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Gretchen Kunigk Fraser

Born: 1919 Died: 1994

Gretchen Kunigk began skiing as a 15-year-old, in 1934, and became a competitor two years later. In 1937, she met Don Fraser, a member of the 1936 Olympic squad, who was her inspiration. They married and moved to Sun Valley, Idaho, where Gretchen was able to train under the great Otto Lang.

Gretchen Kunigk Fraser was born of Norwegian-German parents in Tacoma, Washington, on February 11, 1919. In 1934, she and her brother William received skis as a Christmas gift and that started it all. Gretchen began her skiing career by winning several novice races on Mount Rainier in 1936.

In 1937, she met Don Fraser, who had competed in Germany as a member of the 1936 United States Olympic Ski Team. Don was Gretchen's first inspiration and was instrumental in her joining the Washington Ski Club team. In October 1939, Gretchen married Don. The couple lived at Sun Valley for a year; this proximity gave Gretchen an

excellent opportunity to train under Otto Lang.

Gretchen and Don Fraser were both named to the mythical 1940 U.S. Olympic Team that did not compete because of the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

The Frasers moved to Denver in 1941, where Don worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, but much of their time was spent at Sun Valley where Gretchen was able to maintain her training. She won every major race, including her first National Alpine title.

As World War II swept the world, Don entered the navy in 1942. Sun Valley, no longer a skiing mecca, became a navy rehabilitation center, and skiing for Gretchen ceased for four years.

After the war, the couple settled in Vancouver, Washington, and worked hard at establishing a business. When the tryouts for the 1948 Olympics came, in 1947, Gretchen felt she had been away from skiing too long to make the team. Under Don's encouragement, not only did she try out but she also received the number one position on the team – a spot she held throughout the European training.

At the Olympic Games in St. Moritz in 1948, Gretchen skied nearly perfect runs and won a gold medal in the slalom and a silver in the alpine combined – the first Olympic medals ever won by an American woman or man.

During her skiing career, she won dozens of major alpine ski races including two national titles, and served as a member of the 1952 Olympic Selection Committee, as well as serving as the 1952 Women's Olympic Team manager for the games in Oslo, Norway. Later, Gretchen was involved in fund-raising for the U.S. Ski Team.

When the Frasers retired, they returned to Sun Valley. They were supporters of the Sun Valley Ski Education Foundation, the Wood River Trails System, and the Nature Conservancy of Idaho. Gretchen's Olympic medals are on display in the restaurant named for her in the Sun Valley Lodge – Gretchen's.

The world lost two world-class skiers in 1994. Don died on January 12, 1994, and Gretchen died a month later, on February 17, 1994.

Gretchen Fraser was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1960.

