

KARL & URSULA BERCHTOLD

An oral history conducted by Christina Webb
East Jindabyne, January 23rd & March 19th 2014



**Ursula and Karl Berchtold teaching in St.Moritz, Switzerland,
with beautiful Mt.Bernina in the back ground - 1974**

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KARL and URSULA BERCHTOLD – AN ORAL HISTORY

Karl & Ursula Berchtold interviewed by Christina Webb at their home in Alpensee Weg, East Jindabyne on Thursday 23rd January and Wednesday March 19th 2014

KARL'S STORY

Karl Jacob Berchtold, the son of Jacob and Laura (Rupp) Berchtold, was born on November 20th, 1937 in Aarau, 30 km from Zurich. He attended school in Zurich where he did his apprenticeship as a tool maker.

Karl did very little ski racing although he was a member of Flums Ski Club. Flums is a very popular lowland ski resort close to Zurich.

Emigrating to Australia in 1959, he worked in Sydney for two years. During this time he had the opportunity to visit the Australian snowfields and in 1961 he found employment in Thredbo working on the ski lifts whilst accompanying zither-player Helmut Mayer, by playing the accordion together with Helmut's little band at night.

During the 1961 season, occasionally Karl helped out in Leonhard Erharter's ski school where there were only three or four instructors. He loved the teaching aspect of skiing.

At the end of the Australian ski season, Karl returned home to Switzerland. He resumed working in his trade with the Zurich postal service during the week and at weekends he went up to Flums to practice his skiing technique.

The 1962 season saw him back in Thredbo where he remained until the end of winter, assisting the chief mechanic on the lifts and instructing for the entire school holidays. At this time John Scrivener was mountain manager and Civic and Civic had been engaged by Lend Lease under the chairmanship of Dick Dusseldorp, to extend the Crackenback chairlift.

In October Karl went up to Sydney and during the return flight he sat next to Dick Dusseldorp who asked him "What are you doing in Thredbo?" "Working on the chairlift" replied Karl. However when Karl arrived back in Thredbo he was informed by the company that he was no longer needed and the company were cutting down on staff.

Following an approach to Dusseldorp, he was asked to come back on the lifts however he declined the offer and instead went to work with Bela Rascko cutting trails on Little Beauty. It was hard work although he had the lighter task of following up with the chain saw.

"I worked on the chairlift until when ski school operations resumed in June 1963, and I taught children and beginners for the duration of the winter. My classes were mainly in the Basin and it was tough work.

"I also worked in the ski school but much more regularly because when Leonhard saw me and knew I was back, he said "I want you to work in the school holidays and also when we are a bit busy." Also we had an extra couple of people on the chairlift so it didn't matter, I could be replaced on the chairlift.

"On the chairlift I also helped a little bit on the mechanical side. We had a chief mechanic there but because I was coming from a mechanical background, sometimes he wanted a bit of help with a pulley cover."

In the middle of July 1963, the lift collapsed. It was lunch time and Karl was in the lodge when someone said "The Chairlift rope has broken." The whole chairlift cable and chairs were on the snow. He rushed down to help – luckily only one person was injured.

Apparently at the top station of Crackenback Chairlift the wind was so bad, that Benny Zeller looked out to see if the chairs were swinging. The winch to hold back the bull wheel tension on the cable had just been repaired. The electrician had rung John Scrivener to tell him and he was advised to test the lift whilst it was fully loaded. (Normal practice is to use sandbags instead of people when doing a load test.) Benny Zeller had just walked past the bull wheel before it travelled forward, releasing any tension on the cable which subsequently derailed. Karl assisted in the chairlift repair which took three to four weeks during which time he climbed three times a day, up Crackenback on skis whilst carrying tools.

October 1963 saw Karl flying home again, this time to begin gaining full Swiss certification as a ski instructor as Leonhard would not give him a contract until he achieved this. He began the northern winter

working as an assistant ski instructor at the Flums' Ski Club, gaining racing experience and mountain rescue using a one-man Canadian style sled. At the end of winter he attended the Unterwasser pre exam course and passed the exam, after which he followed up with a three week course in St Moritz.

