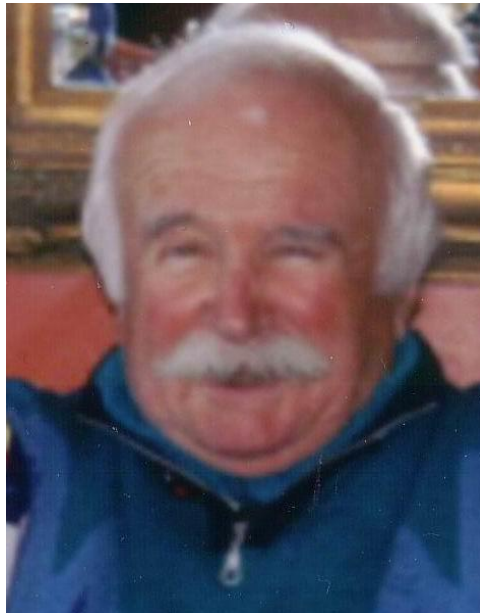


THREDBO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FRANK PRIHODA – An Oral History

conducted by Edith Swift

Thredbo, March 2008



Frank Prihoda – August 2006

Copyright held by
Thredbo Historical Society
PO Box 6
THREDBO NSW 2625

FRANK PRIHODA

interviewed by Edith Swift in Thredbo, Australia.

My name is Edie Swift and I am interviewing Frank Prihoda on 12 March, 2008, in Thredbo.

Now, Frank can you tell me about your date & place of birth, parents and grandparents?

I was born on the 8th July 1921 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. My father was Frantisek Frank) Prihoda and my mother was Emma. My maternal grandmother was Marie Skrivankova and my grandfather was Joseph Skrivanek. My mother was born in Vienna but her parents were Czech. Later on they moved into Kolin where she grew up. My grandfather bought a house and set up a business. My paternal grandparents, I didn't know. They were both dead by the time I was born.

My father was a manufacturer of artificial flowers. He was moderately prosperous and I remember in my childhood we were living very well although as I recall it, there was a shortage of accommodation in Prague. That was three years after the First World War when I was born. Through that our quarters didn't have an internal toilet. We had to go outside on the corridor where there was a row of toilets, which served the whole floor.

In particular, as a child, I recall many trips to the countryside by car and another thing I remember was that my mother was very health conscious. She was insisting that we ate a lot of fruit, which I didn't mind, but I minded spinach and those things, which most children do. In brief, what can one say, I have memories of lovely holidays in the countryside, very often with my cousins. We had a very close relationship with a family of my mother's sister. My mother's sister's husband was the manager of the biggest ladies' headwear factory in Czechslovakia My father as a manufacturer of artificial flowers which was a fashion item then and quite in demand, was also supplying my uncle, so it was a tight connection there.

After the first five years of school, I went into high school which we called the gymnasium in Czech, for 8 years, or the "middle" school and there I was a medium student. At first I didn't like the school but later on in my fourth and fifth year I simply loved it, I don't know why. I started getting hold on the curriculum and even the difficult subject which was mathematics. After struggling at first, I decided "*I'm going to learn it, because that is the only way out of it.*" So I devoted myself to it and I mastered it – that appropriate for that level of schooling of course – I mastered the mathematics required.

At the age of thirteen, I began being interested in sport. I am still rather short, but as a child I was short and very tubby. When I look at my photographs, I had one ball on top and another underneath supported by two columns. I wasn't aware of it, but I think my parents were because they were trying me to loose weight, which was not very successful.

However at the age of thirteen I started growing up a bit. I lost the weight and became more mobile. I became interested in sport. The first attraction was athletics, in particular

running. I joined a club and went for training every week, or may be twice a week, I can't recall. Later on I changed my club allegiance and moved into the bigger sport club in Prague which had many branches. It was originally a soccer club. Athletics was fairly strong there. As a youth there, I formed a number of friendships there, some of which have lasted until now. I went there, training three or four times a week – I loved it – I simply loved it. Mother wanted me to do other things but I said “*No, no I'm going running.*”

Now skiing, when did that start. Tell me about what you did and how you trained. What the courses were like, and things like that?

It is not an easy subject to describe. I started skiing at the age of thirteen, although I was on skis about five years before that but that was only as a child and was not very successful at all. However, at the age of thirteen I started skiing a bit more seriously, if I can call it that. It was to a great degree due to the influence of my sister, Sasha, who is almost 2 years older. She through her friend, and our cousins who were engaged in ski sports, started skiing a bit more seriously, so I and my cousin, Vaclav in particular, also went. We were tagging along behind the more grown-ups. So through that, being under the influence of serious skiers and racers, I started training in a loose sort of a way.

The method then was that the older ones were teaching the younger ones in the group. Then some times one of the men formed a group of the young kids and we went through the hoops. We were doing telemarks, we were skiing in deep snow, in the trees, in all sorts of conditions, in the wind. So it never mattered, we had to go out and do it. That was the mode of the time.

What were the skis like?

The skis were wooden. For us youngsters, we had usually skis made of ash which is a very good timber, because they were cheaper. The better ones were hickory which were dearer. Our boots were the lace-up boots with a square toe to fit into the binding. They had little metal lugs on the sides to make them stiffer. The binding was the type called the Huitfeldt which was an almost totally leather binding with a metal fronts and leather straps to hold the boot in. It allowed you to walk on skis, because in those days, touring was the accepted manner of skiing.

You didn't go up and down, up and down, because you had to climb all the time. So people went from A to B, they stopped on the way in these marvelous mountain huts where they were eating cakes and having tea, having lunches, and each of these huts specialised in something else. If you wanted this type of sweet, and another type of sweet you made a trip somewhere else. That was the mode.

With the racing fraternity so to speak, you did more of this training on a certain course, on a certain hill and you did this up and down, up and down. Of course, climbing on foot you didn't cover much ground during the day.

Who was your main teacher back then?

I would be loathe to say who because there were quite a few older ones. None of the names really matter. None of them were outstanding racers of any European or World standing. At that time Czechoslovakia had some outstanding skiers of world calibre but they were in the cross country running and in the jumping. The downhill, or alpine skiing as it is referred to as well, was a newish discipline because the slalom or downhill races was accepted in FIS only about in 1930 or something like that, through the effort mainly of the English who were in the forefront of championing this sort of skiing.

So did you do any racing? Was it more of a cross country type of skiing?

No. I am referring to the time when I was 13 or 14. My first race was when I was close to 16. It was in the Tatra Mountains in the Slovakia. It was quite a big course which involved a lot of climbing. It was in a high mountain valley. You finished by a lake. I think the climb took about two hours, so if you could do two runs in the day, you were lucky.

On the day of the race, it was at Easter. I should say first, I was very short sighted and I was wearing thick glasses. I can't say I saw well. So on the day of the race, the snow storm came and we climbed up in the snow storm. The weather up top was atrocious and of course, I took off, my glasses froze over. I didn't know where I was. I turned and I ran into deep snow and had an almighty fall. Well that was the end of the race. This happened quite often actually. I could perform reasonably well in good weather although I was never outstanding.

