THE STORIES OF

THE PORT BEACH POLAR BEARS

A community built on connection, commitment and cold mornings by the sea.





Groups like the Port Beach Polar Bears are what give a community its soul and make North Fremantle such a special place to live. I'm a North Fremantle resident and real estate agent, and what I've come to learn is that this ritual represents so much more than a daily swim at sunrise. It is a gathering of generations, a living history, and a shared sense of belonging. I wanted to create a beautiful yet simple book to capture these moments, because there are so many stories here that deserve to be told.

Lucy Thomson, DUET Property Group



On Christmas Day, King Neptune arrived, usually from the other end of the beach and he would choose all the naughty people for the year and they had to go in the stocks and have ice thrown all over them. And so that always caused quite a lot of frivolity, as you can imagine. One year when I was Queen Neptune, I went down to the Fremantle Surf Club and they brought me up in a surf boat so I arrived, you know, with a big stick and everything. I was the first Queen Neptune. Another silly memory is when an old president of the club, Graham, dived in the water and came up between the legs of this lady he thought he knew and he said 'boo', but it turns out it wasn't someone he knew!

Suzette Felton





One key thing is the birthday. Every month we run significant birthdays, and we really celebrate birthdays around here. The older you are, the better it is. If people have got a five or a zero after their number, we celebrate that and ask them to come out, and we'll all sing happy birthday to them. Wally is the oldest member at the age of 92. There's also Shirley, who's 91. She's just gone into care, but one of the Polar Bears picks her up and brings her down here. One of the things I love the most is that there's people from all walks of life and different ages, and I just love that we all seem to come together as one.

Col Werner



Having a clubhouse and having a home for the club is actually a really important part of the Polar Bears. Members can each have their own cup for their cup of tea and there's a line to have a cup. You have to wait a few years, so it's a big day when you finally get your hook for your cup. But the clubroom is a building where we keep the history of the club as well as some of the photographs of previous members. It really just creates that community and provides us with shelter for those cold days.

Melissa Bailey


PORT BEACH
POLAR BEARS
FREMANTLE SLSC
Port Beach Annexe



The swimming's very important. That's what gets us down here in the first place. And then we've just built on the social activity behind it to sort of keep people in touch with each other. Because there's a lot of people come down here on a daily basis and we're probably the only ones they see. They live alone, they're older, and they come down here for a bit of friendship and fellowship. The only days we don't swim, the seaweed sometimes comes in here and it's not pleasant to swim in. And you get a fish called a cobbler, and if you get a cobbler sting, you're in a fair bit of trouble.

Trevor Pedler

Seen any bears on the beach?

Cabine new p



MEMBERS of the Polar Bears Club training for today's fun swim — Picture by MIKE SIL

TWO bears were to be let loose on Leighton beach today . . . just to atract attention.

But there is no need for alarm. They are only signs publicising today's inaugural Polar Bears' Coastal Fun Swim. The Bears are year-round swimmers.

More than 150 people are expected to take part in the one and a half kilometre swim to raise money for the WA Society of Crippled Children.

People of any age are invited to join in for a $4 entry fee.

The swim, starting from the Fremantle Surf Club, is due to end by 9am.

Queen to

LONDON: The Queen will visit Canada in the next few weeks for ceremonies marking the transfer of the Canadian Constitution from London to Ottawa, Buckingham Palace said yesterday.

"DICKS LAMENT"

A funny thing happened the other day,
Out in the cold down Port Beach way,
There's a guy in the water flashing a light,
God knows what he's doing this time of night.
He's checking the temperature someone said,
The old bugger, he should be home in bed.
He staggered up the beach holding it aloft,
It's only 60° in here he scoffed.
I'll bet it's a lot lower than that said Bill,
You'll have to go out deeper and hold it still,
I don't care what you've all been told,
All I know is that it's bloody cold.



