

APF MASTER OF SPORT PARACHUTING #4

FAYE COX

A chat with Susie Mc



1,000th jump, at Labertouche Nationals, January 1971.

SMc: What came first: Jim or jumping?

FC: I had never heard of skydiving or parachuting. I had been working in Sydney and my plan was to go travelling around Australia before heading overseas to the UK. I stopped in Townsville to visit a friend. She had a skydiver boyfriend, so eventually we went to a skydiver's party. My first vision of Jim was this guy literally jumping in to the room, hands and legs spread wide, yelling out "Heyyyyy!!" and I thought, "who's that smart ass?" Amazingly I went home with him that night (laughing). I doubt that I would ever have jumped, except there were really cheap courses on offer to assist the jumpers' pre-Nationals training camp being held at the Tully airstrip. I received my basic ground training with Jim. Although he wasn't a qualified Instructor at the time, regulations were a bit different then, but he was very safe and thorough, which I have always appreciated.

SMc: So how did your course go?

FC: I made my first three jumps at Tully, North Queensland in late October, 1965. My first two jumps were uneventful, but on my third I landed on a sawmill roof at the edge of the airstrip. I was using a LL canopy and happily following the ground control, but the wind had come up. So I was facing into wind, going backwards, when suddenly I saw a roof appear beneath me as I was due to land. I did a PLF, it wasn't bad and I had a nice landing. Feeling pretty clever I quickly collapsed my parachute so I wouldn't get dragged off the roof. People from the sawmill came running over, yelling, "Are you alright? Hang on, we'll get

a ladder". I said, "No, no! I'm fine, I'll just jump off." I must have been in shock. I shed my gear and jumped off the roof, injuring my ankle (laughing). So stupid! The Tully hospital told me it wasn't broken, but badly sprained.

SMc: That didn't deter you?

FC: No, I couldn't jump for some time and went to the '66 Port Pirie Nationals, in South Australia, to watch Jim competing with his new second-hand PC.

SMc: And you hooked up with Jim straight away?

FC: Yes, but I guess he wasn't as keen on a relationship as me, because he was so intense on jumping. That was probably the main reason I decided to jump in the first place, because "what else do you talk about"? I thought, "I'll just make one jump, that should do the trick." I was rather naïve in those days. In Townsville I bought a second-hand Navy container with an old patched TU. I was very proud of it. The ankle took a while to mend and when we stopped at the jumper's pub in Sydney on the way to the Nationals, one of the local jumpers said to me, "you'll never use that, girl! You're only bullshitting, you probably won't even do any more jumps!" I was secretly upset and decided I would at least make a freefall, which I did at Port Pirie. There was an "attitude" towards women jumpers amongst many of the macho jumpers.

SMc: How so?

FC: The inference that women were pretty useless as jumpers got up my nose, so I thought "Right, now I'm going to get my 'A' Licence". I went back to Labertouche, Victoria, where Jim was training full-time together with the Australian team. He had also won his first national championships.

I liked jumping but I was terrified I could die - but I kept going anyway. At Labertouche, they would say, "who wants to go on the next load?" and I'd have my hand up going "me, me, me". I reckon they thought, "that Faye, she's so keen", while I was thinking, "Oh god! I hope it comes up windy". I felt like that for ages.

SMc: Me too!

FC: Really?

SMc: Sometimes even still! Don't tell anybody! (laughing)

FC: Probably the first time I really felt good was when I went up in the plane by myself. Nobody wanted to jump and I said I would if they could fill the plane. I was thinking, "great, no one will jump". Suddenly, this elderly couple appeared from nowhere and wanted to go up in the C172 to watch. I was thinking, "f&%k!! I'd never been in the plane on my own, but I successfully spotted and landed accurately. I think that's when I felt so proud and realized I really could enjoy jumping.

SMc: How many jumps did you have then?

FC: About 30. Then Jim went overseas for six months to compete in the World Championships at Leipzig, East Germany, and to travel. I returned to Perth, joining and jumping with Rockingham Skydivers.

