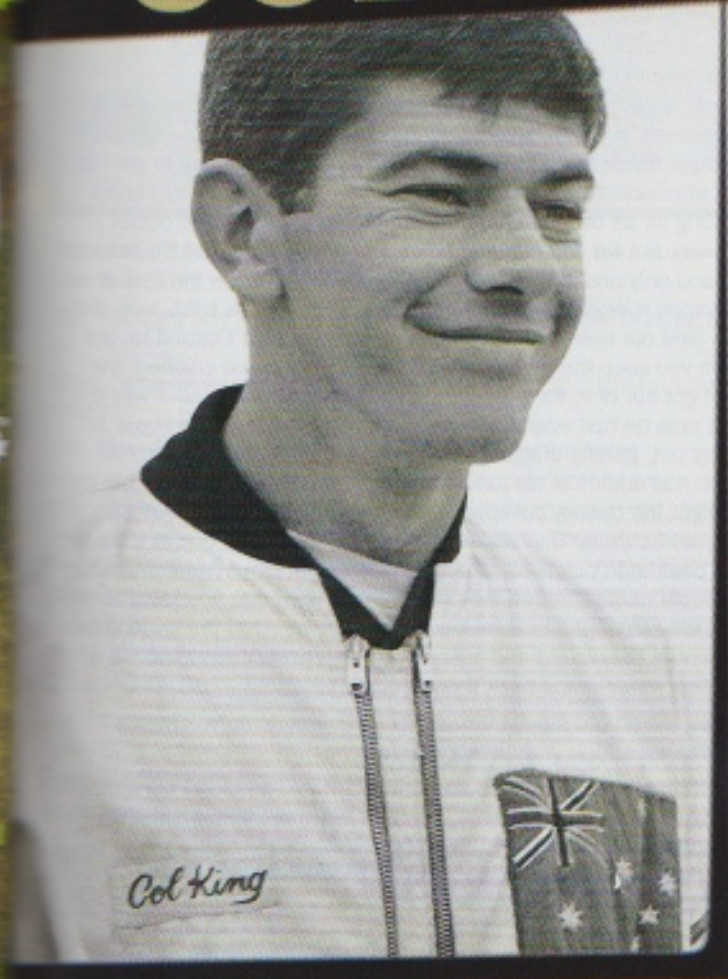


MASTER OF SPORT PARACHUTING

COL KING #1

A chat with Susie Mc



Sitting on Col's deck in the Noosa Hinterland checking out old scrap books and log books...

SMc: "So when did you start jumping?"

CK: "1961"

SMc: "And you jumped 'til..."

CK: "Through to about 1973."

SMc: "You stopped the year I was born!"

SMc: "Back in the early '60s, you wouldn't have seen much skydiving to know that's what you wanted to do, would you?"

CK: "Well I was going to go for my Pilot's Licence and I went to the old Aeroclub in Newcastle and went for a few orientation flights in a Tiger Moth and a Chipmunk. A couple of the pilots there were from a RAF Base nearby there at Williamstown and they were just starting to do a bit of sport jumping and a couple of the pilots there said "well if we were going to go flying aeroplanes then we might as well know how to get out of them and open the parachute", so I said "ah well I'll go and do a jump with them before I go flying". I did one jump and never went flying again! That was the end of that."

SMc: "So in 12 years, how many jumps did you do?"

CK: "Around 1,200."

SMc: "Wow, that's a lot, particularly for then, isn't it?"

CK: "I had a thousand jumps before anybody in Australia then."

SMc: "Did they have 'F' Licences back then? (Excited) Col, are you 'F' Licence number 1?"

CK: "No."

SMc: "Who's number 1 then?"

CK: "There was a fight between Claude Gillard and Andy and Bill Molloy and a few others in Victoria, because Claude ran the Federation (APF) and (laughing) the first 'F's went down there I think."

SMc: "When you say Andy, do you mean Andy Ski?"

