



THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

PASSIONATE ABOUT ALPINE HERITAGE

NEWSLETTER OF THE THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

FRANK PRIHODA **100 YEARS**



AUSTRALIA'S OLDEST LIVING OLYMPIAN!



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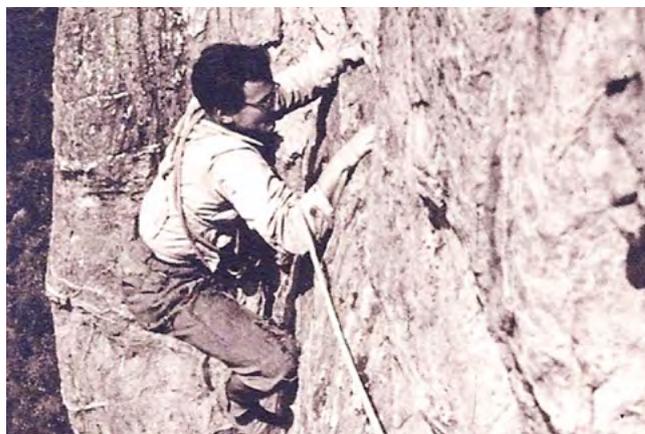
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FRANK PRIHODA, THREDBO LEGEND - 100 YEARS ON

Frantisek (Frank) Prihoda was born on July 8th, 1921 in Prague, Czechoslovakia and became a companion to his sister Sasha who was a couple of years older. Frank's first love was sport and athletics, especially running. At 13 or 14 he became more interested in skiing and participated in his first ski race which came to an abrupt halt when his thick glasses froze over and he couldn't see the course. At races whenever the sun shone his times were good, but Frank's greatest handicap in ski racing was his poor eyesight.

Frank took ski training seriously and to stay in top physical form in summer he would go rock-climbing on the cliff faces in 'Cesky Raj' (Czech Paradise). From 1936 he trained with the Czechoslovakian Ski Federation squad until 1940, after which all ski training activities ceased. Frank and Sasha continued to ski illegally and nobody could stop them because

they were privileged members of the Ski Federation Squad. During the war Frank had to work in his parents' factory which manufactured artificial flowers. Once his parents died; the ensuing responsibilities gave him little time for ski race training.



*Frank Prihoda rock climbing in Czech Paradise -
Early 1940's*

FRANK PRIHODA, THREDBO LEGEND - 100 YEARS ON

Frank Prihoda was one of the small band of people who escaped Europe after World War II and eventually wound up in Thredbo. He escaped with Karel Nekvapil, the husband of Frank's sister Sasha, and it was co-ordinated with the escapes of Sasha and of their friend and fellow skier Tony Sponar. The Communist government having cancelled all passports and closed Czechoslovakia's borders with its western neighbours, subterfuge was needed to get out. Sasha had an excuse for being outside the country (she was a member of the Czechoslovakian women's team competing in Switzerland) and Tony, a member of the men's team, was able to convince the authorities that his portable ski lift would be of value in the team's training activities at St Christoph — but Frank and Karel had to use a more dangerous means of escape. They risked armed border guards while crossing on skis from Bohemia to Austria through a forest and over a frozen lake. In Austria after a very nervous few hours, their escape remained incomplete: they had to avoid detection by the Russians because they were in the Russian occupation sector. Nothing was easy about all this, and at one stage they were detained and had to bribe with ten US dollars — a very considerable sum — a local chief of police to be allowed to get to Vienna. Eventually they made their way there and to St Christoph where they joined Sponar as had been planned in Czechoslovakia.

The pair helped Sponar install and operate his jeep-based ski lift, on a site that had never previously had uphill transport facilities, and they remained in nearby St Anton for about three months. Frank remembers at least one incident from that period with fondness: he had the task of taking the jeep's battery to St Anton for recharging. That job was done easily enough, but on his way back to St Christoph a blizzard blew up and, in whiteout conditions, he skied over a cornice and wound up in deep snow in the valley below it. He was trapped, mouth and glasses full of snow and in a situation from

which extrication was extremely difficult without external help — of which none was available. He fought his way out eventually, battery acid eating away at his parka and rucksack all the while, and got the battery back to the jeep. Risks had to be taken to keep the lift operating!

After departing St Anton Frank and Karel made it safely to Belgium where they stayed for several more months. In due course Frank secured a berth on the *Cyrenia*, a Greek passenger ship bound for far-off Melbourne. He arrived in early 1950. He soon found work in the manufacture of artificial flowers, a field that he and his family had been involved in back in Prague. For a time he considered getting into the mining of mica, which was used in insulating electrical installations, but his investigations in the Australian interior suggested that that would not be particularly lucrative.

