



THE NEXT WAVE

FIONA BASILE

WHEN NOTHING MAKES SENSE ANYMORE

I turn to the water. Salt water.

Moving water.

The ocean has this way of

roughing down the sharp,

smoothing out the barbs.

When all is broken apart, like smashed glass,
the ocean is a grindstone.

It carves away the razor-edge,

the piercing doubt,

the fractured and the cutting.

The wave that breaks

and turns

and tosses

and tumbles

until in its depth,

is no longer the jagged broken,

no longer the serrated,

no longer splinter and stark.

On the beaches is where we pick up the pieces.

Smashed glass now made smooth.

Sea-glass green.

Sea-glass green.

Held up to the light.

Sea-glass green.

Written for *The Next Wave*

by poet and author Joel McKerrrow



Scan the QR code above to hear Joel put voice to his poem.

Music by David Andrew

Video footage by Fiona Basile





INTRODUCTION

‘The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever.’

Jacques-Yves Cousteau

FRENCH NAVAL OFFICER, OCEAN EXPLORER, CONSERVATIONIST, AND FILMMAKER

When I first stepped into the bay in winter 2021, I never imagined how transformative it would be, how it would open a new world of courage and belonging for me, and many others. What began as a tentative, freezing dip became a daily ritual, a way of being held, grounded, and reawakened by the sea. From that first morning at Seaford Pier, camera in hand, I was drawn into a life shaped by beauty, friendship, and play.

Immerse, my first book, captured those beginnings: a small community of swimmers who found connection through the open water. Since then, that community has grown. When *Immerse* went to print in October 2023, there were 65 members in our WhatsApp group, cheekily called 'The Pole Dancers'. As this book goes to print, there are 120. As you'll see in these pages, we are teachers and tradies, parents and grandparents, longtime locals and newcomers. We span ages, backgrounds, cultures, and stories. What unites us is a shared love of the ocean and the way it restores, challenges, and connects us.

Together we set our own goals, big and small, that keep us moving forward. For some, it's simply getting toes wet. For others, it's reaching the marker poles affectionately known as Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, and Kathmandu. Each swim reminds us that courage looks different for everyone, and that every step into the sea counts.

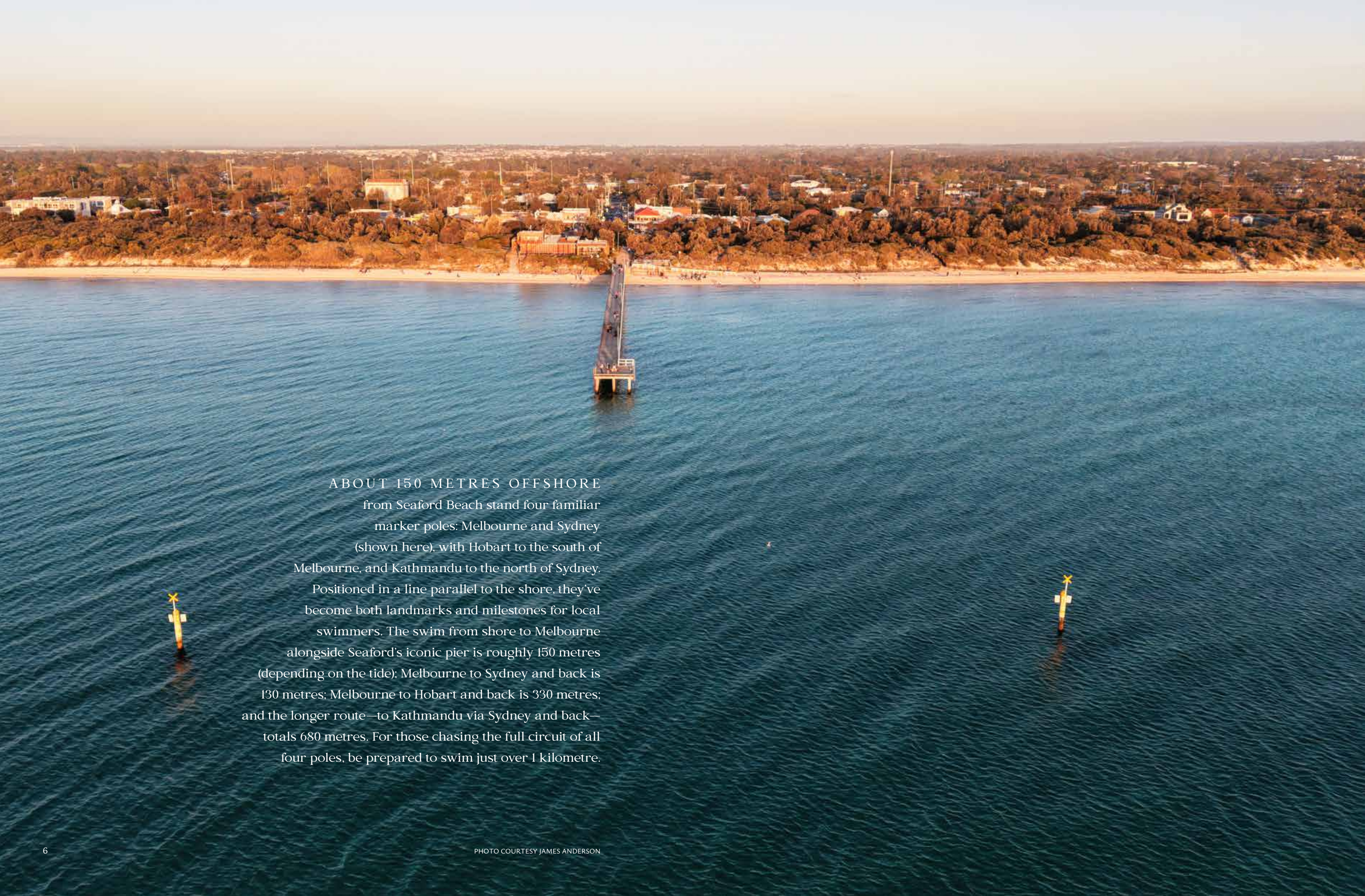
Beyond the physical act of swimming, there's so much goodness found in and beside the water: quiet reflection at sunrise, healing in salt water, friendship and camaraderie, the comfort of knowing someone is nearby in the open expanse, banter and laughter over coffee, and endless play. These daily rituals remind us that community is built not only through words, but through presence, through shared encounters.