CK: "No, Andy Keech. When I started he had 93 jumps, which was like **experienced**."

SMc: "Yeah, he would've been an instructor then for sure!"

CK: "I was an Instructor at 20 jumps! (Laughing) Everybody survived."

SMc: "What was your home drop zone?"

CK: "Newcastle. It was the dominant club from about 1961 to about 1965. I lived in Newcastle. Most of the Sydney jumpers used to come up if they wanted any descent jumping because they didn't have any height at Camden, only 3 or 4,000ft."

Col shows me an issue of the (original) Australian Skydiver Magazine from 1968, where he featured as our Aussie hero - a silver medalist at the World Championships in Accuracy. This was Australia's first ever medal at a World Championships... the article is written in day-by-day diary format by ?? and captures well the feeling of excitement, the anticipation of the jump-off round (as he and the gold medalist were tied for first place) and the enormity of situation...

CK: "I was the first one to get 4 dead centres in a row."

SMc: "On what sort of parachute?"

CK: "A PC." Don't laugh, they were pretty good!"

SMc: "I'm not laughing at the canopy, I'm just amazed at the skill of getting 4 dead centres in a row on a PC."

CK: "Nah, there were people getting 10 in a row at that stage on PCs."

SMc: "Are you serious? What was the size of the disc?"

CK: "Do you want to have a look at one of the discs? They gave me half a dozen of 'em. As we hit the disc they used to give 'em to us. They've shrunk a lot since then."

CK: "Everybody jumps PCs the wrong way these days, they do Accuracy on a PC into wind, never did that, we did downwind runs."

SMc: "Really?"

CK: "You had to set up at about 300 to 500 feet and then just ride it on a steady path, get your angle right and away you go."



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SMc: "That's pretty different to modern day concepts of landing!"

SMc: "So you got your Master of Sport Parachuting Award because you won a medal at that World Championships?"

CK: "Yeah, I came back after that World Championships, about 6 months later I was with Jim Cox in Townsville and he'd just come back from a Board Meeting and said "oh yeah, we just made you a Master of Sport Parachuting." Well the only Master of Sports that I'd heard of in those days were the Russians. If you made the Russian team or made a record, they made you a Master of Sport. That's where it came from I think. So I said to Jim "that's good." He didn't seem real serious so I didn't seem too serious either and it wasn't 'til 10 years later I found out it was a genuine award (laughing) and so then I said "I thought you were having me on!" They had a ceremony at the Coolum APF Conference and they gave me mine and Claude his and Faye hers. What are they up to now?"

SMc: "Faye was number 4 and just recently Dad (Dave McEvoy) was awarded number 5. That's all. Pretty hard to get."

SMc: "So how many World Meets did you go to?"

CK: "The first World Meet I went to was the 6th in 1964. Orange Massachusetts in '62 was the 5th and we had a couple of jumpers from Australia. I went to 1964, '66 and '68 and then I did a lot of jumping in Europe because I was living in London; I worked the winter and jumped the summer months, and there were events like the Adriatic Cup in those days which were nearly as big as the World Champs, before Yugoslavia fell to pieces. I went to Yugoslavia for a couple and the Belgian Championships, French northern region Championships."

SMc: "You were very active."

CK: "Oh yeah! That's all I was doing for 13 years, I just worked 'til I got money and then went jumping 'til I ran out of money. It was all between Europe mainly and North America."

SMc: "Is that before you met your partner Joan?"

CK: "No, Joan and my wife at the time, Pat, were good friends and they followed about 6 months later. Pat and I got hitched after about 5 or 6 years of wandering around and Joan got married to my mate, Glen Read, a Canadian jumper. Then Pat got killed and Joan got divorced, then later Joan and I got together!"

SMc: "How did Pat die?"

