was built for off-the-street access.



*Sasha & Karel Nekvapil - Guests Lounge Room, Sasha's Lodge - Thredbo - Mid 1960's*

Sasha and Karel in the guest lounge room in front of the Kachelofen:

On the balcony; both pictures are from the mid 1960s.

By the start of the 1970s, Karel and Sasha, and the wonderful Ursula Weissflog, very capable manager of the lodge and of people, had had enough of the intensity of providing clean rooms and three meals a day.



*Sasha's Lodge balcony - Sasha & Karel Nekvapil – Thredbo - Mid 1960's*

They decided to build a set of apartments next door and to sell Sasha's Lodge to Karel's brother, Jan Nekvapil, and his wife Jari. The changeover took place around the end of 1971 and the start of 1972.



*Karel, Michael, & Sasha Nekvapil with Ursula Weissflog - Sasha's Lodge – Thredbo - early 1970's*

Uncle Jan had owned and managed a business in Brno, Czechoslovakia, a restaurant and night club called *The Black Bear*. Hence the change of name from *Sasha's Lodge*:



*The Black Bear Inn Insignia*

The new apartments were called *Sasha's Apartments and Sportswear Shop*. A well designed shop was the heart of the new building and from there Sasha passed on her knowledge and love of skiwear fashion to Australian ski enthusiasts. In 1980, Karel and Sasha sold the apartments, having had enough of village life. They moved to '*Sasha's Farm*', on the Alpine Way towards Jindabyne.

Today, the apartments are simply called *Sasha's*.



*The Black Bear Inn*



*Sasha's Apartments - Thredbo Village*



*Sasha Nekvapilova - Sasha's Apartments Thredbo - 1980*



*Black Bear - Thredbo 2021*

I think I'll call it quits there. I haven't mentioned my own experience of growing up as a single child in this beautiful part of the world.

*Michael Nekvapil: Melbourne April 2021*

*Editor: Jerry Krejzar: Sydney April 2021*