In Czechoslovakia Frank had been a competent skier, having taken up the sport in his early teens. Big sister Sasha was a significant influence here. By his own admission he was not outstanding on skis — his poor eyesight was a serious problem, especially in bad weather — but he stood out on the slopes of Mt Buller which he skied for the first time during his second Australian winter. Regarded by the locals as an expert, he did some informal coaching, and he enjoyed the social life of the Melbourne University Ski Club and the other alpine clubs and their lodges. The Victorian ski fields were taking off at this time, the state government having allowed the development of private and club lodges since 1948 — unlike NSW which lagged on this particular score.

Frank also skied in the Victorian, NSW and Australian ski championships and came to know the racing areas of the Australian ski fields well. Performing effectively in racing mode, he won selection in the Australian team for the 1956 Winter Olympics at Cortina d'Ampezzo for the slalom and grand slalom events. This earned

FRANK PRIHODA, THREDBO LEGEND - 100 YEARS ON

him and the other four skiers on the team a long trip away, including time in Zurs, Austria for training before the Games proper. Their trip was subsidised to a degree, but the members had to pay part of their way.

Frank's knowledge of the world of skiing and his proficiency on the slopes marked him as suitable for administrative activity as well. In 1958 he was asked to become the chairman of the Race Committee of the Victorian Ski Association, which required him to organise races on Mt Buller. This meant setting courses, organising gates and marshalling the small armies of volunteer gatekeepers and timekeepers and all the paraphernalia that goes with them such as radio and field telephone communications. Before long, he became the President of the Association, an unusual distinction for a recent migrant but a clear recognition of his familiarity with and understanding of the skiing scene. Much later, he became involved in seniors' racing and participated in it both in Australia and on his periodic return visits to Europe.

In 1974, Frank left Melbourne and became a resident of Thredbo where he soon became a significant identity. From the start he involved himself in the life of the village, ran a gift shop, became a foundation member of the Thredbo Historical Society and in 2000 had pride of place in the carrying of the Olympic Torch in Thredbo. Sasha also carried it there. Much respected as an elder citizen of the village, Frank had the honour of lighting the cauldron on the Village Green where the torch burned for a night before resuming its journey to Sydney.

He served as a long-term committee member and vice-president of the Thredbo Historical Society and gave it much of his time. He also provided sound advice as to the courses of action it should take, for example in developing the museum. Always well regarded, he became one of the first life members of the Society.

Chas Keyes and Jerry Krejzar



Jono Brauer - and Frank - AOC celebrates 99th birthday of Australia's Oldest Olympian - Frank Prihoda



Frank's 'Girls' - just a small number of Frank's many female friends -



Frank Prihoda and Christine Davy - recipients of the Snow Australia Medal for Alpine Skiing - June 2020

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Four Czechs escaped the imminent totalitarian grasp of communism enveloping their homeland - formerly known as Czechoslovakia. They made their way separately to Sankt Anton am Arlberg.

The Czech National ski champion Tony Sponar was the first to flee Prague just after Christmas in December 1948 in Frank Prihoda's World War Two jeep. Soon thereafter on 15th January 1949 Karel Nekvapil and Frank Prihoda left Prague at night to also make their escape over the Czech Austrian border by gliding silently across a frozen lake on cross-country skis.



Tony Sponar, Frank Prihoda and Karel Nekvapil utilizing the World War 2 jeep for the mechanised lift up to Brunnenkopf - 1949

Later in that same winter of 1949 Sasha Nekvapil simply slipped off a train at the Swiss station of Zurich-Enge in transit after a race-meeting in Grindelwald; unbeknown to her fellow team members of the communist Czechoslovakian Ski Federation on their journey home to Prague. This audacious plan was surreptitiously hatched the year prior, to join her brother Frank, husband Karel, and Tony in St Anton in the Arlberg.

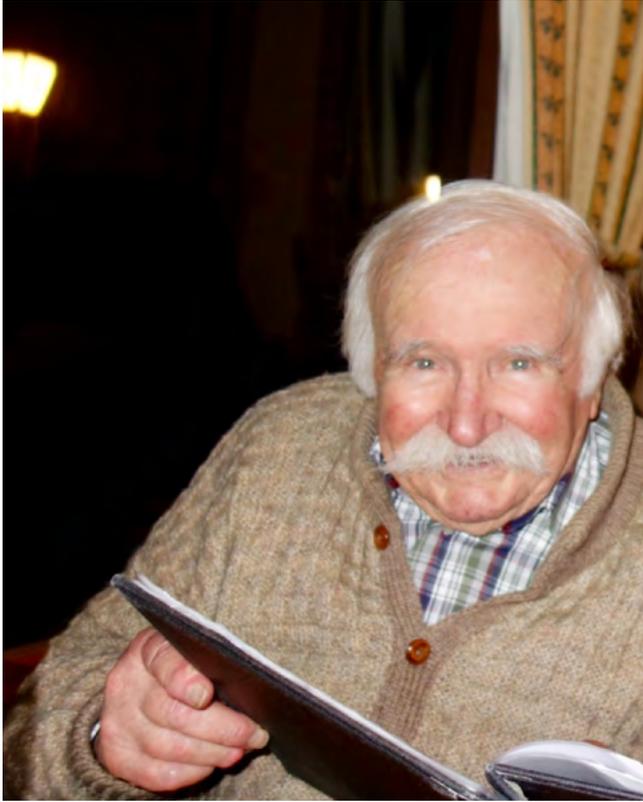
Once our crew settled in St Anton, to make ends meet the jeep that Tony drove during his escape was cleverly utilized as the engine-power for the first ski-lift in the adjoining village to St Anton, the village of St Christoph. (Later to become the home of the Bundersportheim, the ski training centre for the Austrian Ski Federation). Our yet to become Australian Czechs carried Austrian ex-soldiers, the amputees, up the ski-lift. At that time the Arlberg was situated in the post-war French Occupied Zone.