What was your style then?

The style then was the Austrian technique. It was the Hannes Schneider method and it was basically the Austrian technique. Actually everybody skied as they could. You learnt how you managed to turn, so you turned and put all your power behind it and made a turn, and then another. The skis then were quite forgiving. They were softish and they were bending well, so you could turn in deep snow as well. I was barely sixteen then.

I am interested Frank, in the period after that, when you were 17 until the next phase when you left Czechoslovakia in 1948. What the training was like,? What your specific skiing was like?

It was a short transition from that period. After 1936 until 1938, the Czechoslovakian Ski Federation started organising courses, mostly at Christmas time and they were training camps of sorts, so we went to different ones. However, in 1939 when the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, the activities slowed down and from 1941. All skiing and all racing was forbidden.

Up until then what was your method of skiing and training? How was it different when you were 17?

In these training camps, usually at Christmas, we were taught various methods. Now the Austrians gradually developed a little bit, but in 1937 Emil Alle came and he introduced this new French method which was different from the Austrian one. His philosophy of placing the downhill ski was somewhat different from the Austrian one. So one year we started learning the French method and we were doing it for a couple of years. One of the things for the quick turn was lifting your heels so when you went into the turn you sort of jumped, lifted your heels, and went into the turn with your tips leading. That was one markedly different thing from the Austrian. Then he described the so-called “*position ent*” which is the deep position for straight schussing. You bent your body down to your thighs and skied down schuss. To my knowledge it was not described in the Arlberg technique.

The French method prevailed in the racing for quite a while and the French in the pre-war years, '38 and '39, they had very good results with their method because Emil Alle's was probably the first conscious racing style which involved all elements of the downhill racing.

After 1940 all these training activities stopped and of course, we were going skiing illegally. Nobody would stop you because to a degree we were privileged as members of the Ski Federation Squad. We were privileged because we had the permission to keep our skis and go skiing. The main thing was that it was forbidden to carry skis on public transport so through that the Germans stopped people moving about. You couldn't go in a train and take your skis without a special permit and sometimes it was checked and sometimes it was not checked. The occupation by Germans of Czechoslovakia was a very complex matter. The whole life had so many aspects, and it was far from normal. I think that alone could be a whole book written about it.

How did the skis change from the time you were seventeen and when you went into the camps in the 1930s?

The main technological advance then was in the binding which was the Khandahar type of binding. This was a steel cable with a spring at the back which fitted around your boot and there was a clasp in front of your toe piece. Through the closing of the toe clasp, you created a tension which was pushing the boot forward into your toe piece. On the side of the ski, there were hooks, mostly two, sometimes three, under which you hooked your cable either further to the front which gave you a bit of a heel lift or further back which kept your heel close to the ski. You had a better way to manage the ski, by having the heel close to the ski or tight on the ski.

Did that help you with the French method, with that new method, in your racing with these new skis and bindings – with this change?

I would probably say that it did but the French method was not the ultimate answer to everything. Gradually a method evolved which was not far removed from the modern way of skiing. In those days the main emphasis was on the weight in front and when you

were turning, the weight on the outside ski or the lower ski as it is sometimes called. So the two principles which still prevail today. How you come to them took several years to develop and in the end it is very simple. You don't have to do much at all. If you manage the transfer of weight and keep your weight over the skis, mostly in front, then the turning is very easy.

Were you very successful in the time before 1948 in your training camps? Why did you do well? What as a racer did you have?

I wouldn't describe myself as very successful, not at all, unfortunately. They never let me race in a big international race. I often went along, but I was never in the actual team, which raced at a given time. My handicap as I described, was my eyesight. A: it was a great handicap, and B: after the end of the war I was extremely busy in the business.

I had two factories to run and I must say, it was over my head. My father was dead, my mother was dead. My mother ran the business after my father's death for a while but she was not a business woman. I myself, I didn't have any proper schooling in business or experience. The war years, that was different from normal years. Work wise, I was so busy that I couldn't cope with it. When there were races or training, instead of going for a week like most guys did, and train and prepare, I was lucky enough to be there by Friday night and do the race on Saturday or Sunday and go home and start the working grind - the business all over again.

So when you were finishing that period from 1948, when you were 20 or so, in the racing, did you change because of the French method and then you had a combination of the French and the Austrian styles?

By the time it was '48, the French started to recede and it was coming more to the old Austrian style but with changes like I said before – keeping your weight forward, when you were turning keeping the weight on the outside ski. I think that was the main thing. For myself, I think the French method receded in importance.

Frank can you tell me about when you decided to leave Czechoslovakia in 1948 and why? And just briefly about the trip on skis.

After the end of the war, that was in 1945 life returned to normal. Czechoslovakia was lucky in that sense; it was relatively unscathed through the war. Although occupied by Germans we were never in the fighting zone and the industries were in a reasonably good shape. There were some bombing attacks and some damages in Prague and other cities and possibly in some other areas, but on the whole the damages were really small, so the country was in good shape to develop. It returned back to the democratic system which was very strong since the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

However gradually the feeling of the Russian and the Communist system, pressure became much stronger in time as obviously the Russians wanted Czechoslovakia in their zone of influence. The first sign of seriousness came with the forbidding of

Czechoslovakia to join the Marshall Plan which was a great American thing which put a big part of Europe back on its feet. We were forbidden to participate in that one. Instead Russians offered help of their own which was really very problematic because they really didn't have anything especially at that time.

1947 was a very good year but towards the end it started getting politically worse. There were stirrings in the government and the Communists were obstructionist there because they had the most important seats in the government – that is, the Ministry of the Interior which was Police amongst other things and the Ministry of Finance or Industry. They really had the country at ransom. When 1948 came things got worse politically. In February 1948, the Communists started the push. They went into the streets with the militia. The factory workers were equipped with rifles and arms. Although there was no fighting there was a great threat of a serious fight in the streets.

On the 12th February, 1948, it came to a clear break. The government was dissolved and the Communists took over completely. Through the establishment of Communist Socialist regime it became clear that things would change. Immediately lots of things were forbidden to be done. Businesses were expropriated, closed down. People were being arrested left, right and centre for nothing much at all, mainly being enemies of the State or of the people. That meant employers, the manufacturers and business people. Businesses were nationalised, not only the big ones but also the smaller ones. Private enterprise was being forbidden altogether. Everything was going to communes and the State establishment including my business which in the sense of national economic importance, it was negligible. It was a laughable matter.

A funny situation arose – the business dealings like selling the flowers, we were forbidden to do that but we were allowed to manufacture, which was a contradictory situation. The Communists liked to do it that way. They forbade you to do one thing and through that, you can't do your other thing. So I decided straight a way I had to leave the country because I wouldn't live under any oppressive regime. The same went for my sister and her husband although they were living in a different part of the Republic.