I test the water every day with the thermometer. The water temperature is rising. It's moving in the same direction as always, but it is getting warmer. I used to run down past the rocks to the groyne, then swim back, and the temperature would sit between 13 to 13.6 degrees. We haven't seen 13 degrees for five or six years, maybe longer. This year, it doesn't feel like we've dipped below 14 degrees at all, and we've barely even hit 14 degrees.

Charlie Churchwood

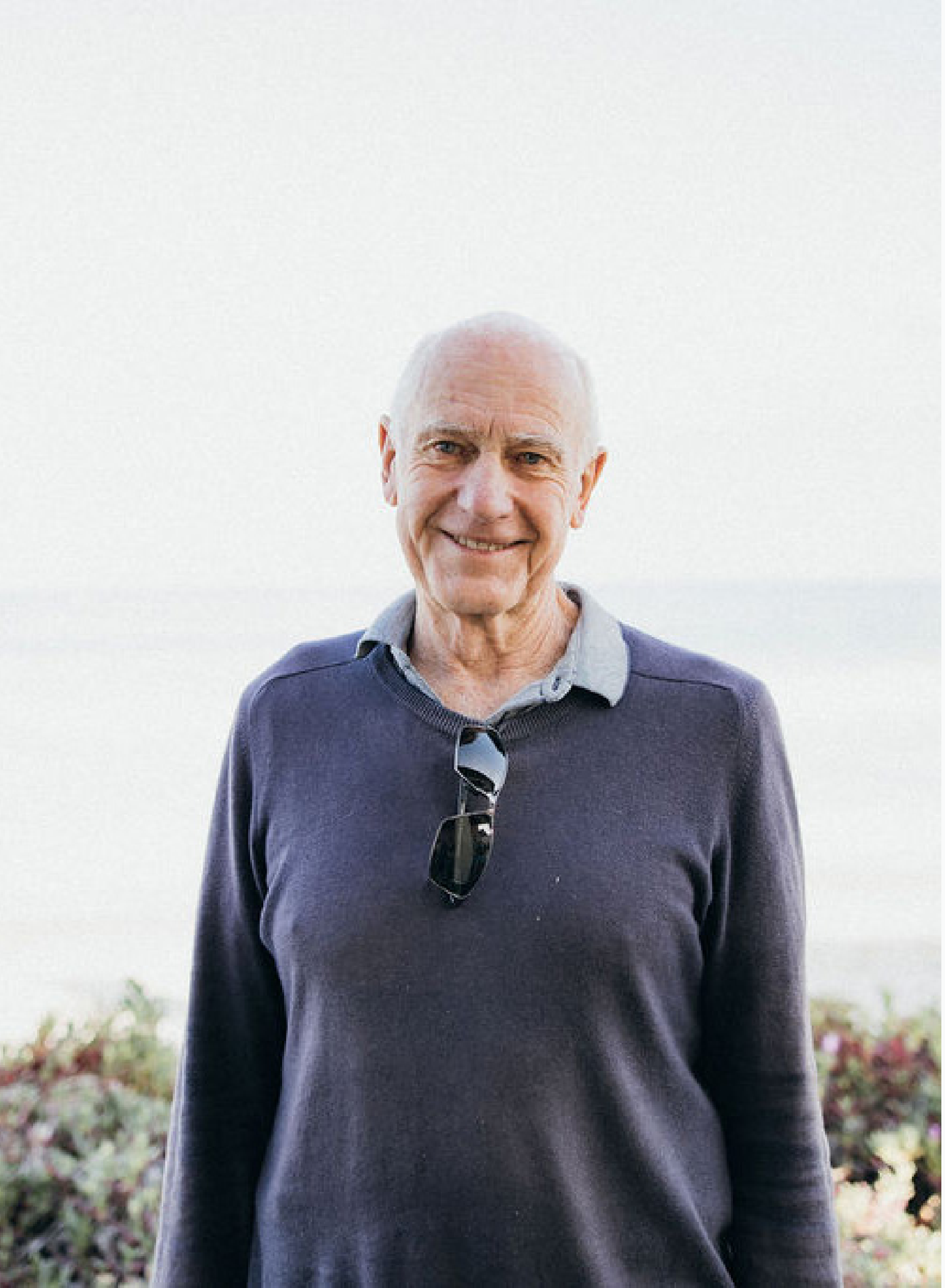




As soon as I hit the water, I feel invigorated and know this is where I need to be. I have suffered the life changing tragic death of my son Jeremy, and during the time since his death I have had the most amazing support from the Port Beach Polar Bears and my Ooh Cafe family of friends. Without this routine and support, I don't know how I would have gotten through this dark period of my life. Once a month, all year round, in all conditions, a gang of four Polar Bears embark on a full moon swim. We follow this up with a tipple of Grandfather Port.

Cheryl Williams


TOYOTA
Toyota
PORT BEACH
POLAR BEARS



We make a point, it's like a pilgrimage, every Saturday, no matter what the water conditions, we try and swim from here to Leighton and back. That's about 800 metres, so it's a 1.6 kilometre swim, which is, for an old bloke like me in the cold water, far enough. I've got to the stage now where I'm a lot slower than the group, but we swim as a team. And that's the old mantra, that no one gets left behind. After you've had a swim, everyone's cold. So a few of the people started bringing down just a milk bottle full of hot water to pour over themselves. And the containers have gotten bigger and bigger. There's this fellow called Barry, he's got a 20 litre container. He puts it on top of the shower stands, turns the tap on, and we all go charging under the hot water. It's well deserved after a cold swim and it just takes the edge off.

Alan De Lacy


PORT BEACH
POLAR BEARS



For years, my mother would be up with the birds, heading down to the sand to greet the day with the Polar Bear Club. My mother, herself Dutch, found an unexpected connection in Karen, a German lady and a Polar Bear Club member. These early morning conversations at the water's edge brought her great joy and a sense of belonging. After my mother's passing in 2006, something drew me to the shore the following year. I wanted to experience the world she had so often described. I was already an early riser, so it wasn't a stretch to make my way to the beach as the sun came up. The smell of salt air, the feel of cool sand under bare feet, and that bracing dip in the ocean quickly became a wonderful ritual. It wasn't long before I, too, was hooked. I joined the club and became a year-round participant in its unique blend of exercise, conversation, and celebration.