On a November day in 2019 in Thredbo Frank raised the topic of the 70th anniversary of our Czechs leaving St Anton. Frank was searching for the permit granted by the St Anton Burgermeister, granting the Czechs the right to establish and run a mechanized over-snow ski-lift in St Christoph. But alas the permit has been misplaced and Frank could not find it. A trivial point nevertheless, as this article is largely written and dedicated to my dear friend Frank, his legacy, permit or no permit. Frank who will turn 99 on the 8th July 2020 is not only Thredbo's oldest resident but the nation's oldest living Olympian; having represented Australia in the 1956 Winter Olympic Games in Cortina, Italy in the Combined and Slalom ski championship events.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Once Frank served tea he exclaimed: -

“At long last I have found some dates!”



Frank Prihoda reviewing the dates of the Czechs departure from St Anton at home in Thredbo Village 2019

“After Easter 1949 that is - Tuesday 19th April - we packed up the lift and were just about to leave St Christoph when four Canadian filmmakers appeared and engaged us for a week to pull their camera, they were doing a film from the early days of Canada but not far from Lech am Arlberg. Technically it did not work - but it was the best week we had all of the winter for finance. Then we came down to St Anton where we stayed probably until 12th May, and then left for Innsbruck which we left on 17th May 1949. The Nekvapils and I drove to Belgium and Tony with his by then wife Lizzi stayed on in Innsbruck. Only today I found the exit date on some travel document.”

The cover photo taken in 2019 by the author shows the Poma lift-closely follows the original lift-line engineered by Tony, Frank and Karel way back in 1948.



Excerpt: St Anton am Arlberg & the Thredbo/AussieCzech Connection - Jerry Krejzar

THE PRIHODA FAMILY

In 1921, in the inner part of Prague, in a suburb called, 'The King's Vineyards', Frantisek (Frank) Prihoda was born at home, the younger brother of Alexandra Prihodova, known as Sasha. Prihoda, roughly translated, means 'happening'; a lot has happened in Frank's life. Their father was also Frantisek Prihoda, son of a farmer who was also an innkeeper and butcher. Their mother was Emma Skrivankova, daughter of a furrier who was also a cap and hat maker Frank's father was a manufacturer and wholesaler of artificial flowers and trimming feathers for hats, employing about a hundred staff. Frank recalls that as a young boy he loved going to the workshop because, as the son of the boss, the girls made a fuss of him. That's where it started. Frank and Sasha always had a nanny, a custom of the times, at least in the good times; the Depression years made this custom impossible. The nanny had to have the qualifications of a registered nurse.

Frantisek had one of the first American cars, an open Hudson. The family often took trips to the country. In the summer Emma and the children would live in the countryside with relations, Frantisek staying only for the weekends.

Frank has many fond memories of playing with his cousins as well as the local children, remarking that they were very different to the city children.



Frank in the countryside



Frank and Sasha in early childhood days

When Frank was about 11 years old he began to spend most of his free time at YMCA summer camps. He absolutely loved them, not only the great emphasis on physical activities but also the academic work. Frank described himself in his youth as a 'chubby little' boy, as well as an extremely shy one. His time at the YMCA gave him the opportunity of joining the Athletics Club; as a runner, soon training four times a week. Although Frank had potted about on skis as a child, it was not until his early teens, influenced by his big sister, that he began to ski 'more seriously'. Their skis were made of ash, lace-up and square-toed boots made of leather and metal and the leather bindings allowed them to ski tour, the main way to access the slopes at that time. At the top of the long ascent would be a snack or lunch at any one of the many wonderful mountain huts. And then the exhilarating descent, appreciated as it may only happen twice in one day.

THE PRIHODA FAMILY

From 1936, the Czech Ski Federation began to set racecourses and prospective racers could attend training camps, mostly held around Christmas time. This initiative dwindled from 1939 with German occupation and then was forbidden from 1941. Frank remembers that skis were forbidden to be carried onto a train however, many people still skied illegally.

Frank's racing ability was tempered by his poor vision. It was difficult racing with thick-lensed-glasses, especially when outer visibility was low. Sasha, on the other hand, was by now making a name for herself as a prospective ski champion.

Frank's life was irrevocably changed when his father suddenly died of a heart attack at the age of 49. Frank was withdrawn from school, a 16-year old, to help his mother run the business.