So we all decided we had to leave the country. We had to start working on various ways how to do it. It had to be done illegally because all passports were cancelled. They were invalid immediately. The only thing was to escape. There were several ways but the main thing was to cross the border either into Germany – Bavaria, or Austria. Austria was easier in the sense that the border of Czechoslovakia and Austria was in the Communist zone. Austria was divided into the Russian, British, American and French zones and the Czech border was on the Russian zone. Therefore the frontier was not so heavily guarded like the other into Germany which was abutting the American zone.

In the summer, 1948, I learned about the possibility to cross a lake which was in southern Bohemia. One arm of the lake was only about 200 metres or maybe 300 metres wide and if you swam in summer across to the other side, you were in Austria. So gradually we decided we would go that way with my brother in law.

Towards the middle of January, we made a trip to southern Bohemia. A good friend of mine drove us close to the border about four kilometres away. Beyond that, he was not allowed to proceed any further with the car, so we walked the way. We pretended we were on a skiing trip. The countryside was under snow however lots of the lakes were not frozen. It was our hope that the arm of the lake we wanted to cross would be frozen and that it would be relatively simple. With luck, when we came to the lake it was frozen and it was covered by snow, so we stopped for a while, had a look around trying to see if there were any guards about. Then we saw a herd of deer going across the lake and nothing moved anywhere. So we thought "*All right, let's go and cross*". So we walked or marched across the lake, got on the other side and now we were in Austria, which was fine.

Now in Austria, we had to walk through the trees and to where I knew a forester living about three or four kilometres away from the border who was helpful to the refugees. We went to him. He gave us some food and let us sleep. His role in that was to take us to the bus, which went to Vienna. His presence and helping us to get on the bus was because he was local and known; through that we would not be suspicious. What came to light was that in winter the bus to Vienna did not go and he said we had to go back to the Czech border to a railway station on the Austrian side. But it was right on the border and we were told we had to get a train that left for six o'clock for Vienna. It was about four hours walking. We got up at two o'clock in the morning. He walked with us through beautiful countryside, freshly covered by snow, a full moon, the moon was shining, it was like a fairy tale.

We eventually got to the station and at six o'clock he went to buy the tickets for us and then he said "*It's Sunday and the train doesn't go. The first train is three o'clock in the afternoon.*" And we said "*Alright, what can we do, we have to wait.*" So we checked in our skis and our little rucksacks, and walked to the little village and walked about. We became obviously suspicious, not being local. You know somebody who sees someone who is not local and says "*Ah, he's not from here.*" When the time for departure came, we got our luggage from the deposit and went to the platform. On the way to the platform, there was a previous Czech citizen, also a policeman not in uniform. He said "*Where are you going?*" in German. We both spoke German and said "*Oh, we go to Vienna.*" "*And what do you do there?*" My brother in law said "*We study at the university.*" "*And what sort of nationality are you?*" And he said "*We are Croats.*" He said "*Ah yes, well can you show me your passports?*"

Can you tell me how you got out of that, you went to St Anton and how you got to Australia?

In the end at the railway station we were held captive overnight. In the morning when the Chief of Police came, we had an interview with him and explained the situation. He was very sympathetic and he got \$US10 from each of us, which was a huge amount of money for the Austrians then. He said "*Alright, I'll let you go.*" So we went and managed to get to Vienna where I had some distant relations, stayed with them and eventually managed to get into St Anton am Arlberg where we had a rendezvous with Tony Sponar.

Tony had driven over from Prague with a jeep, which was fitted out so that it could be used as a portable ski lift.

In St Anton we installed this ski lift in St Christoph which is about six or seven kilometres away from St Anton, right on top of the Arlberg Pass. We installed it on a hill which is by the way still site for the present T-bar. They are using the same hill for their installation as we used for our portable ski lift. We operated the lift from the beginning of February until the Easter of '49. After Easter we packed it up and more or less parted company. (Appendix 1)

Tony Sponar stayed in Innsbruck in Austria. Karel, Sasha and I, we went to Belgium where Karel's brother had a job as a manager of a bar. He organised a job for my brother in law Karel, but I didn't have a job there.

That was the end of the European sojourn and another beginning of the trip to Australia. The trip to Australia started at the beginning of February, around the 7th or 8th February, to Melbourne. The name of the ship was Cyrenia. It was a Greek passenger ship of two thousand tons, not big by today's standards but big enough. I was fortunate to be able to pay for my passage so I was not an assisted migrant. As such I was not obliged to accept the two-year contract with the government which the assisted migrants, that is those whose passage was paid by the Australian government and who were given accommodation in camps afterwards. For that the migrants had to accept the duty to work for two years at any job the government gave them. So most were digging trenches or building roads, working for the Post Office setting up telephones, electricity lines, railway work and so.

As I said before, I was not and I could choose my employment which I organised from Europe. I started to work in a factory manufacturing artificial flowers in Hawthorn in Melbourne. There I was so-called an expert in making artificial flowers. My job there lasted three months. I started feeling not terribly happy there and I thought I would like to expand on my own so my first venture was going to the centre of Australia and examine mica mining. Most people today don't know what mica is. Mica is the mineral which is basically silicone and which was the insulating material at that time used in mostly all electrical installations. There were reports that it was very lucrative and not hard to do. I went there and made a trip around the mines but returned home with a different story. It was extremely hard work and like all mining, was lucrative only if you were lucky enough to strike the first quality type of mica. Mica was there but the poor quality didn't bring you any money for the hard labour. That was the first venture in 1950.

I was wondering what you did after you arrived in Victoria, and talk a little bit about what you did skiing, and the NSW Alpine Championships and some of the things you did there.

I did not ski in my first winter in Australia, that was 1950. Then I went for the first time in 1951. That was to Mt Buller which was the closest to Melbourne. Like all resorts, Mt

Buller was small. It only had one rope tow on Bourke Street, which was a beginners' slope and I stayed in various lodges through friends and acquaintances. Being a skier of good standard, I got noticed and struck up friendships with many of the skiing people there. Being a member of the University Ski Club, and there were lots of other clubs, and the first winter I started racing. I think I did quite well

How was it different then, from when you had been skiing before and what was the equipment like then? What was the snow like compared to what you had, had in Czechoslovakia?

The skis, they were much the same as I had had in Europe. I actually brought my own from Europe, and the differences were the eucalypts on the snow, the rozellas flying on the snow, the wombats wandering on top of the snow – that was quite different – and the quality of the snow. The Australian snow is mainly wet. When I say wet, the prevalent temperatures were above zero even in winter, just close to zero, which and when the sun came out, it had such strength that even in winter it would warm up the air and the snow, through which it got wet. As wet snow, with freezing conditions overnight or when the frosts hit, it would freeze. So it was a lot of ice and a lot of heavy powder.

