

## **MICHELLE REICHINGER – AN ORAL HISTORY**

*interviewed by Christina Webb, Frankheinstein Apartments, Thredbo, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.*

*I'm Chrissi Webb and I'm interviewing Michelle Reichinger in her Thredbo apartment with its view of the green ski slopes, with the intention of recording her oral history for the Thredbo Historical Society. The date is May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.*

*Michelle are you agreeable that this recording of your oral history be transcribed and held in the Society's archives for research purposes, and that you will share the copyright with the Society?*

Yes.

*To begin with, Michelle, please could you tell me a little about your grandparents?*

My grandparents? My paternal grandparents came from Russia, originally from Belarus. My grandmother was Marusia Shroog. She was a very formidable, strong, impressive Russian woman, very progressive. She wanted to become a doctor but you know, in those days it was very difficult for a woman to become professional, so she became a nurse, a maternity nurse. They were a large Jewish family living in Belarus. It was around about the time of the Pogroms and there was persecution of the Jews so they had to be mindful. But at any rate, from my recollection she went on a holiday to Baku on the Caspian Sea where she met my grandfather, Abraham Slutzkin who was an engineer working on the oil fields They got married.

She had a favourite sister, Sima who married Abraham's nephew, Jack Mann. She had ill health so they decided to try and bring her to a warmer climate which would be more conducive for her longevity. Because my grandmother Marusia had a brother living in Australia, who had established himself quite successfully as a hotelier in Sydney on Bondi Beach – he had built a big hotel there – he was in a position to sponsor the whole family coming to Australia.

So I think that all eventuated in 1923 or '24, when my father Alexander was about 12 years old, the majority of the brothers and sisters of my grandmother's family came and settled in Sydney. They became involved in the hotel industry because it put a roof over their heads and they all lived and worked, and operated various hotels in and around Sydney for many years during and after the Depression.

In fact they made quite a mark for themselves and one of cousins, Sandra Levy, who was in charge of ABC Drama did a mini series called 'The Palace of Dreams' which was based on the Russian families' life in Sydney, living in hotels. It was quite entertaining.

*Now your father, was he working in the hotel industry as a young man?*

He did various things He was a wool classer. He was involved with various drama clubs. He produced plays at the Russian Club. But of course growing up in the industry, he eventually took on his own hotel in the city. It was the Coronation Hotel close to the Town Hall and he was running his own show. All of the offspring ended up in hotels.

I recall it was sometime then when he was a publican that he met my mother during the war when they were doing a promotion for the merino wool for the coats for the soldiers on the Russian front. They did a modelling shoot and they were both present at that. My mother Joan, was a model (Miss Daily Telegraph Beach Girl 1944) and he was recruited to represent the Russian contingent. It happened to be their birthdays when they met on the first day of spring. (September first). They met a year later, again on their birthdays and the co-incidence

was a too much. They started dating and got married fairly soon after. They continued working in the hotel industry.

We eventually moved to our family house in Cammeray when we were three little girls. My father continued, buying & developing hotels in & around Sydney & NSW.

*When were you born?*

I was born on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1948, a couple of days before my parents' birthdays. They were both born on September 1<sup>st</sup>. In fact they thought I was going to be their birthday present. I was the middle one. I had older sister, Jenna and a younger sister, Linda. There was about three years between us from go to woe. "Three in three years" my mother always used to say.

*You lived in Cammeray then?*

My parents moved into our Cammeray home when I was born.

*Were they were living in the Hotel Coronation when you were born?*

Yes, I think so.

*Were you born at the Royal Women's at Paddington?*

I was born at Randwick Hospital. I remember they had to call my father off the racecourse because he was something of a punter. He always went to the races on a Saturday. The doctor said "Come on, your wife is having a baby and you had better come or you will miss out."

*And then you moved to Cammeray?*

Yes. My younger sister Linda came along 18 months later and shortly after that my father took on the New Brighton Hotel in Manly. So we actually moved to Manly as a family and spent several years there on the beach.

*And you went to school there?*

Yes I started school at the Manly public school. Then my father and one of his cousins built a hotel. It was called the Enfield Boulevard Hotel and my father was the licensee. So as a family we moved there for another two or three years I think.