Neither of them knew how to run the business. It was a very difficult time; also financially. This meant Frank could only manage a day a week joining his friends in their much-loved physical outdoor pursuits. He was no longer able to train enough to be considered for the Czech ski-team; as Sasha was.

And then came the Nazi occupation and the war years; difficult years socially and personally, though ironically, business improved during the early part of the war, up until the time when all raw materials were prioritised for the war effort. The lack of adequate food supplies caused hardship for all. As a result of some family diplomacy, Frank was exempt from being conscripted as by this time he was the business manager. Frank, by nature, was still a very shy youth. He found it extremely uncomfortable when Emma insisted that he visit all the small retail businesses to collect money owed as well as to become a salesman in order to sell new stock. This face to face aspect of his work

Frank found to be excruciating; the act of trying to extract money.

During this time, Frank and Sasha continued skiing until the time it was banned. Young people would leave Prague, at the start of the weekend, or on a Sunday morning, riding their bicycles through fields and forests, sometimes more than 100 km, to get to the ski fields.

Frank remembers this time as very special, particularly the deep friendships formed around outdoor life. In the summer months this shared love of the outdoors continued with hiking, mountain climbing, swimming and bike riding.



Frank with close friends

Frank ran the business while Sasha, whose university was closed, denying her a career as a journalist, cared for Emma, who by this time, under the combined stresses of losing her husband and having to oversee a business she did not understand, had had several strokes. In 1944 Emma died, leaving Frank as sole business manager at the age of 23. At the end of November, 1945, the war having ended, Sasha and Karel were married and moved to Brno, leaving Frank living on his own, solely responsible for the business and with little time for leisure. Frank said that it was in this time that he realised how much he missed his father, not only for the business

THE PRIHODA FAMILY

but mainly for his need to be guided in what it meant to be a man. Frank described these as his 'lost years'. In the end he realised that life would provide this guidance.

Despite the general jubilation following the declaration of peace, Frank knew that hard times would still follow. He rued the inevitable greed of some Czechs in claiming possession of homes and businesses now abandoned by the departing Germans. This was especially true for the property previously owned by the Jewish population, many of whom had not survived the war. Frank found this aspect of human nature painful.

Life in Czechoslovakia post-war was in some ways easier, especially with regard to skiing. By this time Sasha was the Czech Women's Ski Champion. Frank continued to train but he was hampered both by his short-sightedness and by the limited time available to him given his work commitments, particularly as he no longer had the guidance and support of his parents.

However, as the years passed the political influence of the Communist Party increased until in early 1948 the Prague Revolution occurred, thereby creating the possibility of a Czech Communist government forming. It was soon after this that Frank said to his friends. "Given the political situation, we will now have to get out of here." His friends thought this was an over-reaction, that as they had 'dealt' with the Germans, it would be the same with the Communists. Frank replied, "Germans, yes; Communists, no." He soon discovered both Karel and Sasha, still living in Brno, agreed with him.

The story of their combined escapes at the end of 1948 from Czechoslovakia has been described many times and won't be included here. Enough to say they were blessed by good fortune. By early 1949, Frank, Karel

and Sasha as well as Toni Sponar, were benefitting from the kindness of the Tirol and were running their own ski tow, powered by Frank's jeep, thanks to the ingenuity of Toni. Sasha continued racing over the winter, training with the Swiss-Ski-Team.



Frank Prihoda competing in the 1956 Winter Olympic Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo

Michael Nekvapil

THE TWO COUSINS - FRANK AND VACLAV

Despite the fact that I grew up in Prague and Frank by then was already in Australia, not only separated by distance but also by the iron curtain, Frank appeared very often in the stories told in my early childhood and youth by my father, to which I loved to listen. They were cousins and had plenty of common experiences. It is not by chance, that one of the oldest pictures of my father with Frank are as small boys sitting on sledges in Špindl, (Splinderuv Mlyn) still the biggest ski resort in Bohemia. I truly admired the stories about skiing and mountaineering and those scenes narrated by my father. The best, of course, was Frank's adventurous escape from Czechoslovakia.

Much later I had the occasion to meet Frank in person during his first visits to Prague, and I felt like meeting an uncle whom I knew from a long time ago. I really liked Frank, also my wife and children loved his agreeable character; and despite the distance, and in just a few visits, Frank became a member of my family. Our mutual friendship became deeper much later when we visited Australia, where Frank was our brilliant guide. Some 10 years ago, we were grateful for the opportunity to participate in Frank's 90 birthday celebrations in Thredbo. It was an unforgettable party and I will never forget those beautiful memories, our shared skiing experience and participation in the Thredbo Masters.

We wish Frank on this special occasion of his unbelievable centenary, the best of health and happiness. All our family and friends would wish to enjoy Frank's company and his nice personality for many more years to come.



Frank and Vaclav - Prague 2005



Frank and Jan - Prague May 2011

Professor Jan Klozar

S H A N N T U R N B U L L R E M I N I S C E S

I first met Frank on Mt Buller in 1952 when I was 18 and Frank was 31. It was the first year either Frank or myself had skied at Buller.