Towards the end of the Moritz course before the exam he experienced severe abdominal pain. Whilst it might have to be the removal of the appendix, the doctors thought that a kidney might need to be removed in two or five years. Neither was an option for Karl, so he followed local advice to "drink milk with garlic and do handstands"! Together with the other 179 candidates, he attended the examination despite the pain, and was one of the 92 instructors who successfully gained certification. Immediately he telephoned Leonhard Erharter who assured him of a contract for the 1964 season in Thredbo. By that stage there were only five contracts granted to instructors.

Next stop America. Together with his friend Hannes Kurath – a full certified ski instructor from Flums – they travelled to the American ski resort of Magic Mountain in Vermont, where their applications for jobs had been accepted, having the other necessary qualifications for the job: ability to play a musical instrument and a second language. Hannes Kurath worked in the Thredbo lodges in 1964 when Jean Claude Killy won the Thredbo Cup. In the same event, Hannes was the "Best Australian".

Karl continued to teach skiing during the Australian and North American winters. In 1967 he went to Vail, however he lost his job because he asked for payment for playing music at ski school functions, so he moved to Crystal Mountain in Washington state, where he spent three winters.

During this time the sports manufacturer, Voigt employed him as a ski tester. Karl tested these skis in Australia and broke two pairs. Joe Plangger did a bit of testing for him and broke one pair just by bending one of the skis.

Karl tested the skis at Magic Mountain and also at Mammoth in 1969 where Ursula Barth was teaching. He was impressed with her skiing and invited her to test five pairs of skis. Karl was also testing the Swiss Raichle ski boots. Mammoth ski school politics and irregular work did not impress Karl and he taught there for only one season. Whilst in Mammoth, Ursula met a family who took her to Aspen to teach the children, and then engaged her to care for them in San Diego for the summer – it was a fantastic job.

During the Australian ski season of 1969, Karl arranged a job in the high class resort of Sun Valley, Idaho with Leonhard Erharter, Arnold Konrad, Ferdl Noble, Waldemar Hirner, etc. En route to Sun Valley, he met up with Ursula and they married on November 9th in Las Vegas. The ski school director, Sigi Engel, was rather surprised when Karl arrived with a wife as he had arranged single accommodation for Karl. The happy couple taught in Sun Valley for three years whilst travelling down under for the Australian seasons. In 1970 their flights were routed to Sydney via Switzerland where they had a church wedding.

Karl, tell me a bit about Leonhard Erharter

"He was a good example, as he wanted everything to perfection. It had to be absolutely good. He was a hard fellow to work for because if you went out partying, staying half the night, but he wanted to see that you gave them their money's worth, because taking lessons was an expensive thing for the people. He wanted to see that you were absolutely giving your best to the people. Unless you did that, you had no chance with the people.

"If you did the wrong thing, you were punished straight away such as having the beginners for another week instead of getting a higher class. I remember him seeing me come down the mountains with a class from Merits and I was already working for him for many years. I came from Merits across to the main mountain to Middle Station and he saw me as he skied past with Elyne Mitchell in his private lesson and he said 'What the hell did you do on the main mountain with your class?' I said 'Well I took them down?' 'Why didn't you send them down on the chairlift?' I said 'Well they could ski down, they were good enough.' 'Good enough! When there were twelve in the class, and three were sitting on their arses, they weren't good enough.' Then you have nothing to say and he said 'When three people of your class of twelve can't even handle it, it's too difficult for them.'

"In that respect he was difficult, and more so if you got into an argument with him. So you had to just accept it. He was also very good for the instructors in that respect. He always honoured everything he did. I remember him saying once to Albert van der Lee in the village 'I want that area down here fenced off so that people can't ski across it' and Albert said 'No we can't because we have the chairlift queue going this way.' So he said 'If you don't, well then my staff is not coming out to teach today. It is too dangerous, I

don't want it that way.' Leonhard more or less ran that mountain. He also had the backing of Dick Dusseldorp and all the guys respected him very much.