I was in primary school. It was an interesting hotel because it offered live entertainment that hotels didn't have before. It had delegations, conferences and fabulous hand painted murals on the walls. My mother designed an amazing bar. It was in the vanguard of a modern hotel for that time. My mother was very artistic so she did a lot of the styling of the bars and public areas. My father managed it until we returned to Cammeray in probably 1956 or '57. I was in third grade. We moved permanently back to Cammeray whilst my father continued to run his little hotel empire. That was his main interest, his life. He was a hotelier and all our cousins and family were in the same industry.

*From Cammeray, you would have gone to high school.*

From Cammeray I went to Willoughby Girls High where I completed my education before I embarked on an Arts Drama degree at the University of New South Wales.

*You must have inherited some of your mother's artistic ability.*

Well I wish I had. I mean not in the raw sense. My sister Linda did. She went to Art College and became an art teacher, working in regional Australia, before being appointed head of Art Education at the AGNSW. I always had an "eye" but I couldn't express it in the same way as my mother & sister. My parents were both interested in the contemporary art scene. They had a beautiful collection of contemporary Australian art. I grew up with an appreciation for art.

I went to the University of New South Wales because they had a drama department there. It was fairly new department and it had an affiliation with NIDA.

*What was your introduction to the snow and how come your father who was a hotelier, ended up with a pharmacy?*

Well that is another story. My father became involved on a more casual basis – he wanted to have an interest in the snow from a family perspective so we could have an introduction to skiing. He had colleagues, who were pharmacists who saw an opportunity to open a small business here.

I think it goes back to my parents having a connection with Dick Dusseldorp. They had met socially. They came to Thredbo and had a ski holiday with them in the early sixties and Dick said to my father "We have just built this beautiful hotel. The Thredbo Alpine Hotel. We want to open some retail businesses – we need a chemist, a grocery, and a snack bar. We are looking for people to take on leases for our retail shops." He said to him "Would you be interested in coming on board and being one of the first retailers?"



**Dick Dusseldorp with Joan and Alexander Slutzkin**

That is how they established Snowfield Enterprises. Originally I think there were five partners. My father had a fifth interest in the little consortium in the concourse. It was a means to an end, so that we could come here and have a good time. They leased Snowman's Apartments for staff. That is where we stayed when we came down

*Did you come down every year?*

The first time I came down, I came with my sister Linda on the sleeper train from Sydney and that was the year of the big snow dump, 1964. We got the bus from Cooma into Thredbo and it was just a little wonderland. That was my first sighting of snow, I think I was fourteen.

*What did you wear?*

We wore those pants with the stirrup legs and big jumpers, duffle coats and desert boots. Anyway pom poms on our hats and things, lots of Fair Isle patterned sweaters and tight pants. That was very much the sixties.

*And the colours?*

Lots of reds, navy and cream. They were my colours anyway. It was a very stylish time for the industry because skiing was very elitist then, wasn't it? Not everyone was coming to the snow, so you had to have the means to do it. Paul Reader must have been the retailer in Sydney then. I think everybody went there to buy their finery for the snow. And fur. I remember fur was being worn. Mum had her fur coats down here. It was quite sophisticated and jet setting.

*Tell me about the train ride?*

The train ride left from Central Station. It was just my sister and myself.

*At fourteen?*

We were unchaperoned but we were put on the train and we had a little sleeper compartment. It was the first time I had been overnight. We obviously woke up every now and then with the to-ing and fro-ing. "We were sleeping on a train!" I think I was in the top bunk. But that was a novelty in itself and I don't know how long that ran for because it goes only to Canberra now.

We thought it was a special treat. It was in the school holidays. My parents were already down here and my other sister, Jenna was also here, I remember when we got to Cooma and got a bus connection to Thredbo. There was already a considerable amount of snow so it was a slow ride in. There were chains on the bus. There was snow all the way through to Thredbo. I just remember cars and lodges covered in snow. To get into Kareela, there was a tunnel you had to ski through.

*Were you able to ski up there then?*

No, I wasn't that proficient but I learnt to ski down at the base of Crackenback. The beginners' slope was right down by the river.