In a phone call earlier this year Frank reminded me he had just arrived in Australia in late 1950. He travelled with his sister Sasha Nekvapil and her husband Karel. I had grown up in Tasmania and learnt to ski on Mt Buffalo in 1946. In 1952 I moved to Melbourne to attend university where I met Milan Kantor, the brother of Rusa Wagner who were Czech friends of Frank. I introduced Milan to his wife Anne Murdoch at an intervarsity ski competition on Mt Hotham in 1952.

In 1953 I joined Frank as a member of the Kandahar Ski Club. The club was created by George Chisholm to encourage ski racing. George selected and managed the first ski team to represent Australia at the 1952 Olympics. George had convinced the Ski Club of Victoria to make available free accommodation in a single room out-house to its large Ivor Wittaker Lodge for racers. Frank's Czech mates dominated the founding members of the Kandahar Club. These included John Wagner, Frank Sictanc and Bill Kotzman. The two members of the 1952 Olympic team who resided in Victoria were Barry Patten and Cedric Sloan who I think were also members.

Membership of the Kandahar Club was limited to 12 to match the number of beds it had. This was done to guarantee each racer accommodation to train every weekend. The only non-racers were George and his loyal colleague Ron Young. Frank remembers Ron, as the Club Secretary who allowed others to use a bed of a member if left vacant at any time. I remember Ron as also carrying spools of phone cable that he would lay out on every racecourse to allow use of the new fangled electronic timing equipment. For University races timing was achieved by the starter

waving a stock to two or three people at the finish with hand held stopwatches.

George wanted Australian competitors to be on the longest possible runs so as to approach Olympic standards. This meant developing runs in the Thredbo valley. While I met Frank at many ski races at many locations over many years, racing in a new area for the first time was a very memorable adventure. On the initiative of George, Downhill races were held on what became known as the 'George Chisholm Run' before the road over Dead Horse Gap had been built in 1954 and also in the Olympic selection year of 1955.

On competition day we would spend an hour skiing out from the Kosciuszko Chalet to stamp the course, walk up, train the course at least once, walk up again for the first run, walk up for the second run. We would then walk up again with someone helping to piggy back the injured back to the top, to meet a sledge for a one hour ride back the Chalet.

I have burnt into my memory. When walking up for a second training run, glancing across the slope to observe Frank somersaulting through the air at excessive speed with the peaked tip of his woolen head warmer making a slight imprint in virgin snow as he continued to revolve to land back on his skis again. A recollection that is very appropriate to recognize Frank's exquisite masterful survival ability for having a very happy 100th birthday.

Shann Turnbull

A SPECIAL GODFATHER

Godfathers are very special people if they become a mainstay in your life.

Both god daughter and god father are free from the day to day family dynamics and tensions and both can relax into a much less complicated familial love.

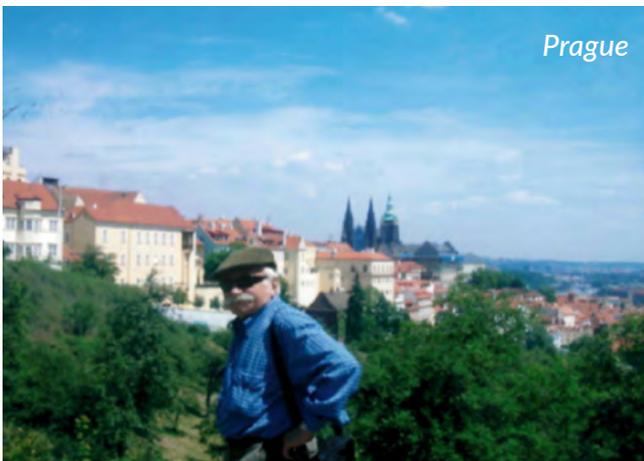
This has been my life with Frank - freedom to do all the things a young woman needs to do with the sort of man who understands how to be that unique mix of uncle, brother, best friend and guardian.

We fished mountain streams together, skied the days away together and played Janacek and Dvorak in long beautiful sentimental occasions recalling his homeland and that of my fathers' - Czechoslovakia. We often met there for concerts and family get togethers in the country around Třeboň.

Frank has always been known as the one and only 'Uncle Frank' to my very wide and adoring family. And simply known as 'Frank' to his many many friends and admirers.

Everyone smiles at the mention of 'Frank'. My life is improved beyond measure with a Godfather like Frank.