"I think Leonhard Erharter was a very good boss. He ran that ski school very, very well. He ran the best ski school I have seen anywhere. He was tough but everyone knew his place. You couldn't do just as you pleased."

By 1970 there were fifteen instructors in Thredbo Ski School under the directorship of Leonhard Erharter. Ursula found employment in the travel agency and the Berchtolds lived in Palmers' Lodge. The Valley Terminal was only for single instructors. By 1971 Ursula was teaching in the Thredbo ski school. Ursula's mother died in August 1973, so instead of teaching in Sun Valley, they taught in St Moritz until 1975 which was their last year as instructors. Karl had spent 13 years instructing.



Thredbo Ski School Instructors September 1974

Left to right: Karl Berchtold, Klaus Schoesser, Hias , Bertie Hecher, .?., Waldemar Hirner, Heinz Muckenschnabel, Ursula Berchtold, Vic Dalziel, Tony Nieland

Doug Johnstone, an opal buyer, introduced the couple to opal mining at Andamooka where they "noodled" and chipped in a dugout for a week or so before moving to Sydney after the Thredbo 1974 ski season.

In 1975 Ursula and Karl took on the management of the Swiss Elna Sewing Machine shop in Sydney with Ursula as a demonstrator. Manuela was born in 1977. After three years of operation the shop was closed as it was not making a profit. The next venture was into a partnership making tool cabinets whilst Ursula worked as an accountant. Twelve months later the partnership fell apart. Karl gained full time employment in a sports shop in Eastwood.

Early in July 1979 their close friend Herman Muckenschnabl who had been Karl's room mate in the Thredbo Valley Terminal, was killed in a dreadful car accident at Sawpit Creek. At the time, Ursula was seven months pregnant and the shock of it caused her to go into premature labour. Their son Andreas made his entry into the world two months too early at Camperdown Hospital.

Knowing that the Berchtolds wished to return to the Snowy Mountains, their good friend Joe Plangger told them there was a house for sale in East Jindabyne. They took one look, purchased it and moved to Jindabyne in December 1979. Hans Wagner came down from Wollongong to help finish what became known as Chesa St Moritz. That summer Karl worked on building sites as a labourer alongside stone mason, Ivo Deubler. One Friday Karl worked casually for the plumber Rob Kneller who said at the end of the day "See you tomorrow". Six months later, Karl was still working for Rob.

For the 1980 winter, the Corney travel firm which also employed Werner Jecklin, engaged Karl as a ski guide. This job took him back into Thredbo where he skied with guests and in the summer he took tours to Europe.

During the poor snow winter of 1982, he joined the ski school at Perisher Valley under the directorship of Ludwig Kurz, with Sigi Draxl as head instructor. It was during this winter that 86 of the Perisher instructing staff “walked” out whilst seeking better employment conditions.

In 1987, Karl worked on the construction of the Ski Tube from Bullocks Flat to Perisher Valley. That year he joined the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Authority as a trade assistant and following the passing of obligatory TAFE test before becoming a reluctant union member, he qualified as a tradesman in the SMHEA machine shop – a job which lasted twenty years. Karl retired from the Authority in 2007.

URSULA’S STORY

Ursula, where were you born?

I was born in Chur. It is the capital of Graubünden in Switzerland.

And your parents?

My father was Karl Barth and my mother, Gertrude Conradin.

When were you born?

20th May 1944.

Where did you go to school?

I went to school in St Moritz. When I was three, we moved from Chur to St Moritz.

What did your father do there?

My father worked in a delicatessen which was an importer for the hotels. He was a driver bringing the fish and poultry to the big hotels. There are three big hotels in St Moritz.

And you went to school there?

Primary and secondary school

Did you do a tertiary course?

