

# the surf's up



*Ironman Simon James knows the dangers that lurk in the waves.*

*Almost 60 years after its formation, Grange Surf Life Saving Club continues to protect the lives of locals and visitors alike. We meet three dedicated lifesavers who make the beach a safer and more enjoyable place for everyone.*

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The tang of sea air, the burning sun, the crash of waves and the sight of those distinctive yellow and red flags. It's a familiar scene being played out on a thousand beaches around this hot, bushfire ravaged nation.

On Grange Beach, a disciplined bunch of Nippers is going through their paces. Under the watchful eyes of parents and club officials, they race into the surf – desperate to reach that distant buoy and rejoin their noisy team mates.

"Doing well, Jayden," shouts a burly lifesaver in sunnies. "Keep goin'. You're almost there. Nice work."

These Nippers are part of a long and honoured tradition of surf lifesaving in South Australia, which began just up the coast at Henley Beach in 1925. Thirty years later, the tragic drowning of two young children at the Grange jetty prompted the local community to form their own surf patrol – the story of Daryl Pinnock, 11, who died trying to save five-year-old Gaynor Farrell, is now part of Grange folklore.

"Henley is our mother club, but there's plenty of rivalry," says Grantley Anderson, one of the original members of Grange SLSC and now a life member. "One of the main reasons I came down here [from Henley] was to honour the memory of Darryl Pinnock. When I see all these kids on a Saturday morning having a great time, I like to think Daryl and little Gaynor didn't die in vain."

Family, community and a love of team sport are the three constants of every surf lifesaving club and Grange is no exception. Some of the younger members, like Simon James, can trace their surf lifesaving lineage back two generations – his granddad, Jimmy, was a founding member of the club in the 1950s.

"Being a surf lifesaver is a big commitment, but I've basically grown up on the beach. I couldn't imagine living somewhere inland. Even Unley is too far away."

*Grange SLSC 0409564219 [grangeslsc.asn.au](http://grangeslsc.asn.au)*

The nippers program gets kids involved in surf lifesaving from as young as five.



John Brown is one of the oldest active members at Grange SLSC.



“I’VE BEEN A FIREMAN AND DID MY NATIONAL SERVICE, SO DOING THE RIGHT THING COMES NATURALLY. THAT WOULD BE SAME FOR A LOT OF THE OLDER BLOKES IN THE CLUB.” JOHN BROWN

**The veteran**

At 74, John Brown is one of the oldest active members of Grange SLSC, and remains as passionate about surf lifesaving as he was when he first joined the club in 1958. Each week he trains with a boat crew of other veteran lifesavers, dubbed The Geriatrics.

“The average age is 65, but we take our training pretty seriously,” he says.

Having clocked up 61 years on the beach, John has naturally seen some big changes to the movement, such as the introduction of women lifesavers and Nippers, which he says has helped make surf lifesaving so strong.

John also works as a lifesaver at both Tweed Heads and Chiton Rocks, and last year achieved 72 hours in his Speedos.

“It’s the community aspect that I love the most. I’ve been a fireman and did my national service, so doing the right thing comes naturally. That would be the same for a lot of the older blokes in the club.”

Over his long career, John’s rescued around six people, many of them suffering a heart attack after getting into trouble in the surf. Oddly enough, few people acknowledge the efforts of the lifesaver who has just saved their life.

“People thank you profusely later on but very rarely at the time. Others won’t say boo because it’s too embarrassing. That’s just how it works.”





**The iron man**

If anyone can claim to have salt water in his veins, it's Simon James, a third-generation lifesaver at Grange who began his lifesaving career at the tender age of five.

As a teenager, Simon channelled his competitive energy into the sporting side of lifesaving, becoming a champion swimmer and taking part in the 2010 Coolangatta Gold iron man event.

"Being a surf lifesaver is a big commitment. You might train eight to ten times a week during competition and that's on top of your normal patrol duties."

He's cut back his training over the past 12 months, but still did 35 hours volunteering last season. "For me, surf lifesaving is a lifestyle. Most of my mates come from the club. The beach is a good place to be, and to grow up."

Simon is acutely aware of the dangers that lurk in the ocean. In 2007, he was involved in a dramatic rescue after a man was spotted floating off the jetty after a tumble dive went horribly wrong. Simon was at the clubhouse when two crabbers raised the alarm. He ran to the beach, shed his clothes and dived in.

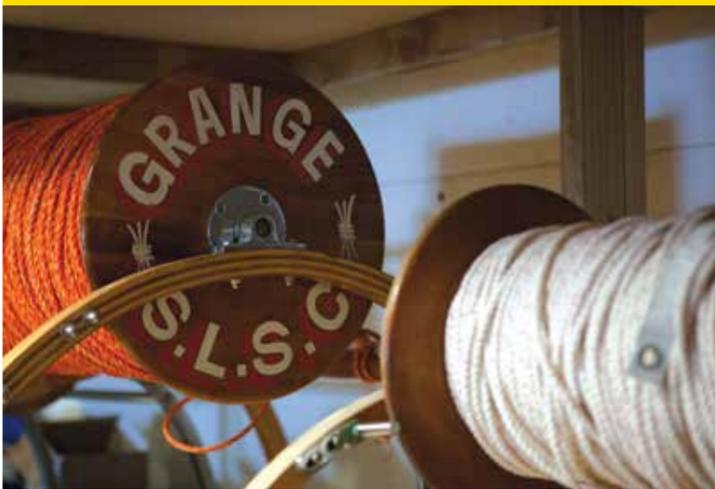
"When I reached him, the man was blue and froth was coming out of his mouth and nose. He wasn't breathing."

The man made a full recovery but the experience had a profound impact on his teenage rescuer.

"I didn't sleep very well for a couple of weeks. My mate and I both had counselling." Did he consider walking away from surf lifesaving? "Not for a minute," he says.



*Third-generation lifesaver Simon James 'grew up' on the beach.*



"FOR ME, SURF LIFESAVING IS NOW A LIFESTYLE TYPE THING. MOST OF MY MATES COME FROM THE CLUB. THE BEACH IS A GOOD PLACE TO BE — AND GROW UP." SIMON JAMES





The next generation of lifesavers is learning to keep our beaches safe.



Shylie Davidson has given the club a more inclusive focus through same wave.

“THEY LEARN REALLY USEFUL SKILLS BUT THEY ALSO FEEL PART OF A SPORTING CLUB, MAYBE FOR THE FIRST TIME.” SHYLIE DAVIDSON



**The teacher**

What do surf lifesavers think about during those long hours peering out to sea? In the case of Shylie Davidson, a long-time member of Grange SLSC, it was about how the club could involve people with physical or mental disabilities in healthy, fun beach activities.

In 2007, Shylie and a group of club volunteers launched Same Wave Grange, which teaches young disabled people water safety, first aid and basic lifesaving skills. “They learn really useful skills, but they also feel part of a sporting club, maybe for the first time,” she says.

The program, run in cooperation with Interchange SA, has been a huge success – each season around 100 young people aged from six to 25 go through the scheme, which is modelled on the Nippers training program and a similar program at the Pambula Surf Life Saving Club in NSW.

“The idea is to open the doors to people who don’t normally have access to beach culture. It also allows our young people to interact with other people who are maybe not as able bodied as themselves.”

Apart from introducing a new group of kids to surf culture, Same Wave Grange fosters relationships between young people of all backgrounds and provides some respite for parents and carers.

“We were a bit nervous to begin with, but we just put together our life skills and made it work. The young people are there to have a good time; we have an excellent time; everyone leaves the beach happy.” ♦