

**Jacqui Russell (nee Robinson)**  
40 years of Women in Surf lifesaving – my perspective



On the podium after winning my first Australian championship with my father



On the podium with Dawn Fraser after winning gold

## **Challenges of becoming one of the first women in surf lifesaving**

The small number of females in Surf Lifesaving when I started meant that there were no separate events for females. We competed against the males right through Nippers and Cadets (under 15) The first Open Women's event was at the NSW State Championships and Australian Championships in 1984-85 season while I was still in the Cadets. I remember how excited I was that in 2 years I would be able to compete in a female only race, even though it was Open Women's. I also married my wonderful husband at the South Maroubra Surf Club.

## **Highlights of my time in Surf Lifesaving**

Being a multiple Australian and World Surf Race Champion is the obvious highlight but there are a lot more as well. Surf Lifesaving was an activity that I shared with my father and it strengthened our relationship. Sharing my victories with my father was special because he had sacrificed many things for my swimming. Travelling around the world was another highlight as I was fortunate to visit many places. I met many wonderful people through Surf Lifesaving, many of who I am still friends with today. I also learnt a solid foundation of lifesaving skills such as CPR that I still use today in my job as a Nurse Practitioner.

## **Advice to younger female members**

Don't be discouraged by thinking that Surf Lifesaving is a male dominated activity. Find a female mentor if it's needed because there are many great women in surf Lifesaving.

When you are competing against your friends, you need to be able to separate your friendship from the competition so that neither is compromised.

## **Experience in Surf Lifesaving prior to obtaining my bronze**

I started in Surf Lifesaving as a Nipper when I was 10 years old. I competed at local surf Carnivals and State Championships while in Nippers. I joined the Senior Club when I was 13 years old and started doing patrols. I gained my Life Saving Certificate and also competed locally, and State and Australian Championships. I gained my bronze medallion when I was 15 years old.

## **How did South Maroubra SLSC manage integrating women?**

I was only a child when I joined Surf Lifesaving so I am not aware of how South Maroubra managed this. However, I do remember that the reason I joined South Maroubra was because Maroubra SLSC did not accept female members. My swimming coach at the time, Barry Rodgers, was a member of Maroubra and I would have joined them if women were allowed. I was disappointed at the time not being able to join Maroubra but South Maroubra was my home for the next nearly 30 years.

## **How can Surf Lifesaving still improve to better involve women?**

I think that retention of women in general is an issue for many sports and community services. I think that encouraging women to take up leadership roles and having female mentoring roles may help. Equal billing for elite female athletes in Surf Sports will also help attract female athletes from sports such as swimming, kayaking and athletics, as well as retaining them.

## **Getting my bronze**

I was the only female in my bronze squad. All of the other males were much older and larger than me. When it came to doing the tube rescue, I had to rescue the tallest man in our squad who is about 6 foot 5 inches. The reason for this is because the only part of him that I could lift was his feet. When we lined up on the beach for training and the exam, people laughed at us and commented "She will never be able to rescue him" They were wrong! [www.wrong.com](http://www.wrong.com)