SMc: Is Perth where you're from?

FC: Yes, my whole family is there. I moved into a flat with two women jumpers who were more experienced with nearly 100 jumps. The three of us competed at the WA State Champs and with 68 jumps I won my very first competition! Jim arrived in WA, settling into the skydiving scene with me.

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SMc: So you were into it by then?

FC: Yeah, I was a dedicated jumper by then. Jim and I got engaged in Perth then returned to Sydney because his Mum was dying. We remained in the east, jumping at Camden and later at Labertouche, where we did our Instructor ratings. In mid-1967 we headed back north to Townsville.

SMc: Is that when you started the DZ?

FC: No. At that time there was the Townsville Parachute Club, run by a retired British Army Officer. It was a small club with members from Townsville and North Queensland. The DZ consisted of a dirt track runway on a cattle property, called Baringha, about 40kms from Townsville. Jumping was pretty low key. In 1968 Jim and I returned to Perth, got married, then shared a house with another married jump couple. We saved lots of money renting floor-space to jumpers, working lots of overtime in our jobs as draftsman and plumber, and instructing weekends with the Rockingham Skydivers. Then we decided to return to Townsville, where we were involved towards improving the jumping and club standards. Then Noel and Sophie arrived...

SMc: Noel and Sophie?

FC: Noel Weckert. He was an instructor from South Australia, Sophie was his wife. The four of us lived two doors away from each other at Hermit Park in Townsville, becoming close friends. In 1969 the four of us formed a commercial centre, the Townsville Sport Parachuting and Skydiving Centre (TSP&SC), which operated at the old Baringha DZ for five years. Conditions were pretty rough then. On occasions we couldn't get in to the DZ when it flooded during the "wet season", so a load would jump in from Townsville, while the rest of us would trudge about a half kilometre through the mud and water, carrying equipment above our heads into the DZ and walking it back out again. Saturday afternoons were spent at the Stuart Pub on the edge of Townsville.

SMc: What was a usual day jumping like at that time?

FC: Three jumps a day was considered quite a lot back then. We needed to get our jumps in early because even though the wind speed limit was 18 knots, it meant fast and hard landings on Cheapos, although some lucky jumpers had PCs. I remember many times boarding the plane as dawn would break at the Townsville airport. It was very basic at Baringha DZ, just the dirt track airstrip and old run down bush dunny. We put a good sand pit in and a small packing shed.

There were some really good jump times including the State Championships. Then unbelievably, the main highway was going to be re-routed right through the middle of our pit, as if the planners had used it as a marker. Then, tragically Noel and Sophie were murdered.



Display landing on the cross



Exiting over Townsville

SMc: Hey?!

FC: Oh, I'm sorry - you don't know about Noel and Sophie?

SMc: No and that just blew me out, murdered?

FC: Noel was NQPC Area Safety Officer and he'd driven down to Rockhampton to check out the local DZ. On their way back to Townsville, Noel and Sophie were held up by three young yahoos, who had run out of money and earlier had unsuccessfully tried to rob a service station. They had a gun and demanded money. Evidently Noel told them to *#\$@ off and they fatally shot him. Sophie jumped out of the car and ran away, but they shot her too.

SMc: Whoah. Ok, what was the aftermath of that?

FC: Noel's boys were living with us; they were only 13 and 15 years old. I was pregnant with Carolyn and it was a difficult time for us all. We finally decided it would be better for them to return to their mother and other siblings in South Australia. It was a very sad time.

SMc: Did they catch the people?

FC: Yes. The two guys were jailed for life. Amazingly, the 17-year-old girl was only sent home to the supervision of her parents in Tasmania.

SMc: That's quite a story! So that's when you and Jim took over the Centre and built a new DZ...