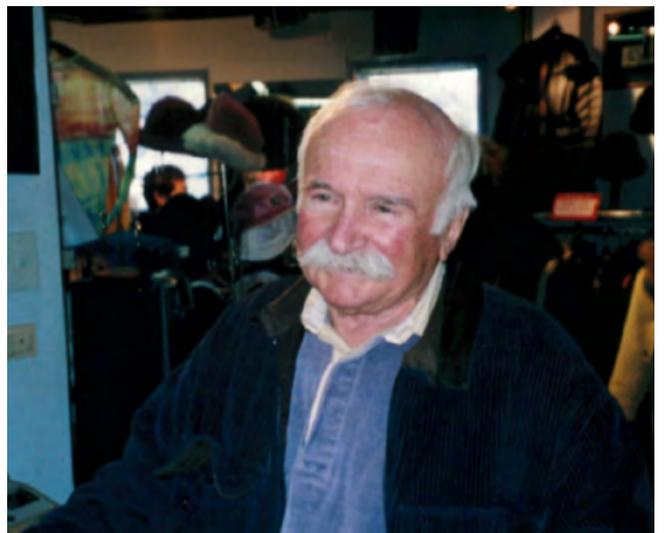
Julie Kantor



Godchildren, Julie and Cathy



Cruden Farm Lanwarrin



The Kindest Eyes

A DUTIFUL GODFATHER, OUR UNCLE FRANKIE

My dad Henry met Mum, Helga, skiing in Pontresina Switzerland, married her and bringing his bride back to Australia; Frankie was the first person Mum met when he was there to pick them up at the airport in 1959, which began a lifelong friendship between them.

This incredibly special family connection began back then, and in 1961 when I was born, Frankie became my Godfather forming the backbone of our extended family, a family we didn't have in Australia.

My Dad, Henry Simon arrived in Australia in 1940 on the Dunera, and settled in Melbourne along with many Europeans, who also found themselves here. Many of them were keen skiers, and as displaced kindred spirits, came together in the Australian Alps carving out runs on Mt Buller and Hotham. Frankie, Henry, and John Wagner became close friends sharing Olympic dreams (Dad being a part of the organising committee and John the team manager). The men's racing hut Kandahar (Mt Buller) was their winter home, travelling to Europe to ski when they could.



Frankie, Cathy & Henry Simon - 1991

Frankie is family to me, my sister Jane and Brothers Andrew and Chris, and to all our children. Always with us for family occasions, dinners, bedtime stories, on holidays, skiing, and family time on the beach at Sorrento. All our friends know and love our Uncle Frankie too!

Frankie stepped way beyond the Godfather role after my Dad died, when he walked me down the aisle on one of the most special days, my wedding day. His steady presence, love and support helped to make the day a wonderful celebration.



Frankie & I - My Wedding, June 1999

Frankie has always been a beautiful, wise, calming, and present figure in my life, always someone I could turn to and rely on, unconditionally. I loved his visits to Melbourne and more recently, my visits to Thredbo, taking with me his favourite European foods and cooking up a storm, sharing feasts and remembering good times.



The legacy of this family love and connection continues with my own daughter and her cousins with their Grand Godfather Frankie.

What a wonderful milestone 100 years is, I feel so lucky to have shared 60 of those years with him!

Cathy Simon

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER ON THE ALPINE WAY

Here was I, a teenage Sydney émigré AussieCzech, one of a number of post-war Czechs who from 1958 flocked to Thredbo in the summer months to holiday. The Czechs were drawn to Thredbo like moths to a flame. Stories about a compatriot Czech, Tony Sponar an inveterate adventurer had sprung up. There was chatter throughout the Czech émigré community about the Snowy Mountains, resembling those familiar rounded peaks the Krkonose (Giant Mountains) in northern Bohemia, which had stirred emotional and nostalgic yearnings, a local connection to the homeland. Once free to roam in Thredbo at fourteen I did not mix all that regularly with the Melbourne Czechs, mainly those expert trout-fishing Czechs from Sydney of my parents generation. Not when so much adventure was possible, such as rugged country trout fishing expeditions. Thus meeting Frank occurred much later.

One summer day in the early 1980's driving back to Thredbo from a weekend pharmaceutical conference in Victoria, Penny and I spotted a familiar forlorn looking guy standing by the roadside in the wilderness next to a broken down Peugeot. It was some ten kilometres or so before Tom Groggin on the Alpine Way, which was just a rugged rough dirt road in those days. We both recognised that beaming moustachioed face in an instant. A face we knew by sight as that of Frank a fellow Czech who ran the gift shop in Thredbo. At seven Czech ceased to be my primary spoken language, so I immediately took the opportunity to practice. It did not take Frank long to correct my terrible grammar which he continues to do so, to this day!

Since that auspicious day our friendship over the years has grown, more so in retirement with ample time to reside at Happy Jacks (Apartments) for much of the winter to ski. So I followed Frank's lead, racing in the Thredbo Master's as Frank had done for ages, I too began to race. Frank was always a source of inspiration and advice in the inspection of the course prior to the race. Neither of us managed to make first place on

the podium, competition in the ranks of the 'old-racing-geezers' is fierce! But those runs together were a joy for us both until his retirement.