*Did many people end up in the river?*

Well I always thought I might, I was quite nervous. I remember it was close to where we were skiing. It was just in front of the Valley Terminal, – that was the beginners' area. They were all Austrian ski instructors. It was a little European village, very multicultural. You wouldn't recognise it today. It was a very intimate little European ski resort.

I finished schooling, then I went overseas and when I came back my mother was here having a holiday with Mrs Dusseldorp, "Mrs D!" Her son, Wouter was in Sydney and he invited me to come down. So we drove down together. We stayed at Lend Lease Lodge, now Seidler Lodge. It must have been August. Then I started to ski up at Merrits with the T-bars and those terrible long, old skis. I remember we learnt to ski on a ski that was nearly 200 centimetres long. It was much harder than it is now.

Whilst I was here "Mrs D" was being instructed by Heinz, (her private ski instructor) and I didn't actually get to meet him while we were there. But they kept talking about Heinz and saying "Do you want to come out to dinner and meet Heinz, our ski instructor" but I kept saying "Oh, no. I've got my own friends, I'm not going out with you guys." But I remember his name being mentioned a few times and then they went back to Sydney. Because I had just come back from overseas, I wasn't committed to any particular work, I got a job and finished the season here

*How old were you then?*

Twenty two or twenty three. I had done my travelling and I felt I was a woman of the world after my two independent years working and travelling through Europe. I thought I was a big, grown up girl by then.

*Tell me a little bit about your London experiences.*

Well they were the days of "Swinging London". It must have been the really late sixties. I started off in Kensington, in Kensington High Street; then we moved into W1. It was very snooty there. God knows how we ended up there, very close to Hyde Park, living in a three-story maisonette. I think the only way we could afford it was to live like sardines. There were seven Aussie expats living there and I lived up in the attic. I shared it with a girl friend. I had three jobs to pay the rent. I was working during the day as a photographic assistant for a fashion photographer. At the weekend I would work in a fashion boutique called 'Feathers' on Kensington High Street which was a bit of fun, and at night I would work in a beautiful little restaurant in Belgravia, Oscars, and that was just enough money to survive, which we did!

We were young and it was all "going off"! It was vibrant and it was trendy, "Beatlemania," mini- skirts and painted eyelashes. It was a good time to be in London. A lot of expats were living in London from the music industry. In Australia they were the known bands that had made a name for themselves in the rock industry. People like Molly Meldrum used to drop in regularly. Russel Morris, the headliner at Blues this year, was living there. It really was "sex, drugs and rock and roll". I must have been a good girl because I managed to get to work every day to pay the rent and feed myself.

I did a bit of travelling to the continent. I did some au pairing. I lived with families. They would take me with them on their travels and I got to see Europe that way. It is important to have those little adventures in life.

*Did you keep a little trip diary?*

I did keep a diary.

*Do you got back and read it?*

I do occasionally

*Does it remind you of what life used to be?*

Yes, free and uncomplicated. I am glad I did it, because once you get married and start a business, there is no way back. So I have some wonderful shared memories.

*Now to deal with the sophisticated lady...*

Well I thought I was. I came home with a plum in my mouth, speaking like the Queen. Well at any rate, there I was by myself in Thredbo, on the top of the mountain working for Rudi Schatzle in what was then called "Eagles Nest" and it probably still is, and living in his accommodation at the bottom of the mountain in Schlupfwinkel, one of the original Austrian styled chalets. Lend Lease Lodge was the Dusseldorp's private residence when they were in Thredbo.. That was designed by Harry Seidler and it has stood the test of time and it is still a beautiful lodge.

Yes I had a fabulous introduction to the mountains through my parents with their connections to the resort; I started working at Eagles Nest up on the mountain. That is how I met Heinz.

Heinz used to come up at lunch time and order a sandwich and a milk shake. He said to me "Are you Michelle? I think I know your mum and *blaa de blaa*." Within a few weeks of that we were an item and we were travelling overseas at the end of the season to beautiful Sun Valley, Idaho, where Heinz would spend the alternate winter season in the northern hemisphere. That is where Heinz patiently taught me to ski.