I did what they call in Switzerland, *Kaufmannschule* which is accountancy. You go part time to school every day and in the other part you spend time in an office where you do the practical work.

Where did you do your office work?

I did my work in the same company as my dad, in the delicatessen shop but in the office. After school I just had no idea what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something with sport and I just didn’t know what. My mum worked from home doing books for many, many people, and said “Why don’t you do that before you do something else?”

At what age did you start to ski?

I started when we came from Chur to St Moritz. I was three then and I started skiing straight away – on 2 metre long skis probably, home-made skis.

Did your parents ski at all?

No. My dad had skied a bit when he was young, but he had bad knees and had to give it up. They were both really good competitive swimmers, but my mum had a hip problem. She had a shorter leg that was never operated on, so she could not ski.

Which ski club did you belong to?

It is called 'Alpina St Moritz'.

Did you join when you were five?

No. I joined later because we didn't go to school with five, we start at seven in Switzerland and I think even then, I probably only skied for fun and we just did little school races. Probably I only joined the club when I was ten or eleven, when I wanted to race. You had to join the club if you wanted to race.

Did you do more free skiing than actual racing in the club?

When I joined the club, we trained. We trained every weekend. Definitely. We did night training. Downhill, slalom. In Switzerland we always have the two hour break – 12 to 2 o'clock lunch break. So from where I went to school, it was about a 100 metre walk to the bottom station of the train going up to the ski area. We had the skis in the locker, and changed, and just made it back for the class.

So you had your sandwiches in your pocket and ate them on the train?

Exactly. Every lunch time and we must have trained two or three times a week under flood lights, and every weekend unless there were races. It was fantastic, the race club.

How were you competitively speaking? Did you win any major races?

I was always a good competitor. You know you go from the Juniors up to the Seniors and I always did well. We were only three girls that did very well. One of our girls became a member of the Swiss A team and we had a couple of boys in the Swiss A team. There were only four members of the national A team. I won a lot of regional races and Graubünden Canton races. I was a winner in all of the disciplines – downhill, GS and slalom.

When you win in those regional races, you are invited to national races and then they make suggestions for you to join the national team. It is the B team you join first, before the A team, but I had no money. We had no money to race outside the area. I couldn't travel to go to races, to go to Austria or even to the French part of Switzerland. So I had to decline a lot of races and eventually I had to give up my competitive skiing.

At what age were you invited to join the B team?

I was eighteen. I tried for two years to actually make it but I had no money for skis. I made a little money with my apprenticeship. I got a sponsorship one year for skis which helped a little bit. But basically my parents couldn't give me any money for travel to the races in which I should have competed and courses which I should do. So then I thought "What should I do?" So I just decided I would become a ski instructor and make money instead of spending money racing.

So you went to the Graubünden?

We had the Graubünden and the Swiss Academies. Graubünden is a kanton (region) in Switzerland. Graubünden was the highest – with the highest Swiss qualification. So I did the Graubünden instructor's course.

That was the highest course – so did you go in as an assistant instructor?

Yes. In the Graubünden you do that pre-course, and then you have to teach for two years in the ski school before you were allowed to go and do your main course.

Did you teach in St Moritz?

Yes

Outside the ski season Ursula was employed by the Head Ski Company in Davos whilst she raced as an amateur, but she really wanted to go to America however her first two applications were rejected. In order to improve her English in 1964, she spent a period in London working in an office after which she returned to Switzerland to the Head Ski Company and applied for a third time for a visa to work in America.

Eventually Ursula migrated to Canada and in 1965, taught in Mount St Agath in the Laurentians, close to Mt Tremblant. Finding the climate too cold, she travelled to the Jasper Park Lodge and gained a job in the front office after which she returned to her family in St Moritz. Finally Ursula landed a job in Mammoth and it was there she met Karl Berchtold in 1969.

Ursula, tell me about your work with Leonhard Erharter?