In a time marked by conflict, uncertainty, and division, I feel compelled to capture and share stories that reveal what is good and beautiful. These stories remind us that we are part of something larger, something that heals, includes, and uplifts. We are so fortunate to have this sanctuary on our doorstep.

Through my photographs, and the reflections so generously shared, I hope to honour this ever-growing community of people who find solace and belonging in and beside the water, and to celebrate the ocean's timeless power to connect and transform us all.

Dive in and play. Be part of the next wave, finding what brings you joy, wonder and connection. It might be right on your doorstep.

Siona BASILE
PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER



ABOUT 150 METRES OFFSHORE

from Seaford Beach stand four familiar marker poles: Melbourne and Sydney (shown here), with Hobart to the south of Melbourne, and Kathmandu to the north of Sydney.

Positioned in a line parallel to the shore, they've become both landmarks and milestones for local swimmers. The swim from shore to Melbourne alongside Seaford's iconic pier is roughly 150 metres (depending on the tide); Melbourne to Sydney and back is 130 metres; Melbourne to Hobart and back is 330 metres; and the longer route—to Kathmandu via Sydney and back—totals 680 metres. For those chasing the full circuit of all four poles, be prepared to swim just over 1 kilometre.



TO ALL WHO FIND JOY,
SOLACE, AND COMMUNITY IN THE WATER.
THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU.





THE WATER frees me and recharges my soul.

It's where I feel alive, tranquil, and completely at home.

CLIVE

CLIVE FEATURES ON THE FRONT COVER



BELONGING

noun

A feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group and having a good relationship with the other members of the group because they welcome you and accept you.



AIMEE, 33

POLICY PARTNER/REGISTERED NURSE
MENTONE

I SWIM for my sanity, myself, and my son.

After becoming a single mum and recovering from gall bladder surgery, I wanted to get fit. I joined the Olivers Hill running club, and for years my sister and her husband had been banging on about cold-water therapy. They even had a chest freezer converted into an ice bath and encouraged me to try it, though I was never game enough.

When custody of my son shifted to 50 per cent, I struggled with him being away. To cope, I poured my energy into running and dipping. At first, I hated the cold and often felt scared of what was in the water, but dipping quickly became my way of managing. Eventually, I fell in love with it.

I came across the Seaford swimmers through the Cold Nips Australian Tour at Mothers Beach in Mornington. The swimmers looked so experienced and immune to the cold. I was impressed and felt the urge to join them. Getting in is still scary. I hate the cold and not knowing what's below, but once I'm in, I focus on my breath and my technique.

I love looking around, seeing banjo sharks, stingrays, fish, and the light reflecting on the water. Although it's the same place, it never feels the same. The bay is always shifting and moving, and it's exciting to see what's next. The feeling afterwards is magical. Once you get past the fear of cold, there's a bliss, a strange euphoric rush, like a chemical flood. It clears my head, builds resilience, and leaves me calmer. Swimming has become a mindful habit, another addition to the beautiful life I'm creating.

Approaching the Seaford swimming group, meeting new people and sharing myself was challenging, but I reminded myself of all I'd already been through. There is no judgment, only care. For me and my little boy, it can sometimes feel lonely, but this community means the world to me. It feels like a safe family. Seeing their happy faces each morning makes tough times a little less tough (and it's free!)

A woman is swimming in the ocean at sunset. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the water is calm. A pier is visible on the right side of the image.

INGRID, 50

SEAFORD

CONNECTION has always been important to me. I grew up in a small village in the Netherlands, where you knew almost everyone by name. Since early 2024, the Seaford swimmers have become part of my community, sharing a love of the open water, the beach, and the challenge of facing the cold through winter.

I've never been a swimmer as such, but I always loved days at the beach with friends. In the Netherlands we'd ride our bikes 40 minutes to reach a good beach and spend the whole day by the water.

In the winter of 2022, I first noticed a group swimming in the bay while I was rugged up, walking the dog on the Seaford Pier. I thought they were crazy in that cold water. Sometimes I'd stop and chat—that's how I first met some of the swimmers.

At Christmas I was gifted the *Immerse* book. After reading the stories, I felt inspired. In late January 2024, the water was calm, and together with Steve and Blaženka, I swam to the Melbourne pole. The joy of reaching it was unforgettable. From then on, I swam on weekends, enjoying the sense of freedom whilst being in the water.

As the water cooled, I wanted to challenge myself to continue dipping and swimming. In winter, your body tells you to get out, but once you pass that first minute or two, it feels good.

The water is calming. I love floating and taking it all in, or on windy days, playing in the waves, especially when a strong westerly blows. I don't stay longer than 10–15 minutes in winter, but the buzz afterwards is amazing.

I've learned freestyle, though I still prefer breaststroke. Seeing banjo sharks, stingrays, and fish deepens my appreciation for being in the water. Swimming to the Kathmandu pole was a big milestone. Some of my happiest memories are with Jagger, my dog, who at 10 years old surprised me by swimming out to the Melbourne pole, then Sydney, and even once to Hobart.

The water is my happy place. I always come out a happier person, filled with joy, energy, and a deep sense of connection with this wonderful community.



THE WATER has given me clarity, joy, strength, and confidence.
Out there, I'm not afraid. Out there, I'm free.

LISA



CECILIA, 68

HOUSEWIFE
DONCASTER EAST

I CAME TO AUSTRALIA

in 1999 on a family reunion visa, after my husband first arrived here as a student. Back in China, I grew up close to a river and a lake. As a child, I loved playing in the water and slowly taught myself to swim. For many years after moving to Australia, I only swam in pools. Open water seemed too cold. Then a friend from my Doncaster Dolphins club took me to Seaford, and I discovered how beautiful it was. At the end of 2024, when my sister developed a skin condition allergic to pool chemicals, I suggested she try the sea.

