

KAREL NEKVAPIL 1916-1993

by Michael Nekvapil

Karel Nekvapil was born in Czechoslovakia. His parents had several establishments in Luhacovice and Brno, Czechoslovakia, including a café, restaurant and night-club. Karel managed these in turn, along with his older brother, Jan. Both became experienced restuaranteurs and managers.

In November 1945, he married the Czech ski racer Sasha Prihodova and quickly developed a friendship with her younger brother, Frank Prihoda and their mutual skiing and racing friend, Antonin (Toni) Sponar.

Together with Frank Prihoda, he escaped from Czechoslovakia in early 1949 following the "Putsch". Once in Austria, the three men using Toni's jeep, adjusted according to Toni's design, set up a portable ski lift in St Christoph, near St Anton in the early months of 1949. This venture wound up with the thaw, which was also the time for them to move on.

Karel, Sasha and Frank moved to Belgium to live with Karel's brother Jan, whilst waiting for visas to emigrate another country. During that period, Michael was born. Eventually Australia accepted their application and Karel, Sasha and Michael landed in Melbourne on December 31st. 1950. Frank having travelled separately some months before them.

During their first Australian winter n 1951, Karel found employment of the Australian Postal Institute club lodge at Mt Buller, which he managed some time. Karel also started the Arlberg Ski School and helped the Forrass brothers build a canteen on the mountain. When Sasha went to work at Charlotte Pass in 1952, he continued to manage the lodge and to instruct. When Sasha went to work at Charlotte Pass, he continued to manage the lodge and ski school at Mt Buller.

By January 1959 there was sufficient money (and borrowed) to build the first part of Sasha's Lodge in Thredbo. The architect was Otto Ernegg, with Bela Raczko and Steve Szeloczsky as project managers and builders. The lodge opened in June 1959.

Karel and Sasha ran their commercial lodge featuring traditional European hospitality for twelve years serving breakfast, lunch and dinner for the first seven years. They could never take holidays together as the lodge was open 365 days a year.

The couple sold the lodge in 1971 to Jan and Jari Nekvapil who renamed it "The Black Bear Inn" after the family restaurant in Brno, Czechoslovakia. Karel and Sasha built Sasha's Apartments next door, where the ground floor Sasha had her ski fashion shop.

In 1980 after 21 years in Thredbo, Karel and Sasha moved to their farm on the Alpine Way. They remained there until where he passed away in 1993.

Karel always enjoyed his skiing. In June 1961, he fractured his leg in six places below the knee. This put an end to his ski racing. He was very supportive of children's skiing and organized ski races for them during the winter school holidays prior to the formation of the Thredbo Ski Racing Club. In 1972 he was a founding committee member of the Thredbo Ski Racing Club, of which he was elected as the Club's first patron in 1979

Today, Karel's T-bar lift located high above Thredbo Village, stands as memory to his contribution to the development of Thredbo.