Skiing was fairly primitive then. The resort was being built. We skied whatever we could. The style of skiing – well the Australians at that time were not very proficient on the whole. They were cut off from all the influences, all the good equipment over the war years and straight afterwards. After the war there was a shortage of equipment and skis so they were quite pleased to be in the company of skiers who knew how to ski better than them. That was mainly some Austrians who were on the mountain and a lot of us Czechs. There was my good friend John Wagner who was an outstanding skier and Bill Kotsman. So we joined the ski racing fraternity – John and I were the stars of it at that time.

People just loved to watch when we skied. Most of them had never seen skiing like that. They didn't realise that skiing could be so easy-looking if you did it the right way.

Were the courses different? Were you doing downhill or slalom?

Downhills were very few because the length of the runs on Mt Buller is mostly not sufficient. All the same, we had some. There was mostly slalom, and a type of giant slalom races. In 1952, a club by the name of Kandahar was formed, which was sort of a racing division of the Ski Club of Victoria. We converted a little building on Mt Buller into a club lodge, that was in 1952. From then on the Kandahar Ski Club has become the centre of ski racing on Mt Buller. Some younger boys joined the club. John and I sort of coached them and we showed them what to do. They skied with us. It was not in a structured way. We used to say "*Look here, you should do it like this, not like that.*" We showed them how to do it, and how not to do it.

They were very happy days and fraternal; it was very happy and relaxed living. Everybody knew everybody on the mountains. Come Friday night or Saturday night, you

could walk into any lodge and join a party. Everybody was welcome. It was a great time.

So you didn't change your ski technique for the wet conditions or the different type of conditions in Australia?

No, I didn't change the technique because the technique remains basically the same. You make maybe certain small adjustments. The fundamentals remain. I don't think anything changed. The major change was probably metal skis, which didn't last very long. They were not quite suitable. In the '60s there were the boots. Boots have changed. Boots were buckle boots instead of lace up boots. In the mid '60s or something like that, the plastic boots started appearing.

Going back to your NSW Alpine Championships and the Australian Victorian Championships, you found it quite easy. You were doing a slalom course then. You were winning quite a number of races being on top, is that right?

Very often in the races I finished second behind my friend John Wagner, which was unfortunate. At times I happened to beat him. The races were mostly slalom or types of giant slalom, or a type of a downhill course. The NSW Championships in a particular year, I won the Downhill which was run in very foggy weather and me, not having good eyesight, people were joking. They said "You couldn't see anyhow, so it didn't matter you were running in fog." That day I ran fastest of them all.

The system then was that there were the Victorian Championships, NSW Championships and Australian Championships. The Australian Championships in 1953, '54, they were run in the Charlotte Pass area and usually in the second half of September after the school holidays. Up there the snow conditions were usually quite good, plenty of snow. Some of the racing was done around the Chalet, some was done on the Main Range but not very much. In '53 and '54, it was tried out at the Twin Valleys which was going down to Thredbo River and it was about an hour and a half walk from the Chalet.

I never raced there because in the '54, in the training on the Friday in the afternoon a girl, Barbara Potter broke her leg and she was carried out on her back, by relay of us on foot. Everybody carried her for a little bit and consequently the next day I think, because of that the race was cancelled.

The Twin Valleys, that was a wonderful ski area. It was never opened up properly mainly because, I think, it was too far from everywhere. Terrain-wise it is one of the best.

Is that near the Chalet?

No, the Twin Valleys is about two and half kilometres down the road from Thredbo towards Jindabyne from here and that is where the chairlift which went to Charlotte Pass,

was running in the '60s. The chair lift was not exactly Twin Valleys, but the one next to it. It is a beautiful area.

That chairlift was a magnificent idea. Unfortunately it never worked properly. It was not designed correctly and not constructed correctly. Today they could do it without any problem but in those days, the contractors, they really didn't know.

Frank now I wondered about the Olympics. They were in Italy in 1956 in Cortina d'Ampezzo. What was your experience there? Do you remember one race that you can tell us about what you did and what you did to train for that?

The team was comparatively large for that time. It consisted of quite a few people, compared with previous representations at the Olympic Games because in 1956 the Games were in Melbourne. So for that reason, the Olympic Federation sent out more racers for the Winter Games. In the downhill, the alpine skiing, there four men and one girl. We started training in Zurs in Austria, just before Christmas 1955. Our trainer was Leonhard Erharter who later became the first head of a ski school in Thredbo. We were blighted unfortunately by a lack of snow. That was an extreme hindrance for our skiing and training. Skiing on little snow is so much harder than when you have an ample cover of snow. It is far more dangerous and every fall, you know you really hurt yourself because you don't fall into soft stuff, you fall on hard ground with a small cover.

Leonhard did what he could, but he was not really happy with us. He thought he would be getting a better team, but he had to make do with what he had. Our best performer was Christine Davy. He devoted a lot of time to her and brought her to standard when she performed reasonably well amongst the girls. We are not talking about the first three positions here, we are talking about the middle or the first half of the field. After the Zurs training, we went to Innsbruck, and then there was a training in Kitzbuhel. There was the great race which was the Hahnenkamm race – a famous downhill race. It was very hard and I must say none of our team were really up to it. Because of the lack of snow beforehand, we couldn't get the proper preparation. The results were not particularly good. It is a very classical race. The Hahnenkamm starts with an enormous schuss, then you go into trees, in a forest, winding your way down. For me, that particular downhill was not easy because it was very dangerous. There was a section where the tracks were frozen. It was in January, early afternoon, a sunny day and it started freezing over. The tracks were frozen. There was nothing much more than a couple of tracks. On the left, there were rocks on the right, there were trees, and you had to keep going. It was quite fast. So that was one of my great experiences.

A funny thing happened. I would like to say, I was one of the last runners because all the good runners, they always go first, and I was one of the last ones. Behind me was a Russian – he was catching up with me so I let him pass and about a hundred or two hundred metres further down, as I skied I saw him go into the trees, into the forest, and he had an almighty fall. And I said "*Serves him right*" because he is a Russian. You know my animosity towards Russians. He didn't hurt himself – not seriously anyhow.

That was one of the preparatory races. Then we went to Bad Gastein. We had a week of training there but once again the snow was very, very scarce. We got to Cortina a week before the race. We got accommodation in a nice boarding house. Once again the snow situation in Cortina was disastrous. The ground was barely covered, like 20 centimetres of snow which is nothing really. Through that, once again, the preparation was not what it should have been. The Downhill in Cortina, it was a big race course. It went high into the mountains and once again started with a big schuss which went into the flatter ground. It was extremely bumpy and it had a very, very hard snow cover, very little. It was really dangerous so our team was absolved from running in it. The only person who ran in the Downhill was Billy Day. He was the youngest member and the best skier of the lot. Because he didn't finish either Giant Slalom, or Slalom, he wanted to redeem himself and went into the Downhill. He finished a very creditable 24th or 27th which was a very good result.