In January this year, we came to Seaford together and met Sam from Frankston. She told us about the 7am swimmers and encouraged us to join. The next morning, we came back, and what I found was a kind, welcoming group in a place that felt perfect for swimming. Before Seaford, I had tried Manly Beach in Sydney. The waves were so strong I could only make it halfway before turning back, while others swam the full distance. Over time, I built the confidence to swim the four poles, even when the water was rough and choppy.

I swim in open water because it is a challenge. Each time is different—rough or calm, windy or still—and every time I finish, I feel happy. Swimming has helped my lower back problems, and when I have negative emotions, the water washes them away. My soul feels calm.

When I swim, I focus on the water itself and how to move with the waves, how to keep going in tougher conditions. Afterwards, I feel light and free, as if my emotions have been reset. I also love the beauty of the mornings: the sky, the sunrise, the changing colours of the clouds. The light across the water is always changing. Open water swimming is good for my body, my mind, and my soul. I feel so grateful.

We've tried many beaches, but Seaford is the best. The people are friendly and welcoming—even the dogs are nice! One day, I hope to live closer so I can swim here every day.



TAOTAO, 56

HEALTH INFORMATION MANAGER
DONCASTER

AUSTRALIA became home in 2003, when I arrived from China on a family reunion visa. My sister Cecilia came first. After arriving, I went back to university at 40, finished my degree, and began my current job. We grew up in Zhaoqing, in southern China, near a beautiful lake and the Pearl River. But I was always scared of the water. My dad and Cecilia both tried to teach me, but no one could succeed.

In Melbourne, I lived near the Aquarena. I took my kids to swimming lessons and watched how the coaches taught them. Again and again, I tried to learn. For more than a year I could only float, unable to breathe properly. Then, just after my 46th birthday, something changed: I lifted my head, took a breath, and managed another stroke. It was a magical day. Finally, I could swim.

For a long time, I swam only in pools. My first attempt in the ocean was at Manly Beach in Sydney, but the rough sea terrified me. Later, when I developed a reaction to pool chemicals, Cecilia suggested open water. A friend told us about lifeguard sessions at Sandringham, so I tried one Sunday morning. The water was too cold and deep, and I couldn't see the bottom. It felt overwhelming.

Then Cecilia encouraged me to try Seaford. The shallow sandbanks and flat bottom felt safe, and in January 2025 we started swimming there together.

What I love is that every day is different. Sometimes the bay is calm, sometimes rough, but always amazing. At first, I stayed close to shore. Slowly I went further: halfway along the pier, then to the Melbourne pole, then four poles, even in choppy water. Each step built my confidence.

Swimming has given me so many benefits. My knee pain is better, and I no longer feel the cold as much in winter. Every swim leaves me feeling fresh and happy. Watching the sunrise, clouds, and fish beneath me is exciting. There's something new each time.

I love the freedom in the water. Sunrise is my favourite, better than sunset. And I love the community. As migrants, we've always wanted to belong. At Seaford, people are welcoming, patient, and kind. We've been included in coffees, birthdays, and watched the local Anzac Day parade together. Finding Seaford has made us feel very lucky and very grateful.





MANDY, 64

NURSE
FRANKSTON

I DISCOVERED ocean swimming during COVID lockdown. In 2021, living in Somers, I walked the beach most days. The bay looked stunning, even in winter. I'd see the odd person braving the cold and think, 'I wish I was that sort of person.' I finally decided, 'Why don't I try?' I set myself the challenge to swim until my 60th birthday. On that day, I videoed myself getting out of the water yelling, 'Yahoo!'

That birthday came and went, and I was still swimming. I just kept going. I bought a wetsuit for winter, but it's never been worn. I'm still in my bathers, surprised at how well I've adapted, and proud that I kept going when the water turned icy.

Being in nature has always been special to me. I used to hike in the high country, but my body couldn't cope anymore. I missed the peace and joy of the outdoors. Now I find that same feeling in the water.

I love the salt on my skin and sandy feet, and I'll carry it with me all day. Some mornings I walk in thinking, 'I won't do much today,' and end up staying in for 40 minutes because it's so beautiful.

When I moved back to Frankston, I found the Seaford swimmers. From the first day I felt the inclusivity and compassion. There's so much love down there. No one cares about money or status. You don't need the right clothes or a fancy membership. You just come as you are, and you're accepted.

Swimming has given me energy, better health, and connection. I live alone, and it's easy to become insular, but this group has changed that. If something's weighing on me, I get in the water, breathe, and come out calmer. I've found such joy in this community and in open water swimming. Even if my body deteriorates, I know I can still go in and immerse. I never want to give it up.



THE WATER has given me my life back.

Every swim, every sunrise, every moment out there
feels like a gift.

PETER K



ANDREA M, 34

REPORTING ANALYST
SEAFORD

I REMEMBER CLEARLY

the day we moved to Seaford. It was summer, the sun was shining, and after looking at houses, we stopped at the beach. The water was clear, the sky perfect, and we jumped in with our clothes on. My husband and I looked at each other and thought, ‘This is the place!’

We arrived in winter. It was freezing. All my expectations of being at the beach every day disappeared, and instead I walked a lot. Then I fell pregnant with Ander, and it was a horrible pregnancy. I was sick from day one until the end. The only thing that made me feel good was being in water, so I took baths every day. In summer, I lived in the sea. It was the only time I didn’t feel sick. That relief has stayed with me.

After Ander was born, I couldn’t exercise, but I could go in the water. I thought, ‘This will be my time.’ I’d swim or dip, then return to the baby. Soon it became more than summer dips. I wanted to love where I lived and to feel I belonged. I saw swimmers at the pier and thought, ‘This must be a thing.’ At first, I went alone, shy with my bucket at the edge. Then one of the swimmers, Deets, came over and said, ‘There are always people here. You can come anytime.’ That kindness brought me in.