Katy Muir





We are husband and wife, and we have been members since 2000. Normally, we swim all year round. Back in the 60s, Brian was a member of the Bondi Icebergs prior to meeting his West Australian wife in Bondi as the proverbial ‘girl next door.’ The next 25 years were spent down the South West of WA. Brian decided before we moved to Fremantle that the first thing he was going to do was join the Polar Bears, which he did, and the rest is history.

Anne and Brian Lockwood





I first got involved with the Polar Bears in 2020. My first swim was in August; it was raining and so rough I lost my goggles. I have had so much fun with everyone and lots of laughs. In 2023, I had an operation that went wrong and I developed septicaemia. I was on life support, in ICU, and spent three months in hospital. During this time, the Polar Bears supported me throughout. All I could think about in hospital was getting back to my friends at the beach and having a swim. I've had such great support from my swimming friends and family.

Jenny Nicholas


Port Beach
Bears



Polar Bears walked by my side during my years of caring for my partner who suffered Alzheimer's. Their support, love and kindness knew no bounds. I am forever grateful. My big swim was a 6km swim in the summer of 2017, just before I turned 70. Preparation was simply determination to do it. It was the same day as the Rottnest Channel Swim, and I underestimated the wash back to shore from all the support boats! But determination won out and I have the 6km summer badge proudly sewn onto my jacket!

Sue Corteen





Pre dawn swimming is, for me, a daily baptism, cleansing and renewing. It's a spiritual reconnecting with the centre and depths of my being, which began in water. It's a salty, watery reminder of who I am and where I belong. The sea is new each day, whether it's the ritual full moon swim by a small group of us (followed by port and chocolate), the struggle against the current or 'flying' with the current, the texture of the sea, silky, choppy, thundery, or its mood, frisky, tricky, balmy, dangerous... I only ever have words that approximate my experience and relationship with the sea because, actually, there are no adequate words.