*Did you work in Sun Valley?*

No, I didn't because I didn't have a work visa. I just focussed on the enjoyment of life again, learning to ski, baking bread and looking after Heinz.

*Can we backtrack and talk about Heinz' background? When and where was he born?*

Heinz was born in 1937 in Innsbruck, Austria. He had a twin brother called Helmut and of course, they were mountains boys. They were very adventurous. They were off - swimming across lakes, hiking up mountains, cross-country and langlaufing. There wasn't much they didn't do. They lived at the foot of mountain. They had two older brothers, Victor and Karl.

It was during the war. I think they were sent away from Innsbruck to a farm because of the bombing. So it was largely the mother who brought up the four boys. I am sure they were a huge hand full. Half the time she didn't know where they were or what they were up to, but to all intents and purposes Heinz had quite a good youth. They lived in the hills of Innsbruck, where the grandparents had farms and animals.

When Heinz was about 21, he decided he wanted to leave Europe and go away as far as he could from home. He planned and plotted. He had a few friends who were interested in doing the same thing, and when he got to his early twenties, he booked his passage to Australia on a boat and he emigrated here. On the day when they were all to go, he was the only one who turned up. None of them could leave their mountains in Austria. So he thought "My God, what am I doing? Here I am, waving off everybody from the boat, sailing off on my own to Australia!"

He had nothing. He didn't speak English. He could ski very well. but mostly self-taught. He had a trade that he went straight into.

Then from Melbourne he went to Mt Buller at weekends, that is how he got into the ski industry. He actually met a group of young Austrian friends and they built a ski lodge called 'The Enzian Ski Club'. He was a founding member. So that allowed him to go to the mountains on the weekends and ski. Later he commenced ski instructing at Mount Buller.

*On weekends?*

Yes. He enjoyed that so much, he finally became more full time in that profession, certainly during the winter. He must have met a few Austrian expats along the way. From memory, he would then go back to the States & Austria. He must have met Martin Kersher who was coaching the Australian Ski Team here, and he was skiing in Sun Valley. So he got Heinz an introduction to the Ski School there and Heinz went to the States during the alternate ski seasons. He did several ski seasons back to back.

*Where was Heinz instructing when you met him?*

Well he was instructing in Thredbo when I met him, but he had come from Perisher. He was in the Ski School there and he came across to Thredbo to work for Lenny Erharter. He had

already been two or three winters here before I met him in the winter of 1971. Lenny was very disapproving of him having a full time girl friend in Thredbo. They were meant to be meeting and greeting, and sharing themselves around, and it wasn't approved of. After we got married within a few months in Sun Valley, Lenny forgave him and made peace with him because they were great mates.

*So you got married in Sun Valley?*

We got married that first season we went over – on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1972.

*What did your parents think about this? Did you tell them?*

We didn't say anything. We were very secretive about it. It was a very quiet ceremony and we really didn't let anybody in the Ski School know what was going on. Heinz said he had to go down to Hailey to pay some parking fines at the court house. So we snuck off and got married in the middle of the week on a beautiful bluebird Sun Valley day. The witnesses were actually the secretary of the judge and the librarian who signed our wedding certificates. They were very confused that an Austrian and an Australian were marrying and they actually referred to us as being Australian because it was all too hard. So Heinz went back to work that afternoon.

*So you were living together in Sun Valley.*

Yes, we were living in a lovely log cabin, in Ketchum. Then a week or so after we were married we must have sent a telegram to my parents saying that we were now Mr and Mrs Reichinger. I think my father nearly fell off his chair and got a bit of a shock, but we had their blessings and they had time to process it all before we came home, which we did at the end of that winter.

In fact we would have probably stayed there. We were quite happy there and I attained my residency. Heinz had a green card because he was working there and he had his trade and a profession for some years. Being married to a resident, I became eligible

Because my father wanted us back in Australia, I think he preferred us to be here and close to home, he then offered us the opportunity to buy our own business – the pre-existing business in the concourse of the Thredbo Alpine Hotel. He said, "If you come back, we can organise for you to live and work in Thredbo" because most of the partners were ready to move on. So we came back that following winter and took over the leases of the three concourse shops.