I loved working in the Thredbo Ski School and I really enjoyed working for Leonhard. It was really like working for a family. He was always fair when you did your work conscientiously. I loved teaching skiing so I tried to do my best to improve everyone in my class and so I felt I was really appreciated by Leonhard. Whatever classes Leonard gave me, teaching is teaching, and it was good.

What sort of classes did he give you

I didn't mind. I probably had a lot of beginners first up but I don't mind to teach beginners. I don't mind what I teach and I was more at Merits with my classes or basically always at Merits. The top classes, 5 & 6 were starting then on the other side at the bottom of Crackenback.

I was mostly located at Merits up to level 4. After a couple of years I was also made manager of the children's classes, organiser of the kids classes at Merits. That was good. But whatever he gave to me, Class 4, 5 or 6, it is all teaching. It was good – I loved teaching.

Leonhard was a good skier, phenomenal, the way he could put up with the elements. I admired him – no matter what weather, he was without a headband and he didn't like us to wear one. I laughed, finally I had could wear one. He also didn't like us to wear overpants. He just wanted us to be in ski pants so it didn't look like instructors could feel the cold. But when you taught for 7 or 8 hours and it happened to rain then it was sometimes horrible.

Finally I was also allowed to wear mittens, he preferred us to wear just gloves. "No, no, instructors wear gloves." I think he took pity on me and I was allowed to wear mittens. Our uniform was not waterproof and you wore it seven hours a day.

And tell me, how were the classes structured? You had two hour lessons or four?

We had one hour private lessons from 9 until 10 am, then a class from 10 to 12 noon, private 12 – 1pm, 1 to 3 pm class, then private 3pm until 4 pm. Actually we could get 7 hours of work or sometimes 8. That was if we started at 8 am.

I was happy working 7 hours a day. Teaching then was well worth it because we were on contract for the season. Two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon and private lessons came through from doing a good job in the class. The money we made in the private lessons, we got 50% of the money from the private lessons. It was well worth it. We made so much money then, probably a lot more than the instructors now. We could put so much money away.

Tell me something about the uniform?

We wore our own ski pants but we were issued with one ski school jacket.

And a jumper?

Later on we received a jumper and a beanie. For a long, long time we didn't have a beanie. I wore my own hand knitted beanies for many years.

And when you were working in Thredbo where did you stay? Were you up at the lodge then?

"No, when I came to Thredbo in 1971, we lived in the Palmer's Lodge. I was working in the travel office but Leonhard knew I was here and in August the ski school became really, really busy and I was needed in the ski school and they asked for me. So I finished off in the travel office. They were fine with that and I started in the ski school for my first year.

But the following year we came and we lived at the Bottom Station with all the instructors. We just had a room and a communal kitchen at the end. That was fine. It was nice because the meeting place was right outside. Unless someone had an 8 to 9 class, the ski instructors got together and skied. We had a training session, like 8 – 9 am and then we had a meeting.

We had a meeting every day. 9 o'clock we were at the meeting place and then the Merits instructors boarded the lift to go up. If you had a private lesson you always picked your guest up at the meeting place at the bottom of Crackenback and skied over to Merits if you had a class there at 10 o'clock. It was well organised.

In the early days, the top classes were 5 and 6 and later on it got changed so that the top classes were 1 and 2. When I started the top class was 6.

Did you ever get to teach on Crackenback?

I did. I used to take race clinics on weekends. I was a race coach. Amongst others, I used to coach the Clifford boys, Kim and Steve and Paul Reader's son.

Ursula, please tell me about your life after Thredbo, your life in Jindabyne and your work with the Trampoline Club

We left Thredbo went to Sydney for a while. We came back to Jindabyne in 1980. I had Manuela in '77. She was three years old and Andrea was just six months old when we came back to Jindabyne, to Tyrolean Village.

What are the children's full names

Manuela Corina and Andrea Thomas. When we came to Jindabyne, we had the house, Chesa St Mortiz, and I was basically a mum at home and looked after the apartments, I took Manuela to the gymnastic club run by Jimmy James. Just before she turned four, she joined the gymnastic club. When we came back to Jindabyne, we had a trampoline from Joe Plangger. Manuela was very co-ordinated for a 3 year old. Right away she just loved it and jumped properly, so we thought "She likes that type of thing".

