

FLORA ELLIOTT – AN ORAL HISTORY

Interviewed by Chrissi Webb at 21 Clyde Street, Jindabyne 4th December 2019



Flora Elliott - 2019

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This is Chrissi Webb, the date is December 4th, 2019, and I am talking to Flora Elliott in her beautiful apartment at 21 Clyde Street, Jindabyne, overlooking Lake Jindabyne. Flora, would you tell me a little bit about your background, when and where you were born, your parents and how you actually came to be in Thredbo?

I was born on August 2nd 1946 in Birdwood, South Australia. My father was a school teacher and my mother was from a dairy farm in Birdwood. Both my parents were born in South Australia. My parents moved to Adelaide where I went to school.

I worked as a comptometrist in Adelaide until I was 21. My co-workers introduced me to squash and I won the junior South Australian title in 1962. In approximately 1968 I moved to Sydney and worked as a hotel receptionist.

One day my fellow receptionists told me that they had put in an application for me for a job in Thredbo as head receptionist, to which I said 'I couldn't possibly get that job' - but I did and commenced work on April 1st 1971. I was also Mr Harold Droga's secretary.

One day Dr John Sheddon came to discuss the oncoming winter arrangements with Harold Droga - Kosciusko Thredbo provided accommodation, ski passes and subsidised meals for the locums who used to come for 1-2 weeks and ski plus work when required (the surgery was manned full time by a nursing sister). In conversation both men commented 'Thredbo is not the place for a young woman to live permanently'.

So, after 2 years I resigned and went to Europe for a couple of years. However, on my return I missed the mountains and came back to Thredbo to work for Sasha and Karel Nekvapil at Sasha's Apartments and clothing shop.

Which year was that?

Probably 1976...I found out that squash courts had been built in Jindabyne opposite the primary school and that the Council's plans showed that the town swimming pool should be built at the back (now Central Park) and, when they were for sale I purchased the premises in 1977 and operated the courts until approximately 1989 when new squash courts were built at the Jindabyne Bowling and Sports Club. I renovated the three squash courts to 3 offices and 3 apartments. I then started a business "Flora Elliott Interiors" which the staff and I worked until approximately 2010 when I retired

My friendship with Elisabeth Sponar started in 1972, the year after their daughter died, when Elisabeth asked me to stay at Sponar's and look after her cat while she and Tony were away.

Once I moved to Jindabyne, Elisabeth and I saw a lot of each other. We often travelled to concerts in Sydney, Canberra or Melbourne and, of course, there was always shopping! Elisabeth often called in for a coffee while we sewed. We travelled to Canada and took a cruise to Alaska. Another time we flew over the Antarctic which Elisabeth enjoyed immensely.

Needless to say I was often invited to join Elisabeth and Tony for parties and dinners and I also helped if help was needed for the pigs, cats or 'Scruffy' the sulphur crested, rescued cockatoo. We would often sail on the lake with several people on Tony's boat which had a large pontoon beside it. So Elisabeth and I spent a lot of time together. It was a wonderful friendship.

You were a great support to Elisabeth I would say, when Tony died - that was so sudden.

Elisabeth must have missed him so much. She was a very private person. They had led quite a separate life in many ways but Elisabeth was always there for Tony. Whenever he wanted something she would drop everything and even drive to Canberra or Cooma to do the errand.

You were her companion right up until her eighties or until she died. In her older years when she couldn't look after herself, what did you do then?

Elisabeth suffered a stroke and it became necessary for her to go into care in Berridale then, later, to higher level care in a special section of Bombala Hospital.

Did she take the cat to Bombala?

No, the Berridale Hostel agreed to a cat door in to Elisabeth's room and a cat run outside which was excellent on all levels.

Her cat went to heaven when?

After Elisabeth moved, one of the staff loved the cat and wanted to take care of her.

Did you have a lot to do with Tony?

Not really. If Tony needed or wanted anything I was always quite happy to help him but generally I didn't see a lot of Tony. It was always Elisabeth.

I am really interested about Harold Droga. Tell me, when you went to Thredbo you weren't really prepared for that interview were you?

No. I had no idea what was involved when I came to Thredbo. I knew that I had accommodation somewhere but I had no idea that was included, as were my meals, as I often ate with the hotel guests. I had my own apartment at the bottom of Staff Lodge with a phone connected to the hotel reception. I found Harold Droga to be a fair and kind boss who taught me so much about business.

What was Thredbo like as a village when you went there in 1971?

Thredbo was wonderful. The whole feeling in the village was quite friendly and, of course, very personal.

What about skiing?

My skiing was provided for, as was my instruction.

Who were your ski instructors?

Ursula and Karl Berchtold. I learnt to ski with Ursula but I generally worked so hard that I didn't ski a lot, but I did ski. I still ski but I am not a mad keen skier.

Tell me a bit about the fashions in Thredbo when you were there.

Aaah, after I left the hotel and then came back to work for Sasha and Karel. I worked for Sasha in the shop and Hanna Deubler also worked there. (Hanna had worked at the hotel with me in 1971 and 1972.) Sasha travelled overseas every year and used to bring clothing back from Europe. Sasha was also friends with Judy Forras from Mt Buller, who used to import Bogner and had a shop in Melbourne. Sasha had a wonderful sense of what suited people.

Sasha had a great sense of what people would like to wear. Of course at the same time Michelle Reichinger had turned the shop that her father had started, into a clothing shop. It was really very nice because Michelle and Sasha both had different clothes to each other. I always thought that they complemented each other.

Was there a company retail shop in the village at that time?

Fleets had a shop where the coffee shop is now - along from the Schuss Bar. I don't think the company had anything back then. They might have opened fashion in later years.

Was Don Algie in the shop then?

He may have been there in the early days. I think he probably was, yes.

So you didn't test the night life too much?

No, I was always quite busy working.

Thank you, Flora for sharing your story. Are you agreeable that it be transcribed and shared with people wishing to do research in the Alpine Museum?

Yes. I am agreeable that my story be transcribed and shared with people wishing to do research in the Alpine Museum



Flora Elliott working at home in Jindabyne - 2019