*Which winter was that?*

It was the winter of 1972. We came back literally on the eve of the June Long Weekend to take over the operation. We went in totally green and unknowing, but probably the less you know, the better off you are. We threw ourselves in at the deep end. We 'green horns' took over the snack bar and the two other businesses, the mini mart and pharmacy, and registered them under the name 'Snowfields Enterprises'. We lived at the back of the shop with the bread and milk. It was not long before the business was turned into a continental delicatessen, catering for the Europeans in the village. We worked two or three seasons until I fell pregnant with Marcus who arrived in July 1974.

*In which lodge were you living?*

We lived out the back in a little cubbyhole. It was tiny. But anyway it was fine for two people for a year or two. When I fell pregnant I said "I don't think this is going to work any more and we moved into the attic of New Kirk Lodge on the top of Arnold Konrad's apartment, where Marcus was born.

Then Luke came along in October, 1975, and soon I was back at work with one child in my backpack, one in a bunny rug and one hand free to operate the check-out, it was a bit of a juggling act for me. The following winter a nanny was employed! The attic in New Kirk Lodge was so small that Luke slept in the bathroom. Obviously something larger was required and we moved into Sonnblick next door for the summer and then we had a couple of seasons in Werrina Apartments opposite the Fire Station which was not really suitable because it was up three stories.

We eventually got fed up with that and we appealed to the Company to give us some land on which we could build together with Frank Prihoda and Helmut Steinocker. After much ado they finally said "yes" and they released this block of land. So we ended up building our apartments called 'Frankheinsteins' 'in Bobuck Drive, Thredbo, together with Frank Prihoda, who was running his little gift shop 'Frank's Gifts' at the time and Helmut, from Stein's Tours, next door. When we moved here, Luke was a baby and Marcus was going on for two. That made life much more accommodating. We felt we had put down our roots finally.

*Before that it must have been like being a gypsy around the village*

But that is how everybody lived, always looking for a bed that was suitable. Once you had a family you really needed something more stable.

*It was like that living in Perisher.*

It is still like that here. Accommodation is always a bug bear. It was always the most difficult thing, just having somewhere to call home.

*Where were the children going to school?*

They were going to school in Jindabyne at what is now Jindabyne Central School. When they went to secondary school, they became boarders at Canberra Grammar and continued to ski at weekends

*Going back a bit, you were operating a supermarket?*

Well it was called the Thredbo mini-mart. It was a supermarket and a chemist shop because I wasn't a pharmacist. We had a little snack bar opposite – a take-away we called 'Heinz's Hots'. So those were the shops we inherited so to speak.

*You ran the two shops.*

It was three separate entities. The snack bar and the mini-mart were separated. They were individual businesses. That was when the children were small and I think I got a little bit over it by the end of the late seventies. We introduced a lot delicatessen lines, charcuteries and patés – a lot of European goods. I really enjoyed building up the delicatessen with imported cheeses, salamis and looked after the Austrian boys. They enjoyed that sort of fare.

*Did Heinz operate a shop over at Perisher at some stage?*



Yes, I had forgotten about that. It was Harold Droga who formalised the lease. he moved to Perisher from Thredbo, to manage the resort and he asked Heinz if he could operate a grocery/deli over there. It also had chemist and souvenir lines. It was in the Valley Inn. We put a manager in and we ran it for several years in conjunction with what we were doing here.

It was all part of Snowfield Enterprises. We ran it as two separate entities. I suppose that was the '80s. It was that mad time when everybody was making money and it was not so hard to pay the rent either.

In the year we had the first road collapse on the Alpine Way, we finalised our involvement with Perisher. When we were emptying the shop, I remember trying to drive all the groceries back here in Heinz's truck. I recall the road was going, going, going, and we were the last car to come across before it finally collapsed.

Doug Edwards opened a supermarket in the new Mowamba complex and we realised that you really couldn't run two supermarkets year round in Thredbo and that was when the business diversified. I went more into fashion and slowly progressed in that direction.

*It would have been hard to have the food business and the fashion side together.*

At the front we had the pharmacy side, and the fashion and grocery on the other side. Heinz ran the mini mart until one woman said to Heinz "It is very strange to have clothes and salamis sort of co-existing." So we realised it had to be all or nothing. We then closed the supermarket side of the business in '81.