Jimmy James was in need of helpers because he did everything by himself and he never had enough helpers. Jimmy asked me right away, if I could help out with gymnastic teaching.

In my earlier days in Switzerland after high school, I wanted to get into sports teaching but we couldn't afford it, so I did accountancy. But later I went to a physical education school in Magglingen in Switzerland for two years. It is a two year course. In Switzerland to become a physical education teacher, you had to be a school teacher and then go into an extension of physical education. I wasn't a school teacher, I had an accountancy degree. I could only teach in private schools with the diploma from Magglingen

Did you work in a school after that?

No, I did the course then I became a ski instructor and that was it. I never used it but later on, I did. I did a bit of private teaching with friends. We trained together doing a lot of running. I would have loved to teach gymnastics when I was younger, but it never happened. So I finally started when I was a older.

And that is why you are still there, doing it because you came back to it later in life.

When Jimmy James asked me I started instructing with him, and later he wanted to give up teaching in the Youth Club. I can't remember when I actually took over teaching. Jimmy James wanted to incorporate the Youth Club at that stage and I don't think it ever happened. Before I took over, he used to have Heinz Gloor helping him. They had one or two trampolines in there. Heinz Gloor did the same school in Switzerland that I did in Magglingen and he was actually a very good trampolinist. He competed in Switzerland as a trampolinist. He helped to teach the children trampolining in the Youth Club. Jimmy James daughter, Claire also taught. Then Heinz didn't have time anymore and I saw the kids really wanted to continue trampolining, and Manuela especially did. She just loved it.

I wondered "How can I get educated in trampolining specific?" I had a friend, Judy Perrin, who is still one of the national team coaches, one of the highest qualified coaches in Australia. I asked her and she helped me out a lot with transitioning from gymnastic educational teaching into specific trampoline coaching. I also went to the official trampoline coaching course in Sydney.

The time came when Jimmy James said "I really have had enough" and I asked Jimmy "Do you mind if I change the Youth Club into what I know more about? Gymnastic teaching I don't know so much about it, but I do know about trampoline coaching and I would like to change it into a trampoline club." He was fine with that plan.

We started the Jindabyne Trampoline Club in 1988. We must have had right away about thirty children in the club. We started travelling to take part in to competitions, mostly to Sydney and our club always did very well.

Do you attribute that to just trampolining or their background and activities?

I think Jindabyne children are active children, they do just whatever is possible outside and physical activity is more natural. I think Sydney children don't do quite as much. The kids here are super active. A lot of the children, who were a bit older, say 7 and 8, were skiers as well and trampolining training complemented their ability on skis. We had all these aspiring young athletes in it. So our club did very well. We collected ribbons and medals at interschool level competitions all the time.

And you went to all these events?

Yes. We had a few children that made it to state level – they did well at state level and got medals at state level. We had children coming in from Cooma as well so later we changed the name to the Snowy Mountains Trampoline Club.

How many assistants did you have helping you?

I never had assistant coaches other than junior coaches, who were the older members. Manuela was helping coaching from 5th class. She was a born teacher. She just loved to teach the younger ones. She was just born to it. Andrea, not so. Andrea never liked teaching the younger kids or wanted to be involved in teaching.

Kristian Draxl used to help out. We basically worked as a club – all the kids. The older, better ones in the higher levels, helped the younger ones along and I was head coach. There was no one in the area I could draw on to help out.

How long did you continue in that way?

The Snowy Mountains Trampoline Club lasted until 1996.

It was not incorporated?

No, it was not incorporated.

Was it affiliated with another club for insurance purposes?

Yes, our club, when I opened up in 1988, we affiliated with Gymnastics NSW. We still are affiliated with Gymnastics Australia and NSW. We pay all our insurances there, do our training through there, and the children are insured through them.