Now I swim almost every day. I work a desk job, so being out early, seeing the sky and water, makes me feel alive. The cold clears pain from my body, and the ritual of telling myself, ‘You can do hard things’ stays with me through the day.

Swimming has surprised me. A year ago, I never would have imagined this life. It has been a natural progression, without pressure to be good at it. Out in the water—no laptop, no phone, just nature and connection—I’ve found joy, resilience, and belonging.

The water has also held me through change. With another child, life shifted again, and I shifted too. When you’re unsure of yourself, nature has a way of showing you who you are. The water reminded me of my strength, my adaptability.

The Seaford community has changed my life. Everyone is happy, kind, and welcoming. A simple hug after a freezing swim can stay with me all day. I’ve made friends, and even my son has found his place here. Now when I go out, I always see someone I know, and I feel that sense of belonging. With my own family back in Venezuela, I’m grateful this community feels like family.



FRIENDSHIP

noun

The emotions or conduct of friends;
the state of being friends.

LOUISE, 28

REGIONAL MANAGER, BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
LANGWARRIN

I FIND a sense of purpose being around like-minded people who create safety and empowerment. I've found this through the Seaford swimmers with my best mate, Bec, as well as through a local run club and book club. We just love a club!

What I love most about the Seaford swimmers is that no matter how often you go to the water, you're always made to feel welcome. Nothing bonds people more than stepping into the freezing ocean, shivering, and taking the plunge together.

As a kid, I spent most Christmas holidays at my grandparents' place in Batemans Bay, NSW. They lived five minutes from the beach, and we swam almost every day. My nan adored open water swimming—we would float in the sea together. Now she lives in Melbourne and doesn't swim as much, but she loves hearing my stories of swimming at Seaford.

I discovered the group through a friend whose aunt swims there. I overheard her talking to my partner about swimming every morning, rain, hail, or shine, and it caught my attention. I sent Bec a message, and the next week we were there.

Swimming is my happy place. No matter how I'm feeling or how hard life gets, I turn to the water. Nothing quiets the mind like being underwater, looking at the beauty around you, and sharing it with others. I also love how it challenges me. The uncertainty—freezing cold, murky conditions, rough waves—can be terrifying. It's easy to walk back out, but pushing through that barrier is so rewarding.

My health has improved. I'm a much better swimmer now, and my mental health is stronger too. I try to swim every Friday morning, and it gives me something to look forward to. It's where I can let go.

Some of my best moments are giggling with Bec as we crash through waves, holding hands in fear as we first plunge in, and chatting with swimmers at the poles. Whenever I face fear or challenge, Bec is by my side, cheering me on.

The best things about open water swimming are the friendships, the sense of belonging, and the beauty of it all. It can be hard to get motivated in the colder months, but the joy afterwards is unmatched. It sets me up for a good day and a great sleep.





SERENITY

the ocean
with her many moods, colours, tides
and below
vast treasures of wonder and awe

I plunge to the depths of my soul
leave the water calm and whole

the sea and poetry go hand in hand
I leave my worries on the sand

it is the feeling of being unmoored in the sea
that anchors me

DEBORAH WILLIAMS
SEAFORD SWIMMER

PETER P, 63

ARTIST, FORKLIFT DRIVER
SEAFORD

EVER SINCE I was five, it's been water, water, water. When my parents moved us to Seaford, the beach, the creek, and the parklands became our adventure ground. I learned to surf at Seaford Beach, joined the lifesaving club, fished, kayaked, and swam. Everything centred on water—and it still does.

For a long time, I kept to myself. I've always been a bit guarded, with only a handful of close friends. Winter has always been my favourite season. When the beach was empty, I could sit quietly, observe, breathe, and just chill. That was my mindfulness. People often said, 'Why don't you go for a swim?' I loved the water, but joining a group wasn't really me.

Eventually I gave it a go. Out there with people from all walks of life, I realised everyone was laughing, connecting, and carrying their own story. Something clicked. It felt like a DNA thing: separate yet joined together. For the first time, I thought, 'I'm really enjoying this,' and I felt part of a group where everyone is equal, bonded by the water. There's no hierarchy, just camaraderie.

Diving underneath is what I love most. I open my eyes, see the light breaking through, and I'm in another realm. There's silence, like being in utero, with shadows and light diffused all around me. It feels spiritual, mystical. For those moments, everything is in alignment.

As an artist, I'm always watching the colours on the water, the way the light shifts and moves. It never stops inspiring me. Sometimes I wake at night to jot down an idea that later becomes a painting. The water always finds its way into my work.

Swimming is now part of my routine, and I love it. You walk out with the group, scattered, but once you're in the water, you're one. I'd never experienced that before. Every swim, every sunrise, every conversation on the pier reminds me that wealth isn't possessions; it's family, friends, community. My parents' ashes are scattered off Seaford Pier, and one day mine will be too. This is home.



A man with short dark hair and a smile is floating in the ocean. He is wearing large black swimming goggles. Behind him is a large, inflatable ring with a yellow top half and a red bottom half. The word "arena" is printed in black on the red section of the ring. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a soft, hazy orange and blue, suggesting sunset or sunrise. In the far distance, a yellow buoy with a cross on top is visible on the right side of the frame.

PETER K, 60

FITTER AND TURNER
SEAFORD

WATER HAS ALWAYS played a big part in my life. My dad taught me and my brother to swim, and it's been a constant ever since. Growing up in the UK, we had just one holiday a year, always in Cornwall, where I loved bodyboarding and playing in the sea.

When I came to Seaford, I was content simply being around the bay—watching swimmers from the seat with Pete, or splashing about with my dog, Bear. For three or four years, that's all I did: float, paddleboard, and enjoy the peace the water gave me. But everything shifted after my heart attack.

The impact was bigger than I expected. In hospital, they told me my life had to change—diet, exercise, everything. I didn't want to be stuck in a gym. I'd been watching people swim, and I thought, 'I love the water, I'm always down here—that's it, that's what I've got to do.' I realised I had to swim.