That was the 'no snow' season, 1982. We didn't have snow making then. We said, "What have we done? We are heavily committed and now there is no snow." Anyhow we got through somehow. We traded out of it. It probably took a year or two to get back on top. Not long after that 'Heinz's Hots' which was the snack bar across the way in the concourse became 'Heinz's Ski Tech' and he went into men's wear and ski fashion and equipment and ran that whilst I had my niche 'Michelle's'.

We would then go to Europe and do a lot of fashion buying at ISPO in Munich, go to Vegas ski show, buying ranges for the shop and to seek out new labels.

*What were the labels?*

'High Society' had some fabulous stuff, very '80s, very over the top.

*English or German?*

German, it came from Munich. They had two labels. 'Creact', 'High Society' and there was 'Lily Farouche' coming out of Munich as well, and they did really distinctive ski wear with an edge. It was quite directional. No one was handling it in Australia. So we had a few labels that no one had seen.

*When you say directional, what do you mean?*

They were setting a new trend in their designs and creating their own looks away from other influences that were in the industry. We did quite a lot in Kitzbuhel. We brought in a lot of 'Sportalm', 'Steinebronn' and 'Elho' from Munich. There were several other labels, 'Silvy', 'Colmar', 'Cerrutti' - all Italian.

That was the era of one-piece suits and fluoros, bright and colourful, a bit in your face, lots of decorations and embellishments, fur, embroidery. It was just a lovely time to be involved in ski fashion.

*What about the après side of ski wear?*

We were quite dedicated to our après fashions, I recall. There were beautiful embellished beaded sweaters, printed and embroidered garments, padded shoulders of course, fur trims, leather, tassels. It was very glamorous.

*And on the feet?*

Well I think fur made a comeback then – faux and real.

*In the '80s?*

Yes, the fur boots and lovely tall leather boots – après boots, suede boots. But it was a look. People did dress up for après ski. They would make an effort. They would go and get out of their ski suits and come down to the Lounge Bar, then go to dinner. They were all “show ponies “ and wanted to be noticed. We did well in that market. We always set the fashion trends.



**The girls: Niece Lara Thoms, sister Linda, mother Joan, sister Jenna and Michelle**

*So then into the '90s. What happened in the '90s?*

I think that was when snowboarding made an entrance in the '90s and it all went a bit grungy.

*Freestyle was grungy. Freestyle came in and then it went into snowboarding.*

It became very androgynous. Everybody was wearing the same daggy, big jackets and pants. Two pieces came in and it became much more technical ski wear with Gortex and all the layered stuff. It wasn't padded. Definitely it was more streamlined but not as glamorous or 'look at me' and I think more functional. People just wanted to have a jacket and pants they could use, that was more multi-purpose. So it lost a bit of its appeal to me.

We continued along and about that time my children were finishing school and they were progressing from being skiers into snowboarders. There was an opportunity for them to set up a snowboard shop here in Thredbo. The first dedicated snowboard shop in a ski resort. 'Heinz's Ski Tech' eventually became a snowboard shop. Heinz was still running it, but the boys were given a venue down at Valley Terminal as they had a space there so the boys developed it into a snowboard shop which they called 'Shredbo'. They ran that for a couple of years and then the Company decided they wanted to put a police presence down there and the place became a police station. The boys then came up and took over 'Heinz Ski Tech' on the concourse and changed it into the 'Good Board Store' which they ran for several more years until they moved on.

These were the boys' formative years. I remember all the heavy metal music that used to come echoing out, down at the board store. People would say "What's that music? Who is

playing it? That's terrible stuff!" But of course that was the era – the new era. That is what they were really into, the heavy music, sloppy fashions, tattoos, dreadlocks, coloured hair, etc. The boys were very young and they really hadn't been initiated, but they certainly got a run for their money out of it. Probably it was four or five years of their lives, from go to woe.

It was the right time for them in their late adolescence. We had quite a foothold in the retail end of operations in the village. It was a bit of a juggling act for me.