FC: In 1974 we purchased 150 acres of bushland at Manton, 10kms further along the highway towards Mt Isa from Baringha. Jim cleared it all, put in some bores and a tank. Being a plumber he built flushing toilets and showers with a unique bush hot water system using a large disused gas bottle with a fire underneath. He also built an open-walled packing shed. When Carolyn arrived we bought a large caravan with a covered verandah out the front, because we were living there four to five days a week. The above ground pool was installed, topped up from the tank water overflow. It was a popular spot. Next was a large demountable ablutions block, plus outdoor kitchen and importantly, the bar, which boasted a large commercial fridge, capable of holding many cartons of beer, and demountable cabins for the jumpers. It was all pretty rustic but provided the necessities of life.

Until then I had not seen many children at DZs, probably because the conditions were not attractive or pleasant. Everyone had dogs instead. It seemed that once a jumper had children they would not jump very much and if a female jumper became involved with a non-jumper that was the end of that. The construction of the huge hangar provided a lot more comfort. I always remember your Dad coming up to examine us for Tandem Ratings and he was really surprised at the "establishment" as DZs back then were often just an airstrip.

SMc: Dad would have been sooo impressed.

FC: Yeah, he said, "Golliwog Farm is really good Cox, I'm going to go back and do this too". But he didn't get the little caravan, he got the big house and inground pool. We always laughed about it and were pleased to be an example for Toogoolawah.

SMc: Why the name “Golliwog Farm”?

FC: Golliwog Farm was an affectionate name for the Manton DZ because our dog Woofa, Jim, Carolyn and myself all had really curly hair.

SMc: So, back in the 70s there were only about a dozen Clubs in Australia?

FC: Hard to remember exactly... Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton. A couple in Brisbane and Sydney, plus Newcastle. Victoria had Pakenham and Labertouche, South Australia had Lower Light, Perth had Rockingham Skydivers. Mt Isa was also active. Could be a few others.

SMc: Katherine?

FC: No, don't think they'd started then.

SMc: So, were you doing many jumps?

FC: All the time. That was our life. About 100 to 150 a year, which was really good for those times. The gear we used was not so user friendly, 200 to 250 was going for it. A funny story when Jim was jumping at Camden in the early days, he had made 100 jumps in the one year while most had only done about 50 or 60. Jim was advised that he was dangerous and needed to stop jumping so much!

SMc: Why did you receive the Master of Sport Parachuting Award?

FC: For being a role model for women in the sport and in recognition of my involvement and achievements in the many facets of the sport at state, national and international levels, especially the development of Asiana.

It never ceases to amaze me that there are so many excellent female jumpers in the sport these days and I really admire them for what they are achieving. I feel really humble.

Being a female jumper in the male dominated sport of the early days, I simply did whatever was available and always gave my best. I stayed active in the sport, while many jumpers came and went. It was pretty tough in the early days and now, when I look back on the archaic gear we used, I shudder. It definitely was not a sport for a weak person. However, it was great experience over the years, as the equipment, techniques and DZs improved and more women actively participated.

SMc: A few more women in the sport wouldn't go astray, I think everyone would agree with that! Tell us about your competition history.

FC: I was nationally and internationally competitive from 1967 until 1986 and then I only competed at State Championships. Style and Accuracy were initially the competition events and there were no separate Men's or Women's events at state or national level for a few years. I generally managed to win a place in the higher levels. When women's events arrived it was great and I was pleased to win several Australian National Championships in Women's Style and Accuracy. I competed in a

less serious manner at National level in rel work and crew.

Promoting women's jumping was important and creating records became popular (I was in the Australian 20-way record in the 80s). I was the only female squad member of the Australian CRW record attempt in 1984.

SMc: And how many World Championships did you compete at? I've seen a number of photos of you looking very cute, dressed in your Aussie uniform bound for great things.

FC: Between 1970 and 1986 I competed at five World Championships. My first World Championships was at Bled, Yugoslavia in 1970, competing in the individual women's event. Although Jim and I had been selected for the '68 Australian team, we didn't go to that world championship, as we were busy saving money, working weekdays and on weekends training students for free jumps payment. I was not happy about this, but Jim had decided it was time to save money to become more established, which in hindsight set us up for our future. In 1972, we were again selected and it was much the same story as we were busy establishing the Townsville skydiving centre.