Susan Grace (Pictured left)





I used to be going in the water and talking and laughing and that sort of thing. Now I'm just an onlooker. It's lovely to sit here and watch out over the water and have a cuppa. Most of us old members have got mugs with our names on them. Of course, anybody that comes along now, they've got to wait their turn for a hook. There's no great story to it, it's just handy for us to have a mug and put our cup back there. They come out of the water and they're frozen stiff, then they go and have their shower and a cup of tea and a bit of toast and they're happy.

Shirley Crawford


GARY
GRAHAM S
TONY FW
PAUL R
COLLEEN
BARRY B
MARK
LEN B
JIM B CAM
SHAUN
SUE
PIP
PIERRE
PEDRO
COLIN
GREG R
WALLY M
DEAN
JENN
JO G
BRACKEN
FARTERS
CRYSTAL PALACE
FASHION
Mark
coffee



The Bears played a huge role in helping me prepare for and complete the Rottnest Channel Swim. To take on that crossing, you need strength, stamina, and a bit of madness. You also have to adapt to unpredictable currents and water temperatures. The Bears helped me with training, friendship and advice. I couldn't have done it without them. My favourite stories with the Bears are always about the sea life we get to share the ocean with. Once, I came face to face with a sea lion carrying its breakfast, an octopus, dangling from its mouth. I've seen stingrays glide beneath me, schools of fish, dolphins dancing alongside us, and this year, the whales were absolutely breathtaking.

Flavia Kiperman





At the edge of Fremantle, where the Indian Ocean rolls in with equal parts fury and charm, a remarkable tribe gathers every single morning, rain, hail or shine. They call themselves the Port Beach Polar Bears, and they might just be the happiest people you'll ever meet. Mostly seniors, but young at heart in ways that defy biology, they plunge into the surf 365 days a year, challenging the waves, the weather, and themselves. There's Trevor, the unofficial mayor of Port Beach, greeting everyone with warmth and counting each brave soul's seconds in the water. Beside him is Browny, ready with a cheeky quip that cuts through even the coldest morning. Charlie, the resident scientist, takes the water temperature and announces it like the nightly news. They are living proof that joy doesn't come from perfect conditions, it comes from showing up.

Mark Azzopardi (Pictured right)





I am 92 years old and I have been a Polar Bear for 26 years. I used to come down casually and see them all down here. When my wife passed away, this was the place that I came back to. I get down here every morning, but I don't come on Sundays. I have a day off. The best thing about being a Polar Bear is that it gets me out of bed.

Wally Wegner





Fifty percent of the reason for coming down here is to talk! All of these people that come down here really help eachother. My fondest memories are when we stand out at the front of the club and and sing happy birthday when someone has a significant birthday. It's really lovely doing that and to support eachother. I don't swim in the winter but I do try and help maintain the succelents at the club.

Jeanette Smith





I've been a Port Beach Polar Bear for five years. There's something about a wide open space and just the horizons, the salt water and the sand. My brothers used to come here and they got me to come down after my husband died. I think it was Nick Cain who said this once. I remember, after his son died, he was with some friends and he said that's the whole thing: when you're in the water, you can't think of anything else. You're focused in the moment, you think you just have to survive. I think that's really true. If you're faced with some sort of challenge, once you get in the water, that's it, you're focusing on the water. So it makes you feel good, and then to come out and to have the community around you, a cup of tea and a chat, it's a great way to start the day.

Diana Webster



You grow old with people. You kind of see each other through life's moments. People go through things, happy things, sad things. I organise what we call a get-well fund. So if somebody's in hospital, I have cards which have pictures of the beach and we all write in the card. That's just a tiny thing we do. Everyone contributes in some way. It's got nothing to do with swimming. It's a real sense of community, and you can feel it as soon as you're down here.

