

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2704

Smith, Marjorie Irene

(1911 - 1996)

Born	6 January, 1911, Drummoyne New South Wales Australia
Died	10 September, 1996, North Curl Curl New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Community worker, Sportswoman, Swimmer, Swimming Coach

Summary

Marjorie Smith is an icon of the swimming world and greatly admired for her dedication to the community and particularly children and young people. She was the first woman to surf at Dee Why beach, Australia, and was the heart and soul of the Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club for many years. Over a 70 year period she taught hundreds of thousands of children how to swim on a voluntary basis across New South Wales. In honour of her many years devoted service to the community she was awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) in 1991. She was awarded Life Membership of the Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club (the oldest ladies swimming club in Australia) in 1961, Warringah Amateur Swimming Association in 1980, the New South Wales Swimming Association's Merit Service Award in 1985, the Australian Union of Old Swimmers Life Membership in 1976 and Dee Why Beach Netball Club in 1980.

Details

Marjorie Smith OAM (née Shade) was a much loved figure in the Manly Warringah area on Sydney's northern beaches after devoting all her life to others, particularly children. An icon of the swimming world, Marj was born in Drummoyne in 1911. She soon developed a love of swimming and surfing that dominated her life until her passing in 1996.

Marjorie's family had a weekender at Dee Why on the northern beaches. She was the first woman to surf on Dee Why beach and was also a great body surfer. The *80 Years On: Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club* history book states that 'even though young ladies were not permitted to join the Surf Club her ability in the surf was the envy of many of the local lads'.

In 1922 she swam in one of the first ever invitational races of the Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club, which is the oldest ladies swimming club in Australia. She would later become the heart and soul of the club, serving on its Management Committee from 1950 to 1996 and 18 years as the Club's Honorary Secretary. She was awarded Life Membership of the Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club in 1961.

For over 70 years Marj taught hundreds of thousands of children on a voluntary basis how to swim. Marj taught kids at Dee Why rock pool and also went into schools across New South Wales and to remote country areas teaching swimming for free. As a qualified swimming referee, Marj officiated at the National Championships, State Championships and various other championship events and school carnivals. She had a particular love of children and also assisted with the Disabled Games.

Marj was a driving force behind the administration of swimming in New South Wales. She helped bring together the New South Wales Men's' Amateur Swimming Association with the New South Wales Women's' Amateur Swimming Association in 1964, worked in the Association's Office and served as an official for many years. In 1985 she was awarded the New South Wales Swimming Association's Service Merit Award in recognition of her outstanding service.

In 1965, she was a foundation member of the Warringah Amateur Swimming Association and served on its Executive Committee for many years including as Honorary Secretary, Vice President and as a member of its Technical Committee. For many years she campaigned for an Olympic indoor pool to be built on the northern beaches. In 1979 the Warringah Aquatic Centre was finally opened while Marj was the association's Honorary Secretary. She was awarded Life Membership of the Warringah Amateur Swimming Association in 1980. In 1985 she was awarded the Warringah Shire Council Outstanding Community Service Award.

She was awarded Life Membership of the Australian Union of Old Swimmers in 1976 and awarded the Natatorial Award in

1991. Also in 1991, she was awarded the Order of Australia (OAM) for her outstanding service to swimming.

Her generosity of spirit is greatly remembered, she would always provide a helping hand to anyone. During World War II, she was an integral part of the community, supporting local families whose loved ones were at war. This was no mean feat as her own husband was at war and she was raising three young daughters.

Marj was the foundation President of the Dee Why Beach Netball Club in 1975, serving for over 20 years on its Executive Committee. In 1980 she was awarded Life Membership.

Testimonials

From letters supporting Marjorie Smith's nomination for an Award in the Order of Australia:

Senator the Honourable Kerry Sibraa, President of the Australian Senate, 7 May 1990

'Mrs Smith is a wonderful woman. Mrs Smith always gave her time freely and willingly and has been outstanding in her dedication to the betterment of swimming.'

JJ Seddon, Executive Director, New South Wales Swimming Association, 23 August 1989

'She is a highly regarded member of this Association with years of active and arduous service to the community in Learn to Swim Free and in supporting the youth of the community.'

Mrs Joan Somerville, Past President Warringah Amateur Swimming Association, 1989

'Many have benefited by her years of service and the hours so willingly given could never be evaluated.'

Mrs Sunny Bidner, Life Member, Warringah Amateur Swimming Association, 1989

'Marj's attitude & wonderful sense of humour plus her dedication & commitment to swimming endear her to all who know her & her cheery presence has enlivened many a carnival. She has given unselfishly of her time & expertise for many, many years & this honour would be a fitting gesture to wonderful lady.'

For the 80th Anniversary of Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club, past members and present were asked to write about their most precious recollections:

Myee Foster (nee Steele), Australian representative to the British Empire Games and Australian Champion

'I used to watch a lady swimming, and tried to cop how she breathed at the side! The lady turned out to be champion swimmer, Marjorie Smith (née Shade) who later became a stalwart of the Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club for many years.'

Lisa Forrest, Australian representative to the Olympics, World Championships and Australian Champion

'But it's people that make any organization – and we had some of the greatest. Of course it was led by our indomitable Mrs Smith'

This entry was provided by Vincent De Luca OAM.

Published resources

Book

"80 years on" : Dee Why Ladies' Amateur Swimming Club, 1922-2002, Wye, Isa, 2002

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html>

Author Details

Barbara Lemon

Created 31 May 2007

Last modified 20 November 2018