When I went to the 1974 World Championships in Hungary, as a member of the Australian Women's team, I was elated to place 6th in the Womens' Individual Accuracy, in front of 74 women competitors. I was on a roll.

I had always preached that I was never going to have a baby, as it didn't fit in with my jumping life, but when I came home, Jim was ready to have a family, so I thought, "right, - I'll go off the pill - it'll take at least a couple of years to fall pregnant so I can keep jumping until then," but no, it all happened straight away! I was devastated at first, but it was so good because I had my darling daughter Carolyn.

SMc: Whom you adore.

FC: Yes. Absolutely the best thing I have ever done. No regrets at all! I remember many of the girls were shocked at me having a baby and they would come to me to ask about jumping and pregnancy. It amazed me that I had become a sort of matriarch. I was jumping a month after I had Carolyn, which in hindsight I would not recommend. I now always advise anyone to "enjoy your motherhood for at least six months". The old DZ was very dusty and hot, making it a difficult time for Carolyn and myself. The weekly kegs and BBQ every Sunday night at our house had been a ritual for so many years, but...

SMc: ... the beginning of the end of the kegs?

FC: For me it became too hard, so the keg and BBQ was moved down the road to a local jumper's house, which was great.

SMc: You were definitely a role model for women, but for more than being a Mum and a great accuracy competitor.

FC: Well I was always really keen for any challenge and I would do everything that was going - Judge ratings, Instructor Courses, Packer ratings, I did them all. I never got around to doing the Rigger rating, although I had always repaired the damaged



The girl had Style!

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parachutes and made jumpsuits.

SMc: Don't be shy, out with the rest of it...

FC: I did things because something was required. For example, I became a jump pilot in the '80s because we needed pilots. I enjoyed jump flying but loved jumping much better. I coached because I wanted to encourage and develop jumpers towards greater competition levels. I was involved in forming the NQPC in 1974 and Administrator until 1995. I was also a Chief Instructor, Instructor Examiner, Board member, Board of Review chair. I was instrumental in forming the QPA, an organisation required to allow North and South Queensland Parachute Councils to realise State Government funding. In 2000 I was a recipient of the Australian Sports Medal for being a long-term serving Queensland administrator and elite female (APF Master of Sport).

SMc: You are still like that now aren't you? You enjoy a challenge... Asiania for example.

FC: That was a challenge I never anticipated – it was really a struggle and I did whatever was required to eventually have Asiania accepted and recognized by the FAI as an International Affiliate member. The Asiania countries' jumping and organizational activities have generally developed during this time.

When my dearest Jim became so seriously ill, my heart was only with him, so my other work basically stopped. But now I am back with organizing Asiania activities and into international judging as Jim would have wanted me to – I enjoy these pursuits.

However, I am hoping that someone younger, who will be honest, hardworking and dedicated, will come forward in the next few years to take Asiania into the future.

SMc: How did Asiania come about? Are you a founder?

FC: Yes. At the '94 Style and Accuracy World Championships, China called a special meeting. Jim and I were invited as we were Australia's Head of Delegation and Coach. The Chinese wanted to form an organisation to bring the Asian and Australasian countries together, to develop competition because they thought Europe and USA etc. didn't really care about this part of the world. I was elected as Secretary-General and it was challenging compiling the Asiania documents etc., which were informative and encouraged new Asiania membership interest.

SMc: Asiania has become very successful.

FC: Yes, I think so. Originally the FAI and the IPC worried that Asiania would become a competitive organization to the FAI. (laughing) In 2002, the Secretary General of the FAI came to the Jeddah Championships, Saudi Arabia, where he had an enlightening meeting with Jim, Lee Jong Hoon (then President of Asiania) and myself. At the 2003 FAI IPC meeting, a Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up between Asiania

Carolyn's first tandem jump in 1989



and the FAI/IPC. One of the requirements was that Asiania members should be in the FAI. In 2005 Asiania was accepted as an FAI International Affiliate member and has become well recognised for its supporting role in successfully encouraging more than half a dozen countries to become members of the FAI. But, there are still countries like Syria and Brunei, where hierarchies have yet recognised the benefit to join the FAI. But I remain hopeful.