CK: "It was 1971, we were doing a big demonstration jump at Bondi Beach, a 8-man jump. On opening Pat and another canopy collided. Everyone was jumping PCs and supposed to be landing back on the beach, but we'd gone too deep on the spot and we were going to have trouble getting back unless we opened high and drove in all the way. Anyhow Pat and another one of the jumpers had an entanglement and by the time they got it undone they were too low, so they landed in the water. The surf boats picked a couple of the others up and Pat was tangled in the gear and they didn't get to her in time, she just drowned. It was that City to Surf race, half a million people there, a big deal."

SMc: "Did she land in the water a long way out?"

CK: "She landed pretty close to the shore but it was a big rocky headland, there was no way you could get out of the water. The surf boat got to her and had hold of her but the boat got swamped and the boat crew and everybody all ended up tangled together and the gear was wrapped all around her and she just didn't make it."

SMc: "I guess it was hard to get out of that sort of gear back then? Like today it is pretty easy for us to cutaway."

"It was pretty easy then. I don't know why she didn't. I think she was tangled in it. Trouble is she was in breaking waves and the canopy could've just wrapped around her. We'd done a lot of water jumps over the years, she hadn't done that many I suppose, but I'd done a lot."

SMc: "Water jumps as in landing in the water, or jumping over the water?"

CK: "Landing in the water - demonstrations, surf club events, stuff like that. We had it downpat; we'd undo all the leg straps and chest straps and be sitting in the harness. When the water came up you'd just straighten your legs and it would just slip off."

CK: "Another water jump we did was just up the beach from Manly, an 8-man into the surf club do, from an old plane called a Norseman. It caught fire in the engine and started throwing oil right through the plane. We didn't want to get out but we **had** to get out! We were about 5 miles out to sea. There were a lot of surf boats waiting for us because we were supposed to land in the ocean anyway, but we had about a 20 minute wait. We all had life jackets on and only one jumper lost his gear, Louie Johnson, the rest of us salvaged everything. The pilot of the surf boat crew said, "why did you land out here for?" and we said that "we didn't intend to, but have you seen the plane?" He said "no." The plane crashed, the pilot got out of it, fortunately he had a seat pack on and it was the first time he had ever worn one. He landed in the ocean about 10 miles out, getting dragged through the water, he was an old RAF pilot, had a knife in his jumpsuit, he cut the rigging lines off his face and got the canopy collapsed. There was a Japanese trawler about 50 metres away. They picked him up and took him back to town but the boat hadn't cleared customs, so they put him in quarantine for a couple of days before they allowed him back into Australia! He lost the plane - the police launch went out and they presented him with what they found and it was in a bucket! We used to do did a fair few water jumps back then."

SMc: "When you say 8-man and 10-man jumps, do you mean freefall stars?"

CK: "Yeah, all we did were stars, with smoke, we didn't think of doing anything else. When I started in '61 there was a moot at Newcastle and if you could fall stable and hold a heading you got points and that was about as good as it got then, but we progressed very fast. They started doing baton passes, which was the initial thing, then doing 3 and 4-man links. Then in the US they decided stars were the way to go, so we started building stars. We got up to 16-man stars, they used to wobble all over the place, we didn't think of boxing them all in and making them all nice and solid and stable. We would have done bigger than 16-mans but we ran out of aircraft, there was nothing in Australia we could use to take a crowd, not like today with turbines charging around everywhere."



Pat King



Col King & Andy See after a "Stick" baton pass



3-man link, Pat King, Col King & Andy See

Team off to NZ. Top L-R: Dingus, Dave Hobbs, Frank Holczak, Ian Swinbourne, Col King & Ted Harrison
Bottom L-R: Russell Cuckling, Andy Keech, Stuey McNeen, Geoff Bingham and Bob Barry



SMc: "You talk about baton passing in the mid '60s, links in the late '60s, what were you doing before all of that?"

CK: "All Style and Accuracy and competition, no relative working at all."

SMc: "Who came up with concept of Style - left turn, right turn, back loop?"