At first, I wasn't very good. I hadn't learned properly, and I was still weak. So, I set small goals. First to the end of the pier, then further. Each time I achieved something, the support around me gave me courage to keep going. I bought goggles and proper swimmers instead of baggy shorts, and I threw myself into it with passion.

Now, when I swim, I find peace and beauty. I clear my mind, listen to my breathing, watch the bottom for wildlife, then look up at the sky. The water makes me feel alive, healthy, and calm. My cardiologist says there's been remarkable improvement in my heart. I no longer have the dark thoughts I used to. I feel happier, more relaxed, and more positive.

The water has given me my life back. Every swim, every sunrise, every moment out there feels like a gift.





LOU, 63

RETIRED PARAMEDIC/NURSE
SEAFORD

I AM AN OCEAN SWIMMER.

I never thought I'd say that. For years it was just me, the water, and my thoughts. I believed that was enough. But joining the Seaford swimmers changed everything. It turned something solitary into connection, silliness, and encouragement. Their laughter lifted me, their joy gave me joy, and I discovered you don't just swim; you belong.

Before this, I'd lived in Seaford for eight years without knowing a soul. I worked shifts, commuted 35 minutes to work, and never felt part of the community. If I'd moved, I wouldn't have cared. Now it's completely different. This group has become my world. We're all mates, which feels rare in this age of technology. You can't force those kinds of organic connections.

At first, I worried I'd look silly, that everyone else would be better, that I didn't belong. But the moment I turned up, I was welcomed. No one cares how you look or how far you swim. There's no expectation. Just getting in is celebrated. The hardest part is getting out of bed, but once you're there and everyone's heading in, you don't want to miss out. You're not a spectator; you're a doer. You're one of those crazy people getting in.

The water has become my peace. I can't meditate, but in the bay my mind quietens. Diving under feels like everything is washed away. I'm not thinking of tomorrow or yesterday. I'm just there, feeling the cold, the textures of the water, watching the sunrise, noticing fish beneath me. It's joy that only comes when your head is quiet enough to let it in.

Out there, I'm just me, and that's enough. The best part is knowing I can do this until I'm 95. I'm grateful I pushed myself that first day to come down, because I nearly didn't. The group has become a big part of my world.

BRIAN, 77

ARTIST
PATTERSON LAKES

BEING IN the water has always felt second nature to me. I grew up swimming in the Murray River, and since moving to Melbourne, I've always lived in a bayside suburb, so the sea has never been far away. Years ago, through lifesaving clubs, I was introduced to open water swimming. We used to swim between the poles back then, and I still love it.

Community has been a big part of it for me. Over the years we've been members of clubs, but that's not the same as true community. I've found it here, with the swimmers. At Seaford, there's a mix of people, and the camaraderie is strong. The men especially have fun together, talking rubbish at times, and I've missed that in other areas of life. As an artist, art groups I've attended are mostly women, so it's been good to have some male company. I also think the women down here are particularly strong. Watching them walk into the water, they look like Mother Earth, full of strength.

Going down to the beach, everybody's happy. You can feel it. I've reconnected with old friends like Clive and met new ones like Peter. It's a real community, not a club. There are no rules, no one telling you what to do. It's up to yourself. That freedom matters.

The water itself keeps me coming back, whether it's hot, warm or cold, or if it's glassy and feels like silky velvet. I love catching a wave too. My health has improved since I've been swimming here. For years I went to a chiropractor every four to six weeks, but I haven't been back since I started swimming. If I get in the cold water regularly, it eases my sore back. It doesn't cure it, but it helps.

Sometimes in the water, I think of my cousin from England who has passed away. He was a swimmer too and loved our beaches. Being in the water connects me with him.

I've had a few frights—rough days when I've run out of energy, or when I hit the pier ladder—but I'm careful now. The tow float gives me confidence, and I don't push my luck. I'm just grateful I can still do this, when so many others can't. That's the gift of this place: the water, the people, the sense of belonging. Some days it's just a walk into the water; other days it's a longer swim. Either way, it's always good to be out there together.





PLAY

Noun

To do things for pleasure, as children do;
to enjoy yourself, rather than work.



BLAŽENKA, 54

EXECUTIVE COACH AND TRAINER
SEAFORD

I'VE LIVED IN SEAFORD

for 25 years. The first time I considered cold water swimming was before COVID. I remember seeing Clive in the water, alone, in the middle of winter. I'd sit with a coffee and think, 'What a crazy guy!' I hated going in the sea. Even on a 40-degree day I found it freezing. I'd only dip once or twice a year.

During COVID, I listened to a program about the benefits of cold water. I began with hot and cold showers—just five seconds at first—and slowly the cold became bearable. I don't recall exactly how I first went into the water at Seaford, but I noticed others swimming, perhaps a little before 2021, and I've now been swimming about four years.

I've always been afraid of deep water, never going past where my feet could touch the ground. My first goal was to swim to the end of the pier. When I did that, I thought, 'Oh my god, I made it!' It was an overwhelming experience.

From there, each small step gave me courage. Someone challenged me to swim to the pole, about 150 metres offshore, and it felt like a huge accomplishment. A swim bubble helped me feel safe. I even surprised myself by completing longer swims, like the Melbourne to Sydney poles, and once to the Hobart pole, with encouragement from Clive. Dipping through my first winter was another milestone. I noticed the cold didn't feel as harsh; my body seemed to balance, and I didn't get sick as often.

The sea has changed me. Of all the activities I do—dancing, meditative practices, social events—nothing compares to immersion in the sea. When I put my feet in, I take a deep breath and everything else disappears. I become completely present. The vastness of the water offers space and perspective, a reality check against the busyness of life. I never thought I'd swim daily, especially in winter, but the sea has given me joy and resilience. I'm living my best life through my connection to the water and nature.

There are funny moments too. My daughter once told me I came home from the beach singing opera to keep warm! The beach also brings gratitude. Every day is different, from clouds and waves to mornings with ice on the sand. It's a gentle, spiritual practice.