SMc: You've worked very hard at it. Volunteer?

FC: Yes - no pay – I am happy to do the work as long as I don't spend my personal money. Asiania activities have funded a lot of travel.

SMc: Have you got one of those really fat, enviable passports?

FC: Yes, there are a lot of different countries and I always enjoy the work and the event.

SMc: In a nutshell, tell me about a year in the life of Faye Cox.

FC: It normally starts with the FAI IPC Meeting (Asiania delegate and IPC Safety & Technical Committee member), Australian Nationals Championships (judging), Asiania supported International championships (judging and judge training courses), QPA, NQ/SQ Administration support, APF National Conference, BOD meeting (member of APF Statutes committee), NQ & SQ State Championships (judging), FAI IPC World Championships (judging), Asiania Annual General Meeting, Asiania Championships (convening everything). In between I would enjoy my times camping with Jim, Carolyn, Jason and friends, dining, movies, walking and swimming at Coolum Beach, an extremely wonderful place to be. So many good memories.

SMc: Are you going to continue with Asiania and judging and traveling?

FC: Yes. This year has been quiet due to Jim's illness. I cancelled all national and international plans, hoping that he'd be with me for a lot longer, but this was not to be. I know Jim would want me to get on with my life. The 6th Asiania Emax Video Competition, which involves webmail judging, will still happen. Also, Lee Jong Hoon, Asiania's most generous sponsor, has organised airfares and full accommodation for Asiania delegate's to attend the FAI General Conference at Incheon, Korea in October. During the period Asiania will have a workshop and 14th Asiania Annual General Meeting. A wonderful concept to promote more knowledge and participation in FAI and Asiania.

SMc: Tell me about your Judging.

Not your average family portrait!



FC: The opportunity to become a Judge came up in the early 70s so as usual I put my hand up. But I didn't do lots of judging, because at the Nationals I also liked to compete. Having always been interested in Crew I had the opportunity in 1996 to achieve my FAI Canopy Formation judge rating during the World CF Championships in Indonesia. Since then I've also gained my FAI Accuracy, Artistic and Canopy Piloting ratings.

SMc: Your FAI Judging Rating, did that go hand-in-glove with Asiania?

FC: It provided the qualification to back up what I was doing in Asiania, conducting Judging Courses to help improve and encourage national judges in these countries because opportunities are few. Together with two other FAI judges I have conducted a number of official FAI Judge Training Courses producing some good FAI judges. It's a different, challenging, yet rewarding, project.

SMc: What would you say to people who think they may want to become a judge?

FC: You need ethics, diligence, patience and importantly, a hard working attitude and practice. I believe if you are in a team and you are also a qualified judge, you can view jumps with a much more specialised and constructive attitude regarding your team's performance.

Faye's daughter Carolyn walks into the room.

SMc: Hey Carolyn, would you like to tell me what it was like growing up on the DZ with a cool mum who was jumping all the time?

CC: It was excellent, really fun. I loved being out there, bringing my friends out to sleep over. We had so many adventures when we would be horse riding, driving (I was driving when I was about eight years old), exploring, swimming, watching the jumping and student training.

FC: You got to fly everywhere.

CC: Yeah, sometimes Dad would let me fly when we were on trips and learning how to pack was fun.

FC: It was amazing how the kids would be able to "teach" people how to do things, especially landing rolls, exits, arching etc.

SMc: I used to sleep above the training area and could recount the entire first jump course word for word at about age 10.

CC: Mum and Dad used to get me out there to demonstrate exits on the flying fox or if someone was having trouble with their landing rolls.