*What were the fashion changes in the 2000's?*

I did a lot of 'Spyder' and 'Nils' coming out of America. They were my main ski ranges. I think I started focussing more on fashion and lifestyle, and other pieces because I had competition around me. There were other ski shops making an entrance in the village and they were really focussed on ski wear and some of them were importers and distributors. So I began pulling back from ski wear and I also incorporated Heinz's ski wear into my shop when he closed the 'Ski Tech'. I continued to do a percentage of men's ski fashions and accessories for several years. Then I just parred it right back to being ladies' fashions, après and resort wear.

*Did you bring stuff in from overseas?*

We were doing imported leather and suede, some of it through the importers and a little bit we brought in ourselves – a lot of imported labels. I did a lot of jewellery and accessories. It was a resort store. It was just lovely fun. We did a lot of fur. Fur made a comeback in the 2000s, not that anything was from endangered species – a lot of racoon and fox. We were known for our cashmere and developed a following for more luxurious pieces. So that is what I liked doing and that is what I was known for.

My customers grew up with me and grew older with me so I found! I was catering to my generation and my children's generation and their children's generation. I would have whole families shopping together. They all managed to find something. We weren't overly pigeon holed, but we were quite diverse in our product and we moved along with the times. We had to stay current and so we did.



**Last window at 'Michelle's', April 2015**

The other shops? Heinz got out of Ski Tech when the boys had their snowboard shop and they decided they wanted to get on and do other things. So it was all back to being one (Michelle's) store probably for the last ten or fifteen years.

*When did you close the doors?*

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 we closed the doors – on Heinz' birthday – just after the Jazz Festival

*Going back in history, what was the impact of the Road Collapse in 1997, on your life?*

Yes, it was a tough few years in every sense – financially and emotionally.



**Heinz Reichinger**

We found it quite difficult because we lived close to the site and we were affected by the geo tech reports. We were deemed to be unsafe for habitation. It was very political and very stressful on all of us because of all the negative publicity and all the road works around here, all the retaining walls that were going in and the cutting down of trees around us. Yes, it was living with it 24/ 7 for some time while they were doing all the road repairs.

We had staff living here that year. They wanted to evacuate everybody on this side of the hill but it was just totally impracticable. So we were the only lodge that still had tenants being able to stay here and everybody else was evacuated around us. That was quite a spooky feeling during those few weeks when all the recovery was going on, but we kept the doors open.

We weren't going off with our tail between our legs. So we traded on, and of course, it had a massive impact on trading for those next few years which were followed by the fires in early 2003. This affected us again through our summer trading. I don't think our summers recovered for a very long while. So we saw some pretty turbulent natural disasters. We obviously survived them but I think it took a lot out of me physically and emotionally, looking back on it.

You are not so aware at the time, but it did impact on people's lives. People left. People were affected. It was really a sad time. Life goes on and Thredbo is still a beautiful place and it has recovered. It took probably the best part of ten years to get through it.

*Who were some of the friends you've made at Thredbo?*

In the early days it was lovely because there were a lot of families in the village. A lot of young married couples like ourselves who were having children at the same time. Some of them were second generation like the Hughes's from Silver Brumby, the Lucas's – they continued to have an involvement in the family business. Up at Tyrolia there was the lovely Liz & Brian Jones, who were very close friends. She had her two children, Sasha and Adam. We are still in contact with them and they have had their families.

And there were the Hechers of course – Heinz and Bernti were very close. We looked after each other's children and helped during those years of building and construction. There was



a lot of support in the village for everyone. The Aho's – do you remember John and Tania who were doing a lot of building up here. They were actually building our home. They still stay in contact. Yes, we made lifelong friends, including Jeff and Jane Straney who built the 'House of Ullr', the Clifford family, three generations who go back to the late fifties, Doug Edwards and the Koeman's from Kasee's who still reside in the Village. All the pioneers from 50's, 60's and 70's.

*What about Frank Prihoda?*

Ah, Frank. How could I forget my beautiful neighbour, Frank. I think Frank came here very early in the piece. I was pregnant with Marcus when he arrived and he was looking for somewhere to live. He was making a life here and starting his own business. We hooked up as partners and built our property. We have been neighbours here for forty plus years – more than neighbours – obviously very close friends who support each other. Frank was always there for us in the early days, in whatever capacity he could be.