The club lasted until 1996?

The club didn't stop. We were teaching in the Memorial Hall until 1996. Then Jindabyne Sport and Recreation opened a new hall in March, 1996, and due to fact that it was higher, it had a higher ceiling. We moved. At first we were really worried to move to Sport and Recreation. We thought that the distance was too great for the parents to bring children out. It was so handy in the Memorial Hall, but a lot of the older children would have hit the roof by then. It was a good opportunity to move out to Sport and Recreation and we have been there ever since.

Do you still continue as head coach?

Yes, I am still head coach.

You will have to groom someone to be an understudy, in case something happens to you.

Yes. I have been trying for a long, long time. When we operated in the Hall, the members had to put the trampolines up and taken them down each day, because the hall was used for other sports as well, soccer, netball etc. Three years ago we were able to negotiate full use of the hall and were able to put in in-built trampolines. We have sprung floors. We have double minis. We have an amazing set up in there. Andrea financed everything. He put all the equipment in. He built all the features and it is basically his business. It is called "Action Sports Training" and I continue as head coach and manager. This year I will take some wages for the first time.

You have put more than could ever be costed into the trampoline club for really very little recognition for what you have done.

The recognition is the success of our members who we trained and guided. I just thought about it this year when the Olympics came round, and we had Scott Kneller competing. He was one of the young ones coming on when we went to Sport and Rec. He became one of the junior coaches. He wouldn't have been in more than Year 5. He was an amazing little coach and now he has been to two Olympics and still trains at our facility. He doesn't help with teaching now he is back at University. Whenever he is in Jindabyne, he comes to have a bounce.

We have touched a bit on Andrea, now tell me about Manuela's career? When did she start skiing?

When we came back to Jindabyne, she was three. I took her up right away for a ski at three years of age. I took her up just on nice days and Andrea was in my back pack. In those days you were allowed to have little ones in back packs. Andrea, he started at two and a half. He said "I've had enough of being up here in this confinement. I want to ski."

It was probably actually quite cold in the back pack.

I made sure I went on nice days. Do you remember the free lift between Perisher and going up to Smiggins – the Piper Poma? I used to pull the kids in on toboggans to that free lift and we skied the free lift all day long. That is how they learnt.

Children skied free until the age of five.

Yes, but I couldn't afford the ticket. For a long time, for those first years since being a ski instructor, I remember I skied for four days for myself. I supported the kids for a long time. When Manuela turned five, I had to pay for her. I didn't go skiing very often.

Who would take her up to Perisher then?

Karl then became a ski instructor in Perisher. Quite often on a Saturday, Sunday, he took the children up and they were able, because he was an instructor, to be in the kids ski school for free and Del Draxl was so kind to have them for lunch in the child care centre.

It all began from there. Then we moved to Thredbo because we loved Thredbo skiing. I bought a Thredbo pass and moved the children over to Thredbo. I remember, Manuela was 9 ½ or 10 and Andrea 8. We always free skied with the kids. I used to race, I said to Karl "Here in Australia it is far too expensive. It is not like in Europe in getting them to race clubs." So we always just free-skied with the kids.

When they were 10 and 8, they went up the lift ahead of me and at the top Andrea said to me "Mum, you need to chase this group down the hill - We just had a chat to the gentleman next to us on the chair and he told us all about this freestyle ski team just starting in Thredbo and they are looking for juniors and we would like to be part of it, it sounds great".

So we chased the group. They were stopped. It was only a small group of four or five and Don St Pierre, the head coach, and one other coach. I stopped and said "The kids wanted to know a little bit about freestyle skiing" and they said "oh yes, we are looking for junior skiers." I said "Andrea and Manuela are really young. I don't know if they would be old enough for the team." He said "Oh, they are a perfect age" - school holiday were just starting – "Could you meet on Saturday, down at the bottom? We will take them for the day and we will let you know after the day."