Jeni Pedler



I've been a Polar Bear for 15 years, maybe 20. I was swimming at Cottesloe around the time Bryn Martin was taken by a shark. It was a significant experience, and I wanted to change to a safer beach. The furthest distance I've swum is Rottnest solo. My first swim to Rotto was exciting but totally unprepared in many ways. We took iced drinks instead of hot drinks! The water temperature was a lot colder in those days. That was the 1990s. It was well and truly colder than it is now. But the Polar Bears is not an achievement thing, it's about participation.

Kim Tyler





I am 90 years old and I've been a Polar Bear for 42 years. We were only a small group when it started. We had remarkable people. I look at the board with all our Polar Bears who have passed away, and I swam with all of them except the very first person on the board. We had Bill Haskell, who was a wonderful, wonderful man. He was an ex prisoner of war and you never heard him complain. He always had a theory that you must swim with a buddy. Bill and I always swam and watched the ones at the back. With the Polar Bears, there's always been that camaraderie. We've always looked after each other and cared about each other. Even though there's now over two hundred of us in the club, it's still the same thing, which is very special.

Norma Edmondson


RICHARD OSMAN
The Thursday MURDER Club
500 PIECE JIGSAW PUZZLE
Planet Earth
LEE CHILD
SILVER WATTLE
MEMBERS
Please do not use
our Club Rooms as a
Changeroom



I started taking my son, Fred, to swim at Port when he was a couple months old in the summer of 23/24. It's been a nice bonding experience for he and I and it's also provided another bond to this special corner of Perth. The Polar Bears have been welcoming, friendly and helpful; Fred gets passed around while I make our toast and is sad to leave the toy library when it's time to go. After walking the dog by the river first thing in the morning, Fred and I walk or cycle to the beach for a dip and a slice of toast, a great start to the day and another reason I never want to leave North Fremantle.

Seymour Clifford





I have always avoided structured groups. Something about this mob was very different. Soon I was following my friend Craig in with his group. By the time I had swum 50 metres, they seemed to be heading over the horizon! I soon learnt they were called the ‘A Team.’ Anyway I persisted, as I didn’t yet have any connections with the rest of the members. About three or four weeks into my ‘membership’, Suzette came up to me and said: “Andrew, I’ve been watching you and I think you should join our group”. I soon learnt they were sometimes called the ‘B Team.’ They welcomed me so warmly I suddenly felt part of it all. When I came home after my first few swims, my partner would see the euphoric grin on my face and knew it was something special. All the Polar Bears are so different, except when it comes to why we are there in the early mornings.

Andrew Noad

Bill gets life

FREMANTLE HERALD January 4, 1997



From one Bill to Another

"Yankee Bill" of the waddling gait receives his Certificate of Life Membership of the Port Beach Polar Bears prior to his departure for Crowsnater Country on September 15th, 1997.

Bill, who received his certificate from the first Life Member of the Polar Bears, Bill Haskell, hailed from the United States of America and settled in Fremantle after serving at the U.S. Navy base during World War II. He was moving from Fremantle to be with his daughter Judy and son-in-law Warren Roofe. Incidentally, Warren originated the 'Drip of the Year' trophy which is sought after by members prepared to go to any lengths - or heights - to qualify for the award.





SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 Labor Day 16.6°	2 17.2°	3 16.9°	4 17.0°	5 17.3°	6 16.7°
7 Grandparents Day 16.4°	8 16.3°	9 16.3°	10 16.2°	11 16.3°	12 16.1°	13 17.6°
14 17.4°	15 17.0°	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 Autumn Begins Rosh Hashanah Begins	23	24 Rosh Hashanah Ends	25	26	27
28	29	30 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation				

SEPTEMBER 2025



Revisiting Hell-fire Pass

Margaret Hadfield



I first heard about the Polar Bears through my mum. She was one of the early members and the first female president. I lived in Mandurah at the time and didn't become a member until I came to live in Perth in 2015. I have swum at Port Beach from a small child with a few gaps over the years. It represents my life long enjoyment of the water. I have made many friends since becoming a Polar Bear. I even travel with some from time to time. I have met some who knew my mother. She would have been 102 this year. The Polar Bears are special because they welcome everyone and truly care about you. A swim at any other beach is not the same without tea and toast and a chat after a swim.