Community has been one of the greatest gifts. Though I sometimes feel on the periphery, everyone is welcoming, kind, and generous. I've learned to overcome fear one step at a time. For me, showing up is 80 per cent of success. With motivation, knowledge, and opportunity, I've been able to embrace change.



I COME TO THE SEA

When I come to the sea,
how it comforts me.
Its ebb and its flow,
removes fear and deep doubt.

I've found a place where I can let go.
Finding peace and pure joy,
allowing love to show.

I've plunged in its depths,
forgiving myself.
I feel the soft hug,
its serenity and joy.

When I come to the sea,
my heart is so grateful,
for strength and the healing,
the sea gives to me.

MELINDA (MIN) SAUNDERS
SEAFORD SWIMMER



PENNY, 47

TEACHER
CARRUM DOWNS

AS A CHILD, I often struggled to feel like I belonged. I kept the peace by pretending to be someone else, but inside I felt lonely. What helped was nature—taking myself into the bush, sitting under trees, listening to birds. There was also singing. Singing was my escape, the one way I felt free to express myself, a way of being heard when I didn't feel seen.

Water was there too. My mum calls me her 'very own mermaid'. I loved swimming lessons, lapping up and down the pool, always stronger in the water than I felt on land. But life took its turns, and it wasn't until the COVID lockdowns of 2020–21 that I found the Seaford swimmers.

Walking with a friend, we spotted a group getting in at the pier. It seemed crazy, but irresistible. Before long I was in the bay myself.

At first, I wanted to go unnoticed. I was terrified of being seen in my bathers, convinced I wasn't good enough to be there. But the people I met didn't see that; they saw me. They lifted me up, accepted me as I was, and reminded me of my worth. That acceptance has been life-changing.

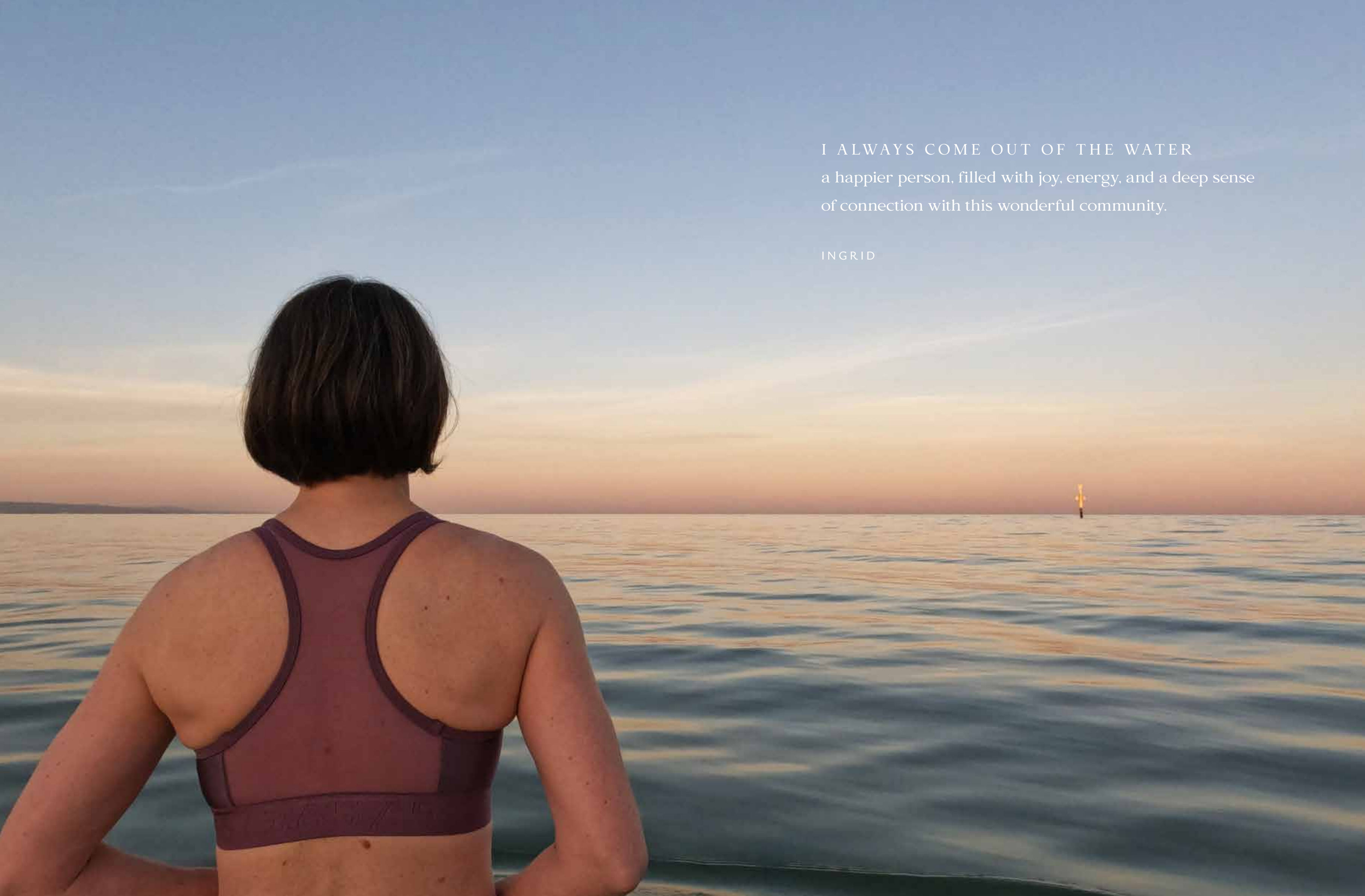
The water itself keeps me coming back. Some mornings, I doubt I can face it, but if I skip a swim, the day feels heavier. When I get in, everything shifts.

My mind settles, my body relaxes, and I feel calmer.

After losing my younger sister to a brain tumour at 19, I've carried grief with me. The ocean softens its edge. Like singing, swimming is a way to process and release emotion—sometimes quietly, sometimes with joy, but always with truth. Some mornings I even catch myself humming as I float, as if the water carries the song for me.