CK: "The Russians I imagine, because they started Sport Parachuting off in communist countries. We didn't really get going for a while, the first full team we sent away was in '64 - we had a full men's team and a full women's team. Then after that, we started doing a lot more relative work, just stars. Then New Zealand got in on the first 10-man star meet one time. We had a team and we went over there, we thought it was Christmas! We came second. I was on that team with Geoff Bingham and Ian Swinbourne, Stuey McNeen, Dingus..."

CK: "I did a lot of relative work, the standard improved rapidly, we were always trying to keep up with the Yanks, they used to put the magazine out and tell you what was going on and then we started contributing to that mag, Andy Keech started taking a lot of good photos and he ended up staying over there after a World Meet."

I couldn't help but have a giggle at the photos of the old gear with front mounted reserves, the huge altimeters and stop watches and the bulk of it all, thanking the people like Col who jumped and modified this equipment and essentially helped make it safer for my generation...

SMc: "What do you make of the canopies and equipment these days?"

CK: "I came out and did a couple of jumps a few years ago. I opened at 5,000ft just to play with the canopy on the way down; scared the pants off me! I thought at the time of maybe taking it up again because I enjoyed it and then I thought, "Christ, I wouldn't feel good jumping these canopies, I'd have to start from scratch and work my way back up to it again". But, nah, I'm too involved in other things. But yeah, some of the gear we used to jump was just so big and the canopies so big, in freefall I could hardly lift my head up."

SMc: "I felt like that on the old student gear, like a turtle."

SMc: "So why did you give up jumping?"

CK: "I did it flat strap for all that time, but after Pat died I tapered off a bit, I lost the taste for a while and I just didn't get into competition again which was the thing I loved. I did quite a bit of fun jumping, but I can only do so much fun jumping, I lost interest in the end and just stopped. It would be nice to start again (laughing),..."

SMc: "66 years old and wanting to start jumping again, that's cool!"

CK: "Well I saw all that mob out at the POPS Meet and there were a couple of guys who were 80! I thought, "I'm only young here!"

Reminiscing over the photos of young faces and old friends...

SMc: "You are right in your Editorial about how we make lifelong friends in this sport. You'd still be friends with most of these people wouldn't you?"

CK: "Yeah, unless they are dead or living overseas I still see them all frequently, we drop in on one another as we go past, it's amazing."

SMc: "Are you glad that you spent those years skydiving?"

CK: "Oh yeah! Yeah! If I hadn't have spent those years skydiving I would have probably... well I was being groomed for a career in the ship yards in Newcastle, doing an engineering apprenticeship. I had a leave of absence to go to the World Meet, I was supposed to come back in 3 months and continue on in the job. But I didn't. I was enjoying myself and I never ever went back. It just changed my life altogether, from there I worked and jumped all over Europe and North America. I lived a different life. As a result I've done all sorts of things; fishing boats, we fished commercially for 10 years, trawlers, all sorts of great adventures."

SMc: "Most jumpers would have a fairly similar type of story I suppose - living a normal life, then discovering skydiving and it changing their life forever."

SMc: "Well Col, and your mates, thanks for paving the way for us."

CK: "Can you imagine what it is going to be like in another 50 years? I'd like to know when Sport Parachuting officially did start in Australia. Claude would probably know because I think he was involved in it and a few of the Victorians. It must be pretty close to 50 years now I think, 'cause I know it existed when I started, **Just** existed and I started in '61 so it's probably close to being the 50th anniversary of Sport Jumping in Australia."

SMc: (Jaw-dropping pause) "That's huge!"

CK: "It is, isn't it?!"

SMc: "And how far has it come in 50 years?!"

CK: "And how far is it going to go, that's what I wonder, 'cause the stuff you guys are doing these days is just fantastic."



Col head down in the 60s, with Andy Keech he says it was by accident but his body position is pretty good

Photo: Alan Jey