Cernokostelecky Pivovar (Black Fortified Castle Church Brewery) – Frank & Penny Krejzar – May 2012

Having re-established my connection to 'the homeland' Czech affairs of mutual interest arose and a joy for Frank to talk about. Frank visited Prague on a regular basis and we often met up and shared some memorable times together. On one particular occasion after we picked him up at the residence of his relatives, No 12 Jungmannova, two doors down from the Sponar family residence at No 6, Frank insisted on visiting a brewery, neglected and run down under communism, known as the Cernokostelecky Pivovar (Black Fortified Castle Church Brewery) in the town of the same name Kostelec nad Cernymi Lesy (Fortified Castle Church on the Black Woods), which had been restored to its former glory. How lives and history can at times coincidentally intersect can be quite beguiling. Kostelec, the very town where my mother was born, before she fled to the big-city lights of Prague; and where my grandfather worked as a cooper in the very same brewery, before he died of mustard gas poisoning after returning home from the first world war.

This particular trip in May 2012 turned out to be a most nostalgic one. Frank asked to be driven to Nove Mesto na Morave, (New Town in Moravia) a town in the Moravian highlands well known as a centre for cross-country skiing. The visit to the town for Frank was an important

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER ON THE ALPINE WAY

one, where the Czechoslovakian National Ski Federation used to frequent, to train for alpine skiing a skiing training centre. We visited all the old haunts, even the communist era hotel (Hotel Medlov), where the Czech National Team was housed back in the 1940's.



Hotel Medlov, Nove Mesto na Morave - May 2012

Since Frank ceased to travel we have conversed about a number of subjects, usually around the dinner table where Frank's culinary skill is renowned throughout the village.

With Sasha, the last dinner the four of us shared ensconced at the table at Happy Jacks, brother and sister watching expectantly before serving up and savouring Penny's Czech dumplings; just when she was about to slice them with a knife. Squeals of panic emanated from the table. Simply not done! In a Czech kitchen the dumplings must be sliced with a strand of cotton thread! Tradition and perfection are a hallmark of the Czech psyche, a trait that Frank continues to strive for everyday, to this day.



Frank below the Iconic statue of Saint Wenceslas, Vaclavske Namesti, Praha - May 2011

Jerry Krejzar

FRANK 1974 - 2021 THE THREDBO YEARS

Frank Pihoda has been part of our Thredbo family for nearly 50 years.

We first met when Frank came to Thredbo in 1972 to be close to his sister Sasha & brother-in-law Karel Nekvapil who were established Thredbo personalities & business identities operating Sasha's Apartments & Ski Boutique. I was expecting my second son Luke & we were looking to build permanent accommodation for ourselves & staff to operate our retail businesses in the Thredbo Alpine Hotel. Likewise Frank had established his own successful retail outlet Frank's Gifts, in the hotel selling speciality souvenirs & beautiful imported ceramics from the Czech Republic.

Frank too was looking for a permanent home in the village. Together, with the generous support of K/T & our third partner Helmut Steinocker (Steins' Tours) we embarked on the building of our Thredbo home now affectionately as Frankheinzstein's Apts.

We completed the construction & moved in before winter in 1977. After numerous extensions, renovations & debatable paint colours we remain close friends & neighbours to this day. Over these many years Frank has witnessed my boys grow & become fathers & now my grandchildren look forward to greeting Uncle Frank when they visit.

We have always considered Frank as part of our close-knit family, skiing together, entertaining each other, participating in local events, celebrating milestones & generally looking out for one another. Frank has been the one great constant in our lives. Kind, generous, modest, discreet & intelligent. Many wonderful & enduring qualities.

As Frank nears his 100th birthday we continue to be inspired by his amazing memory, resilience, determination & stoicism.

Frank retired from his gift shop after his 80th birthday, nearly twenty years ago. Since then Frank

has remained actively involved in the Thredbo Alpine Museum, FHS body corporate, travelling overseas to ski & visit friends & being involved in local community affairs. Only recently has Frank slowed down & allowed himself the indulgence to relax & reflect on his amazing life. Frank is our much loved Thredbo Elder, highly regarded & admired by the local Thredbo community. Frank's Thredbo home has seen many a memorable gathering with his colourful friends & family

It's our intention that Frank with the continuing support of his Melbourne family & many friends remains in Thredbo as our beloved neighbour for as long as possible.

Looking good so far...



Michelle Reichinger, Frank & family

Michelle Reichinger

SKIING & FUN TIMES WITH FRANK

For fifty years I have had the pleasure of skiing with Frank both in Australia and Europe. I first met Frank and his sister Sasha whilst competing in the various Masters races around the Australian resorts. Later they both booked their overseas travel with my agency in Jindabyne and both, at separate times, joined my PISTE Ski Tours and Mountain Adventures European ski trips.

Many of our Australian ski excursions were trips to Dead Horse Gap, often followed by the always popular champagne picnic. I have Tom Schrecker and Frank to thank for showing me a great, but less known, alternate route ending a couple of kilometres further along the road from the Gap.

In Europe Frank, Tom and their friend, the late John Wagner, joined me in Poiana Brasov, Romania where we mixed exciting skiing and wild scenery with historically themed excursions to nearby towns. Tom had a unit in Val d'Isere, France where Frank often visited and I, living not far away was lucky enough to be invited to join them and gain from their in depth knowledge of the area.