Here, in this community, I've found belonging. Singing gave me a voice, and the ocean gave me freedom. With these people, I've found both. I belong. I'm enough.





I ALWAYS COME OUT OF THE WATER
a happier person, filled with joy, energy, and a deep sense
of connection with this wonderful community.

INGRID

DEBORAH, 70

WRITER
PATTERSON LAKES

I FOUND MY COMMUNITY

with the Seaford swimmers. After COVID, when so many connections had stopped, this group became my safe place. I hadn't felt that kind of belonging since my children were at school or when I was working. Clubs had come and gone, but they weren't true community. Now I know I can come to the water every day, and no matter who's there, I feel welcomed and safe. I can swim, laugh, or simply enjoy a coffee afterwards, knowing I've nourished my soul.

I've loved the sea all my life, though as a sailor, I was taught to stay out of it. My father would say, 'Why swim if you have a perfectly good boat?' I only had two swimming lessons growing up, just enough to save myself. So when I began dipping at my local beach in 2021, it was huge for me.

I discovered the Seaford swimmers a couple of years later. Dipping soon turned into a desire to swim. Within six weeks, I reached the first pole, Melbourne, which felt enormous. Since then, I've had lessons and even entered my first open water swim race. For me, it's about challenge, but a safe one. It's never about competition, just the desire to grow. Some days I swim to the poles; other days I simply play. Handstands, dolphin dives, synchronised swimming, treading water in a circle, talking and laughing together—these moments take me back to childhood joy.

What I love about the swimmers is that we are all bare-faced, open, and vulnerable. In our bathers—no hair done, no makeup, no handbags—we are the same, equal. To step into the water together, without ego, is to say, 'This is me, the water, and community.'

Of course, there are challenges. I've often feared the sea, but I hear my father's words: 'Don't fight her; let her bring you home.' On a wild day, with waves breaking over me, I thought, 'At this age, we're not challenged often—but I can still go in and be brave.'

The water continues to surprise me—the thrill of each sunrise, the grounding beauty, the awe. As the sun hits my face, I think, 'It's another day, and I'm here.' Whether you dip or swim laps, it's an even playing field, bound by kindness, care, and friendship. Open water swimming has given me structure, connection, and joy. I feel immensely grateful, and I hope to keep showing up well into my 70s and 80s.





HEALING

noun

The process of becoming well again.



NAOMI, 55

SECURITY FIRM DIRECTOR
SKYE

MY JOURNEY with water began in 1989 when I joined the police force and started swimming. From then on, I loved it. Water has always been my safe space, my cleansing, my grounding. I'm a water baby. Whether camping near a river or sitting by the bay, I feel at home. I can sit on the sand for hours, watching the waves, and whenever I've had troubles, getting into the water washes everything away.

One morning, walking along Seaford Beach, I came across a couple of funny characters—the two Petes, Bear the dog, and Rob. They invited me in, and from that day I felt welcomed.

I'm a strong swimmer, but I grew up traumatised by the *Jaws* movies. I've only been out to the Melbourne pole once. Mostly, I prefer the channel, where I can take in the scenery and feel safe. I love seeing the swans glide by, the birds dive, and the light shift across the water. I've watched dolphins swim through and seabirds chasing fish, and every day I feel grateful for the beauty of the bay. Being present like that, engaging all my senses, grounds me.

The community has been a lifeline. When I was going through divorce and other challenges, being accepted here was like finding family. There's no judgment, only kindness. You don't get that everywhere. Every morning, I laugh, and that laughter is healing. My kids tell me it's the best thing I've ever done, and I agree.

When life feels overwhelming, a swim puts it all into perspective. Everyone has struggles, but together we swim, we laugh, and suddenly it doesn't feel so big anymore.



STU, 47

BUSINESS OWNER, AMATEUR GUITARIST
CRANBOURNE

I WAS a workaholic, and my life coach told me to walk on the beach on Sundays just to stop. That simple habit soon led to dipping. It was January, the water looked enticing, and by chance we met the swimmers at Seaford. Everyone was so welcoming.

I was suffering mentally, physically, and emotionally. I was hurting and in chronic pain. My entire world had collapsed in a matter of years, and I wasn't coping. I had been forced to sell two houses, found myself single, had a shoulder reconstruction, carpal tunnel surgery, the recent collapse of a horrible rebound relationship, and then had to put down my sick dog. My life was in shambles, and I was at breaking point. I was also suffering from severe plantar fasciitis and couldn't stand for more than five minutes at a time. The only thing that gave me enough longing to be around was the ritual of getting up, facing the cold, and swimming. There's something about the water.

At first, I dog-paddled to the pole. Slowly, I taught myself strokes, built fitness, and set small goals—one pole, then the next, then the long one. Each milestone brought relief. The water grounded me, like it reset something in my body and head. I'd come out pain-free for a few hours, and along with some acupuncture, I found myself able to stand for longer periods, which gave me hope. In winter, when you dive in, every inch of your skin burns, then goes numb, and your brain finally stops freaking out. Bit by bit, it became a daily non-negotiable.

I didn't want to talk or make friends, but the community drew me in. Hugs, morning check-ins, swims, coffees, jokes—it became a family. Even my parents (in their early eighties) and my sister now swim regularly. The still mornings, when the sun rises over the water, feel spiritual, quieting the noise in my head.

Swimming has given me everything I needed just to hang on—and then so much more. I never expected it. I wasn't looking for it, but it's been an absolute lifesaver. I'm not going anywhere any time soon.

A full-page background image showing a swimmer's arm and head above the water surface. The swimmer is in the middle of a stroke, with water splashing around their hand. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The water in the foreground is dark and rippled.

IMMERSED

Ripples of water, like satin.
The afternoon sun on my face.
When I'm in here, nothing else matters,
I'm floating beyond time and space.

Soft as the sand just beneath me,
the aqua caresses my skin.
Closing my eyes, I feel weightless,
as joy fills my heart from within.