I, myself, went into Giant Slalom and Slalom only. The Giant Slalom was a long course, quite difficult and my result was not commendable at all. Now for the Slalom which requires a good snow cover because people make sharp turns, all in the same spot. It requires a good cover and good preparation. Partly because there was hardly any snow, the preparation of the course was difficult so the organisers in their wisdom, asked the fire brigade to hose the whole slope with water. Consequently it froze. It was one sheet of ice from top to bottom.

In the first run there were 90 or 88 gates and the second run had 92 gates which is almost twice as many as the modern slalom. It was an enormous race. The slalom poles were not the modern flexible ones, they were little saplings which were really embedded into the ground. Once again my starting number was 112. I was the third or fourth last runner to start. Well my run, it wasn't good but it wasn't bad. There was one section at the top which presented a lot of trouble to the fast runners, and a lot of them just shot out because on the ice they couldn't hold it. I was doing that gate, and I saw that I was drifting out and said "*Oh dear me, I'm drifting out, and I am not going to do it*", so I grabbed one of those poles and because it was so stout, I turned around it – it was quite legal – and so kept going.

My second run, it was after 4 o'clock in the afternoon. You could barely see. It was twilight already, and I finished, I think 54th if I am not mistaken out of a field of 116. I was not happy with the result because I thought that in slalom I could have done a bit better. But then it is a great difference having a race on Mt Buller and going into the big racing which is a different story. You have to get used to the big time racing the atmosphere, the conditions, and all that goes around with it. That was the Olympic Games. We didn't have many results. We had placings by Billy Day in the Downhill, by me in the GS and in the Slalom, and of course, by Christine Davy.

What were you skiing on? That type of skis?

We were skiing on the Kastle brand skis. Kastle was an Austrian manufacturer. Each of us was allowed to buy at factory price, three pairs of skis, like slalom, giant slalom and

downhill skis. In those days we didn't have the support which the racers of today get, neither manufacturers, nor from the Association, nor the organisers. All we got was 300 pounds. That was to cover the passage to Europe and back. Beyond that, we got the week in Cortina covered and I think that was all. We each had to pay the rest. There was support in as much for accommodation and in everything else, we paid far less, probably half price of the normal charges – that was the support from the organisers from the various resorts. They supported the racing in return for the advertising and for propaganda purposes.

It was not all that expensive, nevertheless it was no comparison with what the racers get today. Nevertheless there was no obligation as far as brands were concerned and as far as the various aspects of racing, whether you go into the race or don't go. It was far more on a friendly basis than now. It was not strictly governed. After the races, we went to Venice together with the team and then we parted company. That was the end of that experience.

Did you wax your skis?

We had to wax skis. Once again the top teams, they had specialist waxers who were waxing the skis to the best. We did what we could by experimenting. Our knowledge was not very deep. We knew how to wax but the finer points eluded us. Waxing skis, it is an art of great skill. You have to judge conditions, snow temperatures, snow quality and all these things which we didn't have any expert advice on.

The technique at this point? What were you doing as far as technique was concerned?

The technique at that time was more or less a universal mix of the Austrian technique then which was developing – it was not the old Arlberg technique any more. It was a modern Austrian technique, and quite a lot of influence from the Americans and Canadians. Each nation had a little bit of a different approach. But to me it was very similar like it always has been. You know it is the proper stance, the standing on skis and the distribution of weight, putting the weight on the outside ski, and turning in time. In slalom, giant slalom and for that matter, downhill, the great thing is to turn at the right moment, or to start turning at the right moment. If you leave it too late, you have to do a very sharp turn and start drifting and slow down too much – that is the general racing technique. I can't say that we excelled in the point of technique, we just skied to the best of our ability. I should say that Christine Davy did quite well in the Games. I forget her placings but she performed probably better than any of the men.

In 1958 you were Chairman of the Victorian Ski Association. I would like you to talk about what you did there and what happened.

I would like to correct this slightly. In '58 I became the chairman of the Race Committee of the Victorian Ski Association. As such it was a very lovely sounding title but in fact what it involved was to organise races from the beginning to the end, to get the slalom poles, get to the course, set up the gates, organise the time keepers, organise the gate

keepers and all which goes with racing. Usually on Saturday morning, as early as possible, I went to our storage shed on Mt Buller, picked up a big bundle of slalom poles. In those days I could carry up to 50 poles on my shoulder. As I was skiing down, I was setting up the course because there was no time to prepare really like they set up courses today in advance, or early in the morning with all the technical facilities. In those days there were T-bars, so you went up the T-bar and skied down the particular slope where the race was to be. As such you would stake out a course, the racers went behind, they side slipped and packed the course a little bit. They would then walk up or take the T-bar up, and off we go, we started racing. It was very quickly done.

At first we only had visual timing. The course had to be set on a slope where the time keepers at the finish could see the start. At the start there would be a man with a pole with a flag on it, and as the word went "Go", so the man would lower the flag and the time keepers would press their stop watches. When the racer arrived at the finish, then the time keepers would take the time, record it, then wave a flag to show they are ready for the next runner. It was quite primitive. A little later on, there was a telephone connection, now we had to string wire from top to bottom for the field telephones. At first there were army surplus phones – very often they gave us a lot of trouble. The connection got broken and through the wetness of the snow, the wires sometimes shorted and didn't work properly. However, that was an advancement on the previous completely visual method.

A bit later on again we had radios, but that was already in the '60s. We had radio connections between start and finish. With the first set of radios, we had to have a line of vision from the start to the finish without any major obstructions. If there were any obstructions, the signal wouldn't go through. The later versions of the radio didn't have this impediment. They were not so restrictive and it was a big advantage. Later of course there were the electronic gates which would open when the racer took off and there were the electronic lights at the finish when the racer crossed the finishing line, the time would be recorded automatically. Basically that is the method used today. It is so refined. You know we couldn't dream about these time measurements which they do today. Well briefly that's it. Everything was completely volunteer and sometimes the greatest headache get the help.

After being the chairman of the Race Department of the Victorian Ski Association, the time came at one of our chairman of committees meetings, when they couldn't decide who should be the President of the Association. The Secretary at that time came up with the idea "*Why not Frank?*" I said *No, don't be silly, I don't want to be a chairman and I can't be a chairman.*" They said "*Why not?*" I thought it a great honour being a migrant, and comparatively early after my arrival here, that somebody should think of me as material for presidency of the Association. It came to a vote and I was voted in. I stayed in the function for two or three years. I am not sure now, the past years seem to merge into one another and I can't quite remember the passage of time.

The function, it doesn't have much to do with skiing itself. It is more the administration of an association. The Association consists of members who were clubs. There were a

number of ski clubs of which some were based on Mt Buller, some at Falls Creek or the surrounding towns, some were based at schools and university. There were forty constituents, if not more. That is not a very rewarding function to swim between the various interests and the demands of the clubs, make sure that they remain members and that they are more or less happy.