Frank introduced me to Prague and also encouraged me to visit the beautiful Tatra Mountains for which I am extremely grateful.

Over the years there have been so many fun times with Frank and his friends both in Thredbo and Europe that have enriched my life experiences. Thank you, Frank!



John Wagner, Frank Prihoda, Marion Murri & three local friends - Brasov, Romania - February 1998



Marion Murri & Frank Prihoda - Poiana Brasov, Romania - February 1998

Marion Murri

FRANK'S FACE, A TRIBUTE FROM THREDBO RESORT

When 'The Tor's run was re-named Frank's Face at Thredbo in 2020, it was in honour of Thredbo resident and Australia's oldest living Olympian Frank Prihoda as he celebrated his 99th birthday. But that is just the tip of Frank's incredible story and contribution to the Thredbo community.

The intermediate run from Australia's highest lifted point is sandwiched between Karel's T Bar and Sasha's Schuss, named after Frank's brother-in-law, Karel Nekvapil and his sister Sasha (who married Nekvapil).

"Having the Frank's Face trail located between Karel's T-bar and Sasha's Schuss gives me great pleasure and feels like family," said Prihoda.

The story of this Czech influence in Thredbo began over 70 years ago, when a young Frank fled the former Czechoslovakia and the communist regime. With him was Karel, and later in 1949 his sister Sasha, a ski team member of the communist Czechoslovakian Ski Federation who found her chance to slip away after a Swiss race meet.

Adding to Thredbo's deep European links is Tony Sponar, who borrowed Prihoda's Jeep to escape to St Anton in Austria (namesake of Sponar's T Bar). Reunited in the Arlberg, the trio were integral to the development of skiing in Thredbo and importing the Arlberg technique, the blueprint of many ski schools worldwide.

Frank continued his alpine love after landing in Australia, his sister luring him from Melbourne in 1974. "My sister Sasha and her husband were running a lodge here – Sasha's lodge, the second ever commercial lodge in Thredbo. Consequently, I had a connection to Thredbo and for me it was a place I wanted to be. I love the place, the atmosphere, the skiing and the winter."

Having competed in the Winter Olympics in Cortina in 1956, Prihoda was also awarded the Snow Medal Australia, a new award from June

2020 to recognise Australians at the highest level of winter sport. In 2014 Frank was also named as one of the Faces of Thredbo, along with his sister and brother-in-law, for significant contributions to skiing and making Thredbo what it is today.

Frank was also one of the first passengers on the new Merritts Gondola in 2020 and attended the official opening of the Gondola just prior to his 99th birthday.

Today Frank's hope is that others feel his love for his mountain home. "I wish for Thredbo to prosper and to get over the difficult challenges that it has encountered with the bushfires and now the pandemic. It would be nice for heaven to be kind to us now and send us a lot of snow so Thredbo can give all its visitors the experience they would like."

As Frank celebrates his 100th birthday milestone this year, the Thredbo community will be honouring Frank with a special birthday celebration in the resort with fireworks and of course, Frank's favourite cake.



Frank with a picture of his sister, Sasha

Thredbo Resort

TRIBUTE FROM THREDBO

“On behalf of Thredbo Resort, I wish Frank all the very best for a healthy and happy 100th birthday year. The contributions Frank has made to the Thredbo community, the culture and the fabric of the resort over the years have been significant. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Frank for these immeasurable contributions.”

Stuart Diver, Thredbo Resort General Manager



Frank and Stuart, Merritts Gondola, 2020



Frank on the new Merritts Gondola, 2020

FROM THE EDITOR

This special edition newsletter comprises a series of articles by those close to our dear friend, Thredbo's Living Legend Frank Prihoda. All the Thredbo Community wishes Frank, Australia's Oldest Living Olympian the very best of health and happiness during this memorable centenary year. Our best wishes Frank, on July 8th, which we hope is a most memorable occasion.

Jerry Krejzar

A Tribute to Frank



Editors:

Jerry Krejzar

Leah Foster

**LEEWAY
STUDIO**

SALUTATIONS

[CLICK THIS LINK TO SEND YOUR OWN SALUTATIONS TO FRANK!](#)

With warmest good wishes and congratulations to Frank on his 100th. from his old friend and ski buddy

-Tom Schrecker

Všechno nejlepší Frank, doufám, že se ocitneš obklopen lidmi, které nejvíc miluješ, přeji krásný den

- Graeme Holloway

THS OFFICE BEARERS: 2020/2021

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THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

Opening Hours: 1 – 5 pm

Subject to the availability of volunteers during COVID 19 restrictions

Peak: July – September 2021 (closed Mondays)

December 26 – January 27 (closed Mondays)

Other: Weekends only

Spring: October, November

Autumn: Feb March April, June

Plus public holidays and special events



THREDBO ALPINE MUSEUM

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www.thredboalpinemuseum.org.au