We are trying to pay back that now in his later years. We are sharing meals and social occasions. He is still a big part of our lives and family. The kids have known him forever. He is a Dutch uncle. I couldn't imagine what it would be if he wasn't our neighbour. At 95 and going strong, he is such a role model for us – for everybody. I hope I can get on a plane and go to Prague when I am 95.



**Long term Thredbo traders, residents & friends: Lou Gibson (Ski club Australia), Jhaney Kusar (JK Gallery), Frank Prihoda (Frank's Gifts), Heinz Reichinger (Heinz's Hots/Heinz Ski Tech), Doug Edwards (Mountain High Real Estate), Ted Gregorski (Bernti's), Michelle Reichinger (Michelle's), and Donna Gregorski (Bernti's)**

*Were you able to have any holidays?*

Oh yes. In the early days we would often go overseas on our buying trips and to see Heinz' family in Innsbruck. He would go back to visit the family and coordinate a business/holiday/ski trip when we could. Occasionally we would take the children.

In between that we would sneak up to Noosa in October or November for a bit of sun and down time. That was like the Thredbo of the north. You would go up there and bump into yourself.

*How about telling me about the farm down near the coast?*

Heinz was always interested in perma culture and growing his own vegetables. He had been looking for some time for a bit of land on the south coast as an alternative to Thredbo. Ironically it was after the road collapse in '97, that we decided that "Yes, we did need something beyond the National Park gate." All our interests were here and because of the effects of that on us, we needed a little get-away place.

We found a lovely, little five-acre property with a gorgeous timber house on it, in a valley called Rocky Hall, which was in the middle of nowhere. It was not far from the coast. When we could, we would go down there and play farmers and farmers' wives, grow our vegies and tend our little orchard, make our jams and preserves, entertain the neighbours, go to the markets, plant, weed, rake, and prune until we were worn out.

We discovered what life on the land was like, but it was good – I think we needed that. In recent years it became more work than pleasure. Just recently we managed to find a buyer for it and we sold. That was a huge relief because having just purchased Paul Reader's farm on the Alpine Way as our transition into retirement, we really didn't need to have that little acreage to worry about. So we moved our hobby farm from the coast back to the mountain, to our new property – 'The Yellow Haus'.

*How many acres is that?*

A hundred and twelve acres - it is a beautiful property. It is a beautiful part of Crackenback, stunning views, sitting up on the top of the hill – no neighbours.

*How is the road in from the Alpine Way?*

Well we actually had our road improved last year and had it graded, but it is still a dirt road which the Council manages to grade twice a year. I am kind of comfortable living up there because we were on a dirt road at Rocky Hall and there is something nice about being a little bit off the beaten track. After years being in the public eye, you need your time away from it and to know there won't be someone knocking on the door. I am hoping we are going to have more quality time down at 'The 'Yellow Haus', to improve and enjoy it not so much in winter but during the summer and spring – to enjoy for ourselves and for our friends & family to come and & enjoy " the good life in the mountains".

*Thank you Michelle for the interview and for sharing your history.*

Thank you.





**Gia (11), Lauren, River (3) Luke and Dillon (9) Reichinger**



**Louis, Isabel (Issy) Darling and Marcus Reichinger**

## Oral History Interview Agreement

In this agreement, the interviewee assigns copyright to Thredbo Historical Society Incorporated. Your recorded interview will become part of Thredbo Historical Society's collection, where it will be preserved for future researchers. The Thredbo Winter Sports Museum is grateful for your participation in this oral history project.

This is an agreement between the **INTERVIEWEE** and the **Thredbo Historical Society Incorporated** (please fill in your details):

### Interviewee

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I have been asked and have agreed to be interviewed by Thredbo Historical Society Incorporated, subject to this agreement and as part of the Museum's programs. The Museum has advised me that it wishes to preserve the Interview as part of Thredbo Historical Society Incorporated's collection. Once the Interview is preserved at Thredbo Historical Society Incorporated, I understand that it can be used by the Museum for a variety of purposes including, but not limited to, exhibition, research, education material, public presentations, publication, website, broadcast and transmission unless I place restrictions hereunder on any of those uses.

And

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