FC: I can remember one time when Carolyn's kindergarten came out on a bus to experience the jump scene. There were several Display jumps, we showed them packing procedures, let them have look inside the plane and then they enjoyed their picnic. It was funny when it came time to leave. We were off for a few days to carry out some show displays and Carolyn cried because she wanted to ride in the bus not the plane! So we flew all the way back to Townsville airport to pick her up from the bus and then headed off towards our demo destination.

CC: I guess I got along well with older people from when I was very little. I would lie in bed in the caravan on Saturday nights, listening to everyone partying, but not being allowed out. When I got older I really wanted to jump, I was hassling Mum and Dad "come on, come on, let me jump" and finally I got to do a tandem when I was 14.

FC: Carolyn started solo jumping when she was 16 but wasn't allowed to make too many jumps until she finished high school. We also worried she was only doing it because she thought it was expected of her.

CC: Dad was like, "we don't want to be pushing you or making you do it", I was saying, "I want to do it, just let me get out there, I know everything, let me have a go, I'm out there every weekend watching everyone, come on!"

FC: You'd know too Susie, drop zone kids get such a wide experience.

SMc: Yeah, maybe a bit too wide sometimes, has made for very open-minded people though. There are pros and cons, but the pros far outweigh the cons.

FC: Our DZ was only small and everyone was on their best behaviour as far as Carolyn was concerned because they knew Jim would murder them if they did anything wrong by her. The jumpers were perfect carers.

CC: Mum and Dad didn't jump together for quite a few years because they worried I could be orphaned. But I felt really safe all the time and I never worried about if they were up there.

FC: Yes, we mainly worried that the plane might crash. When Carolyn was older we became more relaxed.

SMc: We're talking about us kids growing up on the drop zone, but you and Jim, when you started the DZ, you were in your mid 20s, so you have really grown up on the drop zone too, right?

FC: Yeah, I guess so.

SMc: So how many jumps did you do Faye?

FC: I only did just over 5,000 jumps.

SMc: (Laughing) Is that all!

FC: Not so many these days. I gave up several years ago and I can remember why. My knees, back and neck were suffering from years of jumping, lots of wear and tear, because I did over 1,000 jumps on round parachutes, lots of downwind accuracy landings, generally making stand-ups. We also did many demos and stand-up landings on the target was the only way to go. In 1985 and 1986 I badly injured both knees separately – landing on a hard accuracy pit, and in a high wind gust. (Disappointed) It really ruined my accuracy and Crew jumping. But I could still do everything else in jumping.

In 1995 we sold the TSP&SC and retired to Coolum Beach. I missed being a DZ operator, instructor etc. and I was now a fun jumper. Over the years my injuries became an annoyance to my jumping prowess and in 2003 I decided I was not really enjoying it. I also realised that I was a bit of an egotist who would prefer to be remembered as a strong jumper, so that was that...

SMc: Do you miss jumping Faye?

FC: Yes I do. But it was the best decision for me. I don't go windsurfing or snow skiing anymore either, but still enjoy hiking, gym, swimming and lots more. When I go judging, it's great to have that sense of usefulness for the competitors and their jumping, but it would be nicer to also be "doing it". But when I feel like that, I think "walk, talk, creep or crawl" - I want to keep walking and enjoying my life.

And with that Faye recounted more jump stories into the evening. Faye has so many interesting tales to tell!

The big man behind the great woman, Jim Cox, Faye's beloved husband of nearly 41 years, died in March this year after a short, fierce battle with mesothelioma (an asbestos related cancer). Jim himself was a legend in the sport - a staunch APF and NQPC member, Board Director, CI, ASO, Pilot, Examiner, Competitor, DZ operator etc. for over 40 years. When I asked him about Faye he replied "the thing about Faye that many people wouldn't know is her dedication to the cause, the years of paperwork and organisation. Apart from Asiania she did so much for Australian jumping behind the scenes. She's been remarkable."

And when asked if there was anything more he'd like to add, he could only think of the need to say how happy he felt about the shape the APF was in at the moment. "Jumpers should be pleased with the direction the APF is headed."