Alison Tilt





I've been a member of the Port Beach Polar Bears I think for about 20 years. I am indebted to my late partner, David Daly Kelly, for getting me to come along to Port Beach all those years ago and discovering this great community. The Polar Bears know how to have a good time with warm celebrations of birthday, fun social gatherings and honouring of significant occasions. I have really enjoyed being part of the entertainment on these occasions, singing and playing ukulele with many talented musicians in the club. It is a wonderfully inclusive and supportive club, and David and I as an openly gay couple felt warmly embraced right from the start. I am very grateful for the wonderful on-going support from a number of members, when David's health declined after two strokes in 2020 and I became his full time carer until his death in early 2022. In fact, I would not have coped if it weren't for the love and support of so many during this difficult time.

Colin Beasley


FORT BEACH POLAR BEARS
FREMANTLE



Having always been a pool swimmer, I only got into open water swimming with Rotto training and came to realise ocean swimming is a totally different experience. The benefits on a mental and psychological level are fantastic. And that's the reason that I can get out of bed on a cold stormy winters morning and wade into a freezing weed filled ocean as I know how it will make me feel for the rest of the day. Having that cup of tea and toast with friends sharing the same experience seems like everyone is high on endorphins.

Craig Bailey





Swimming at Port Beach with the Polar Bears has given me a sense of independence and I have regained my confidence since having a family. I get to clear my mind and start every day the right way. The one thing I love most about this community is that they are a family. Being Irish and living away from my family for over nine years now, I have never found that sense of family anywhere else. The care and compassion they all show is amazing. You won't find one person who isn't happy to help. History also plays a big role here, with generations of families being Polar Bears. I look forward to my boys becoming Port Beach Polar Bears too.

Rachel Doherty





I became a member of the Port Beach Polar Bears in 2010 following retirement from my employment of 45 years in banking and insolvency accounting. This was a natural recreation pursuit following involvement in Surf Life Saving Clubs in my early days and the fact that my wife was already a long time active member of the club and it was, and still is, something that we enjoy doing together all year round. The beach usually throws up something different every morning, from the weather and swim programme to the different members attending, which is something to look forward to daily. Long may it continue, I say, and I hope that with all the hard work put in by the Government, Council, Club Committee and members, the beautiful Port Beach will be preserved and looked after for generations to come.

Ken Felton


WWW
POLAR BRRRS
2019
WINTER SWIMMER
POLAR BEARS
2020
COVID WINTER CHALLENGE
POLAR BRRRS
2021



Swimming in the ocean is liberating. It's an everyday reminder of who I really am. Another mammal frolicking in the water and having fun, fun, fun. Physically, it's exercising without strain. Emotionally, I simply remember myself. Socially, it is light-hearted but so very supportive when needed. I swim all year round. Winter swimming is very special and I miss it when the season is over. There is nothing as wonderful as being part of a bunch of mature women falling over themselves in the strong turbulence of the white water, pulling each other up and roaring with laughter. Growing up I lived behind the signal station and would often walk to Port Beach, sometimes forgetting to wear sandals, which made the trip back home excruciating. I won't forget that.

Jennifer Wesley


PORT BEACH
POLAR BEAR



My most amusing Polar Bears story involved the discovery of false teeth in the mounded seaweed. I thought it would be a laugh to put them on the club house window sill and ask if anyone had lost them. As I placed them there, someone excitedly said that they belonged to one of the Polar Bears who had been dumped in the surf the day before. As the story unfolded, we realised that I had discovered them at least a kilometre from where he had lost them! He was thrilled that he didn't have to fund another set.

Linda Berlach


FORTBEACH

This book began with curiosity. A North Fremantle local and real estate agent, Lucy Thomson had long admired the Port Beach Polar Bears braving the ocean at first light, no matter the weather. What began as fascination grew into a desire to understand the people behind the ritual and to create something lasting to share their stories.



DUET