There were pressures for modernisation and during my second or third year, the emphasis on the old style of administration diminished and a certain clique of people were thinking of organising things differently. There were fairly rich parents of budding racers, they wanted things done differently and more or less demanded that a lot of time for work in the Association. I couldn't give it because I was extremely busy in my work and that was just not possible for me, so I was just voted out in favour of somebody else who was a type of a go-getter and did rather well for a while. So that was the end of an era for me, anyhow, or possibly for the old timers, the old style administration.

You were going to tell me about 1967 and the seniors' races.

In the '60s there were a number of people who were no more actively racing in the younger class and who thought it would be nice if there were races for people who are in a different category, who are not racing in the main races, but would nevertheless like to race. That was both in Melbourne, in Sydney and NSW as well. So probably in 1966, Beppi Gutknecht, who was Swiss by origin, he organised a race for seniors which was anybody over the age of 35 years or maybe it was 40, I am not quite sure. I think the first race was at Thredbo and it was a great success. Beppi organised prizes or trophies for the winners. He organised the whole race. The Thredbo Ski School set the course and did all that work. Time and gate keeping was done by volunteers, but there seemed to be enough of them. It was a once-a-year race really. That was for everybody who took part. These races became very popular. They were not only in Thredbo. They were at Falls Creek. I don't think we had any on Mt Buller. Falls Creek and Thredbo were the main venues.

The last race of this type was held in 1976. I think it was quite a lean year. By today's standards it was quite a good year, but by the standard of snow cover in those years it was a lean year. It was held in the gully down from the Ramshead. Afterwards Beppi gave up the organisation. He didn't want to be involved anymore. For a couple of years there were no races.

Eventually people from the Guthega Ski Club took it upon themselves and they organised the yearly race which was called ANVAC – Australian National Veterans' Championship. It was for seniors over the age of 35. It was held at Guthega. It was an enormous success. Everyone was flocking there. In the first years the field was like 50 or 60 racers and the atmosphere of that race was extremely good. It was a handicap race based on the FIS method of handicapping. There were time differences, or certain allowances of time depending on the winner's time. If the winner's time was under a minute, the yearly allowance was less than if the winner's time was over a minute. The second version, if it was over a minute, gave advantage to the older because for every year you got up to .03 or .04 of a second, benefit. Whereas, if the winning time was

under a minute, you only got .02 of a second for a year. Through this system, there was one year when I won the race and very often I came second. I enjoyed it enormously. That was already the time when I moved up to Thredbo. I have been living here since 1974.

Gradually it became known that there are races organised for seniors in Europe and they were referred to as Master's Races. I very much wanted to participate and eventually, I think it was in '83, may be in '84, in Val d'Isere I took part in the first race. I don't know what placing I got there. After that I tried to go to the finals in the Masters' Cup. The Masters' Cup was organised on similar lines as the World Cup Races. It was only for seniors. Of course it was on a smaller scale than other races. But in Europe, a lot of many people participated and just did the circuit all winter long. I myself at best, only went for one or two weeks and sometimes there were preliminary races, and afterwards there was the final of the Masters' Cup. Well I won one race in Lake Louise one year. Quite often I finished second and quite often fourth. I always finished amongst the first six or eight.

Our age group finally had a lot of strong skiers and very often the best times of our group were faster than the best times of the younger group one or two below. It just depends as in all races, who comes together. There was one race in the United States, it was in Winter Park which is not far from Denver, in these Giant Slaloms they were starting at intervals of 30 seconds. I ran as Number Four or Five and I caught up with the racer before me. For a bit I was unsure what to do, then I passed him and finished the race, and there was confusion with the time, then I protested and my time was third I think for the first run. I protested and I had an argument with the organisers and in the end I was accorded a new run. But the catch with that situation is that the time of the new run counts and even if it is slower than the time before which was my case. By the time I was allowed to start, I was completely frozen and stiff, so I was not in the mood for it anymore. The result was that I finished fourth. The protest didn't pay me but I didn't think it right. The organisers, they should have allowed me more time after the runner before.

There were other big races all over the place in France, in Austria several times, not in Italy. They were in Canada, USA, a couple of them in Switzerland. Once again I enjoyed that very much. It became the focal part of my skiing.

In 1993 there was a race to be held in Megeve, France, and I was in Val d'Isere training for it and on a training run in a slalom one morning, I hit a pole and had a mighty fall and fell on my shoulder. I dislocated my shoulder, tore the muscles so afterwards I didn't go into a race any more. I was getting on in years. A great handicap for me was that I was the only Australian and as such I had no support, I had to wax and lug my skis, and organise everything for myself, so it was not only the race itself, but it was the prior to the race and after the race.

So after my injury, it was operated on in Australia later, I didn't race anymore except I still go into what was originally the Austrian Masters in Thredbo, now it is the Thredbo

Masters. It is a great social occasion, enjoyed by everybody, with a dinner afterwards and great fun.

That is the extent of my racing. In closing – about this subject – I don't consider myself extremely outstanding or successful. I enjoyed it and I like to do it. I have certain ability but I also had handicaps, but altogether it was a great part of my life.

Would you like to donate this to the Thredbo Historical Society? We usually do a verbal on the tape as well as the written, so I just wanted to say that you would, and its fine that it is transcribed.

Well I am happy to donate it. Yes, absolutely.

APPENDIX

Thirty six members and guests at the Annual Mid Winter Thredbo Historical Society dinner on 24 July, 2000, enjoyed a welcome champagne, hors d'oeuvres and a three course sumptuous feast at Thredbo's Il Segreto restaurant. The only interruption to dinner and convivial conversation, was an amusing and memorable account by Guest Speaker Frank Prihoda who reminisced about innovative ski lift construction. Following is an abridged version of Frank's story.

THE JEEP SKI LIFT as told by Frank Prihoda

After the Communist Party forceful takeover of Czechoslovakia, Frank together with his sister Sasha, brother-in-law Karel Nekvapil and friend Tony Sponar who was the country's foremost skier in postwar years, conceived a way in which to illegally depart from their homeland. Tony came up with an idea to construct a portable ski lift out of Frank's jeep for the use of the Czech ski team either at home or abroad.

The principal of the lift was an aluminium sled fitted between the back wheels and a sled under each of the front wheels. These would stop the jeep from sinking into snow. Tony disconnected the front wheel drive and fitted a driving shaft for a winch fixed to the front of the vehicle. The drum held 400 metres of 10 mm steel cable. This demountable additional equipment could be stored inside or on top of the vehicle for travelling. To operate this ski lift, the jeep would travel on the road as close as possible to intended site. When the vehicle reached the edge of the snow, the sliding platforms and winch would be fitted, the cable unrolled and anchored on the spot from where the lift should operate. Then the winch would be engaged and the vehicle would winch itself up to the end of the cable.