Off they went, and when they came back, Don St Pierre said "you are not getting these children back. They are in our team." They were good skiers then, by 8 and 10, good solid skiers. Don said "Your children are just amazing skiers and we would love to have them in the team." So that was it, they joined the Thredbo Freestyle Team. Don St Pierre was an amazing coach. He came from Steamboat Springs in Colorado in the US, but later on he became the US national team freestyle coach and took the freestyle team to the Olympics, after he finished off with the Thredbo team. It was fantastic to have him teach the kids.

They were two seasons in Thredbo and then Don St Pierre, who was from Steamboat Springs, said "I would like to start an exchange program, so we can send the children over to Steamboat Springs and train in the Wintersports Club in Steamboat Springs." The next January I took them across and they skied the whole month of January during the school holidays in the Steamboat Springs Wintersports Club and did the first Rocky Mountain competitions. They got a lot of training in.

How old were the children then?

Manuela would have been eleven and Andrea nine when we first went over and then I took them over for three years running. We made friends with a very nice family over there so we were able to send the children over. Karl took the children over on the planes, stayed a week and then came back, leaving them in the charge of the family. So that is how they came better and better.

So they continued training in Perisher Valley then?

Yes. Their training changed from Thredbo then when Don St Pierre left and Thredbo didn't have a mogul course any more. They were still in the Thredbo team and Perisher started a team – the Perisher Freestyle.

Peter Topalovic and his brother were in it. So the training moved over to Perisher because they had the facilities.

The Perisher Club is still going?

It is strong. When Don McInnes was ski school director in Perisher, one day he came to me, he knew that the children were already excellent freestyle competitors and he asked what they do for training and stuff. I talked about the Wintersports Club in Steamboat Springs. He said "Oh, 'Wintersports Club', that sounds really good and he started the Wintersports Club in Perisher – I was very influential in the name! (laughter).

The Wintersports Club in Perisher now has all the different disciplines –moguls, free-ride and all the other disciplines.

And now Manuela's first Olympics?

Her first Olympics was in 2002. She was in close selection for Nagano in 1998 when she first broke her heel and then did her knee and did not recover in time for the final qualification for Nagano. Then she trained for Salt Lake. She was away even before Nagano, training and competing on the Europa circuit or the North American circuit. Then after Nagano, Manuela participated in the World Cup circuit. The World Cup usually started early in the winter such as in Sweden, then they went off to America and back to Europe every year.

Right after school Manuela did Certificate 3 through the Australian Council for Health Physical Education and Recreation followed by Certificate 4 in 1998 with the Fitness Institute Australia. In between training for Salt Lake she had to work. She was an instructor at Sport and Recreation where they offered the Les Mills classes, pump and body balance, and she always taught trampolining for me.

Then Torino?

Torino was in 2006. It was the second Olympics for Manuela. She made the final in the moguls event and placed 14th. It was a great achievement.

And Andrea?

Andrea was in the World Cup team for the 2002 Olympics and would have gone to Salt Lake but just half a year before Salt Lake in the test event in Deer Valley, he did his anterior crucia ligament. So Andrea didn't recover from the injury in time to complete the qualifications for Salt Lake, which was devastating for him.

So he had a career change?

Yes. He said "I can't do another four years." He said "Nope, I may do another four years in the sport and have another injury."

So you must be very proud of your children. Congratulations on their achievements and how you supported them.

We tried. I am really proud of that. We guided them. We never pushed the kids to do anything. We really made sure they wanted to do it, and when they chose a path, we tried to help as best we can.

Are you happy for me to transcribe this and share the copyright with the Thredbo Historical Society?

Yes.



Karl & Ursula Berchtold at home, April 17th, 2014

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Interviewee.....*K. Berchtold*..... Date.....*19.3.2014*.....

Interviewer.....*Chrissi Webb*..... Date.....*19.3.2014*.....

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Interviewee.....*U. Berchtold*.....

Date.....*20/3/2014*.....

Interviewer.....*Chrissi Webb*.....

Date.....*20/3/2014*.....