When the jeep was on top of the desired hill it had to be placed front facing the slope. To carry skiers uphill, a train of six T's was fitted to the end of the cable, one after another. The train of T's had to be pulled straight down the slope by the guard to the landing area, usually on a flat. There, five pairs of skiers stepped into the T's, placed them behind their bottoms, the guard would grab the front T, wave to Tony who was running the engine and

winch up top and the winch started to pull the skiers uphill to a distance close on 400m. Guarding duties were performed mostly by Frank and Karel.

In December 1948, Tony as a prominent member of the Czech ski team and part owner of the portable ski lift/jeep obtained permission to drive the heavily laden vehicle to St Anton, Austria where his team was training. Sasha was already in Switzerland with the girls ski team while Frank and Karel had a complicated illegal crossing over a frozen lake on the southern Bohemian border into Austria. St Anton was to be the temporary home for the three young men.

St Christoph on top of the Arlberg Pass and not far from St Anton was the site selected for the ski lift. Until that time there never had been a ski lift there. The top of the lift was a nice hill close to the run from top of Galzig Bahn to St Christoph. The loading area was more or less in the front of the Austrian Ski School Bundesheim which was not operating at the time.

After obtaining permission from the Burgemeister, getting the heavily laden jeep up the 6km steep snow covered road, to the site and several days of difficult installation, followed by trials, it was evident the winch driving shaft was not strong enough and an extra bearing had to be fitted half way along. Not a problem in a normal workshop situation, however in a wilderness surrounded by 2 - 3 metres of snow, and temperatures between minus 25 degrees to minus 30 degrees Centigrade, without power, it was another matter. All drilling in the chassis had to be done by hand - most terrible and hard work.

To buy the bearing, somebody had to go to Innsbruck some 100 km away, then return to the site using the cable car from St Anton to the Galzig, ski down to the site, see how to fit it, go to St Anton to have a backing plate made, take it back and mark off the holes, take it back and check if it fitted, go back down and have some alterations done. At long last after two or three weeks the lift was fully operational. Then came the blizzards so it was not possible to run the ski lift for five weeks.

So without any business, the group was not able to afford any other food than dry bread for lunch, and potatoes with garlic sauce for dinner. Gradually business improved and the first somewhat better customers arrived in the form of a group of war invalids who proved to be the best and most disciplined riders to ride the jeep T-bar.

One of the greatest problems was that the battery always lost its charge overnight in these extreme conditions. So it was necessary to take it out every night, ski down with it to St Anton, have it charged overnight, take it up the cable car - if it was running - ski down with it to the jeep, fit it in again, and hope that the oil was not frozen in the sump. Sometimes it was necessary to warm it with the blowtorch to get the crankshaft turning.

Of course car batteries are heavy and leak acid. On one occasion Frank lost his way from the top of the cable car, ran into a ditch full of fresh snow, fell backwards and could not get up. It took him more than half an hour to free himself after having almost given up all hope that he would ever manage.

Sometime in March 1949, Sasha joined the team and later Elizabeth, Tony's future wife, came to St Anton. Close to Easter, with the arrival of custom in the form of French students to the Bundesheim, the financial fortunes improved and the group were able to have lunches and even dinners with meat once a week.

So it is true (Doppelmayr eat your heart out!) that the first ever ski lift in St Christoph am Arlberg, Austria, was installed and run by three Czechs who all came to Australia and finally to Thredbo."

Subject:AOC Website Article

Date:Sat, 28 Jan 2017 16:05:15 +1100

From:Frank Prihoda <prihoda@spin.net.au>

To:David Tarbotton <David.Tarbotton@nswis.com.au>

Dear David,

Here is my story, starting with saying that indeed the 1956 Winter Olympic Games were indeed cursed by lack of snow which created a lot of problems for racers and organizers as well.

I did not dream about competing in Olympic Games as a young boy as the idea of it was far too removed from my sporting involvement and aspirations. But I followed skiing films and results of racing with great enthusiasm as Czechoslovakia was generally involved in skiing and quite a high achiever in international competitions albeit then it was Nordic disciplines.

Although when I was a boy there was snow in the streets of Prague but it was quickly cleared away as it interfered with the city functioning. In some quiet hilly streets it was tobogganing for small children. I had a good childhood in the middle class family, attending as usual 5 years of primary school and also 5 years of "middle school", roughly the same as high school here. That school lasted normally 8 years, unfortunately I could not finish it on account of my father's premature death and mother took me out in order to enter the family business which was manufacturing artificial flowers. They were then a fashion accessory.

Skiing I went for the first time at the age of eight, not a very successful affair for me. My sister and various cousins did much better. More seriously skiing started for me at the age of 13 when I gradually tagged on some older cousins and my sister who were part of the racing, Alpine disciplines crowd. From the age of 13 I started doing track athletics in the youth class running first 60 meters sprints and later 400m, which was better suited for me. Of course I continued skiing mainly being taught and coached by older racers and gradually being involved in the Ski Club "Slavia" being guided by older racers and part of group of young ones.

In February 1948 after the Communist Putsch a strict communist-socialist government came into power which installed a harsh regime under which I did not want to live. Our business was also expropriated and the future was dim. Therefore I decided to leave the country and managed to do so in company of my brother in law in January 1949 having crossed illegally into Austria. My sister Sasha Nekvapil was participating in races in Switzerland and managed not to return with the team back to Czechoslovakia. Quite an achievement. Eventually we all met in St. Anton in Austria where we also met with Tony Sponar and ran commercially a portable ski tow in near by St.Christoph. Sasha and Tony were both competing in the 1948 Winter Olympic Games in St.Moritz, Switzerland. It was for Czechoslovakia.

After Austria I spent some eight months in Belgium where my sister and brother in law were, I left for Melbourne in February 1950. It was all family decision. Being single and not requiring any assistance from Australian government I obtained my landing permit within 6 weeks from Australia House in London. I arrived in Melbourne on 9th March 1950 and started working immediately in an artificial flower factory, Harbigs, having organized my employment by mail, at a very good wage. I stayed there some three months and later after a short stint at mica mining I

was involved with friends in manufacturing tapestries. That lasted until I left for the Olympic Games already at the end of October 1955 by plane and via USA, Canada for Zurs in Austria where the team met.

In Australia I started skiing only in the winter of 1951 at Mt.Buller. It was on weekends only and staying in various club lodges for whose hospitality I am thankful. It was skiing without lifts, climbing on foot, which did not give you too much downhill skiing in a day but it was good for physical condition. Luckily there was in Melbourne my good friend from Prague, John Wagner, excellent skier and racer and together we had some quality skiing. However there was no organized race training.

In 1953 Kandahar Ski Club was founded under the auspices of George Chisholm, it was racing division of the Ski Club of Victoria. George was later the team manager for the Winter Games in 1956. George by the way did a lot for downhill racing organization not only in Victoria but NSW as well and was well regarded across the whole skiing community. I myself was a member of the racing committee of the Victorian Ski Association since 1953 and later it's chairman. I also had a stint at being president of the VSA for two years.

When it became known that there would be an Olympic team in the 1956 Games the dream of being a member of it took a more real form as

I considered myself a having a good chance. So the winter of 1955 was full of expectations for many skiers. There were trials mainly in the form of various state championships, Victoria, NSW, ACT, Tasmania. I participated in some of them but was absolved from the ACT and Tasmanian ones as my nomination was assured due to my known ability. The racing community was a small one and it was known to the selectors "who is who". There was training but by private and personal effort not by any official bodies none being in existence at that time. I was in my own business, although partnership, so I could make my own decision. My sister Sasha took temporarily my place as she could not participate

having been a ski instructor therefore a professional, although the best in Australia at that time.

What was interesting about my nomination that being a migrant and I did not fulfill my strict five years residence requirement for naturalization wheels were put in motion and I received Naturalization Certificate already in May of 1955. The team was then William Day, youngest and best of us all, Anthony Aslangul, James Walker, Christine Davy and myself. It being the year of Melbourne Games the AOC was more generous and we received a blazer made to measure but for the pocket, embroidered, we all had to pay three Guinness.

I did not travel on the Iberia. I undertook an airplane trip around the world on my own as I wanted to make good use of my being able to travel. I went via USA, Canada to Europe where we all met in Zurs in Austria and I think it was some two weeks before Christmas 1955. It was the place of our training and Leonhard Erharter became our coach. He was an outstanding Austrian racer who due to severe injuries had to give up racing and devote himself to coaching and ski instructing. During that time good snowfall came, we had plenty of snow. That unfortunately did not eventuate in other resorts where we skied. From there we left straight after Christmas for Innsbruck where we did not ski and after a few days traveled to Kirchberg near Kitzbuhel in Tirol. There we skied/trained and took part in the famous Hahnenkamm downhill race. That sojourn lasted roughly a week and it was a very pleasant stay in Kirchberg.

Afterwards there was a stay in Badgastein, where other than training a Super Giant Slalom race was held as test for the assembled racers. We were there approximately a week. From there it was a run for Cortina. All the travelling was by VW minibus which George Chisholm generously provided for team travel. For all the stays in various ski resorts we had to pay ourselves albeit very low rates and lifting was provided by the host resorts. Cortina stay was paid for by the AOC.

Cortina, lovely, charming mountain village, more of a small town or township, with luxurious shops and entertainment venues, provided everything for the successful conduct of the Games. new stadium, general improvements in infrastructure and buildings except for the very important ingredient - snow. The situation was to say the least, most unsatisfactory. The conditions were better farther up the mountains but snow cover very thin, very often small stones, being mostly whitish, were not very visible and were crunching under your skis. Also conditions were a bit dangerous as any fall was painful.

The Italian hosts were very generous, our hotel Roma was first class family establishment, accommodation being two or three to a room. The team manager was provided with an attache for contact with the authorities, he was an army major (in civilian clothes, very nice man) and two young ladies were looking after our day to day small problems and a source of local information. They came from eminent Italian families who had luxury chalets in Cortina.

The opening ceremony took place on Thursday 26th January 1956 on a bright sunny winter day. After a march through the streets of Cortina we entered the stadium at the head of the column. Flag bearer was a young Italian athlete as ours was a small team and an agreement could not be reached, who of us it should be. I was walking with pride being able to represent my new country and also with a little fear of the tasks ahead. These were big races in which none of us had any experience. After the speeches the entertainment was provided by the chorus of the Alpini, mountain detachments to the Italian army. They were beautiful singers also performing at the medal presentation ceremonies.

My, our, first race was the Giant Slalom, in nature more like Super G. very long. In those days there were no pliable slalom poles, small, sufficiently long saplings were used. They were very solid. The day was beautiful. Due to pre- racing nerves I had a fall in the first gate, not a bad one, but I had to climb back on the course and it cost me a lot of seconds, hence my placing.

My second race, Slalom, usually my best discipline took place on Tuesday 31st January and it was run on a slope close to the village. As it had only thin cover of snow, two days before the local fire brigade sprayed the whole slope with water which froze into a sheet of ice. It was the only way to provide a skiable surface for all runners. There were 114 and I had a number 112. My second run was near 4p.m. almost in the dark. The course was extremely long, well over 90 gates 92 and 96 I think, consequently running times were quite long, close to almost double of present day times. The course in its especially top part was very demanding as it was glassy ice, very slippery. One gate, quite a sharp turn was the downfall of many top racers, taking it too fast they slid off course and could not stop until way down, too far to return. I managed to stay on course only just. My placing 54th was somewhat disappointing to me, as I fancied myself to be able to finish somewhere around 35th.

The downhill course under normal snow conditions would be quite beautiful, very dramatic setting under the rocky mountain, with a long very steep schuss near the top finishing in a more level traverse. Normally the transition from the very steep to more level gradient was manageable. But the transition then was very sharp and the traverse was extremely full of sharp and hard bumps. That was where many a good downhiller came to grief, as it was very taxing and strength sapping. Further down, the entry curve into trees, steep one, was dangerous on speed, quite a few finished in the safety net. On account of these conditions Tony and I did not have to run the downhill. Billy Day was stronger and eager to redeem himself for the previous disqualification and placing. He did that very well having finished 35th. Christine Davy, our only lady on the team, performed very creditably having been guided by our coach Leonhard.

Personally I experienced the long arm of the communist regime while in Cortina. One day a Czech ice hockey player told me that my skier friends from the Czech team, were expressly forbidden to see me. I was wondering why they started to shun me. It had no other effect than depriving me of friendly contact.

After the closing ceremony came the more flat feeling of disappointment, feeling that one could have done better and maybe tried harder. However at the end of the Games all was done and could not be changed. The whole of the more than a month was living on a constant "high". We travelled all together to Venice where we parted company and some went home other did more travelling. I went to Denmark, Germany, Austria, Italy, partly on business, also visiting friends, Hong Kong, returning to Australia in May 1956.

Last almost 43 out of the 67 in Australia I lived in Thredbo this wonderful mountain resort. For 27 years I ran a shop selling souvenirs, gifts, small clothing and also some art objects. I retired towards the end of 2001 at the age of 80. I am enjoying comparatively good health in spite of having problems mainly with my back which also hampers my walking. I have been single all my life and my nearest relative was my sister Sasha Nekvapil who lived since 1959 in Thredbo running a commercial lodge with her now deceased husband Karel and last probably 15 years or even more in Canberra near her son Michael Nekvapil with whose family I have a good relationship.

Frank Prihoda

1956 Winter Olympic Games Cortina d'Ampezzo Italy

Opening Ceremony - Australian Team

First Row: (from left) Tony Aslangul, George Chisholm (Manager), Billy Day

Second Row: Jacqui Mason, name not known, Christine Davy

Third Row: Frank Prihoda, other names not known