My soul is at peace in the ocean,
no trouble can reach me out here.
Immersed in her cool, salty potion,
the stillness dissolving all fear.

I linger, enjoying the sunshine.
My spirit at one with the sea.
I smile, for I know, all will be fine.
Just for now, it's the water, and me ...

VANESSA (NESS) BREDEN
SEAFORD SWIMMER

MELINDA (MIN), 63

RETIRED GRAPHIC DESIGNER
CARRUM DOWNS

I'VE SPENT MY LIFE near the water.

Growing up on the Gold Coast, our house was right on the beach at Burleigh. I'd walk with Mum every morning, watching the sunrise and listening to the surf. We didn't need to speak. We just soaked it in.

When I moved south, I didn't realise how much I'd missed that closeness until I came to Seaford about 10 years ago. After cancer and another traumatic event, the beach became my sanctuary. At first, all I could do was stand with my toes in the sand, listening to the waves, too fearful to go in. Even the shower felt painful. But I longed for what others described as a hug.

I made a vow: one day I would swim to the Melbourne pole. When I finally did, it was my secret. Nobody knew until I came out. That swim was a turning point. I realised the why for me is that silky hug. I became addicted to it—the water pulling me out of bed, rinsing away depression and anxiety, replacing them with peace.

The water became spiritual for me. I cried in it. I prayed. Floating at the pole, arms stretched wide like a crucifix, it felt like baptism—a letting go.

Every time dolphins appear, it feels like a blessing, always when I need reassurance most. They remind me everything is going to be okay.

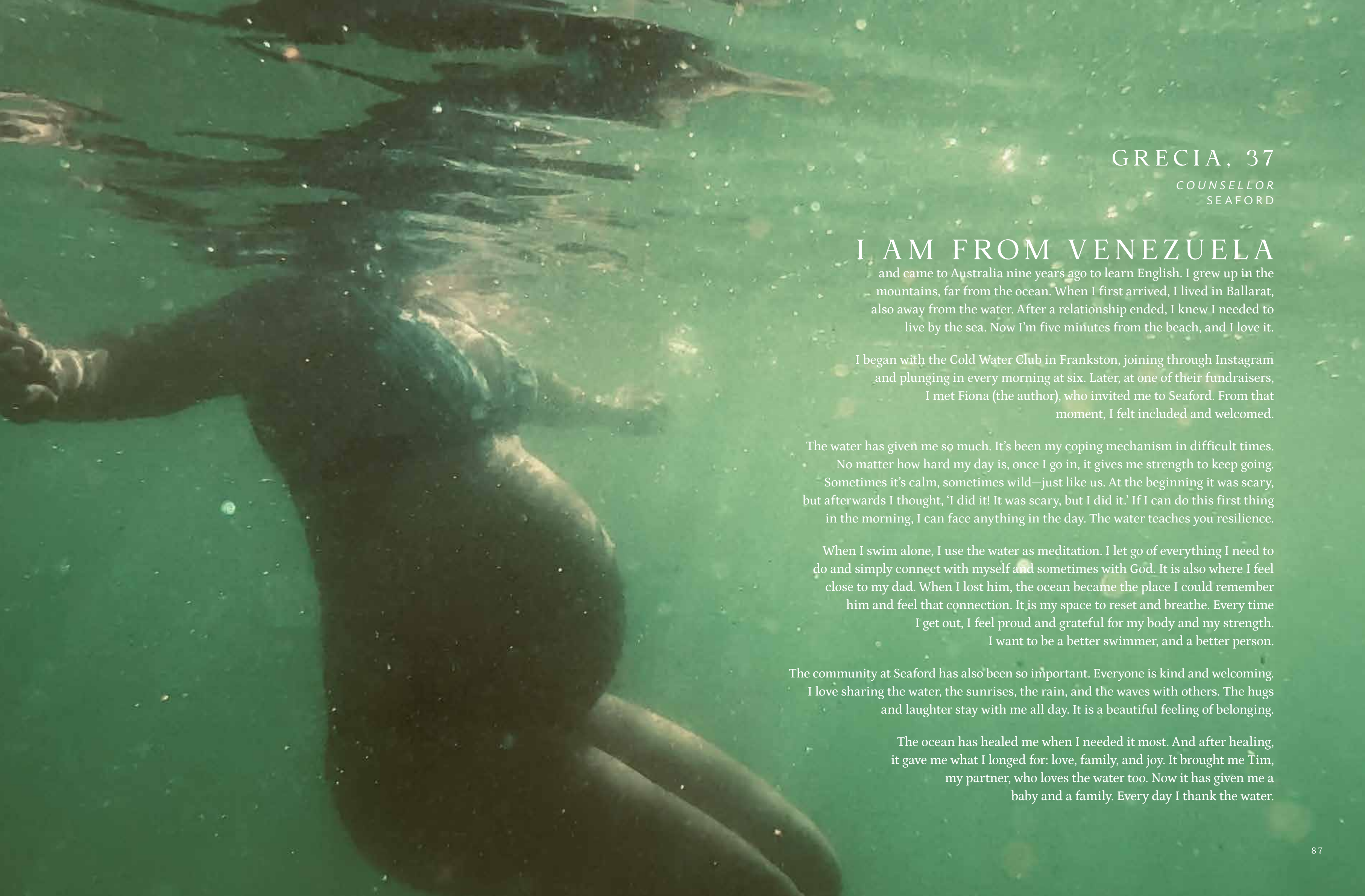
Swimming has reawakened my creativity. For years I thought trauma had stolen my art, but the water gave it back. Now I paint what I see and feel—the pier, the waves, the underwater colours, even the joy on swimmers' faces. Painting has been part of the healing, rebuilding my strength and confidence.

The Seaford community has saved my life. Here, there's understanding without pressure, love without judgment. On hard mornings, when tears come, someone will notice, offer a smile or a hug, and it's enough.

This year of swimming has brought me more healing than six years of therapy. Through the water, through art, through these people, I've learned to love and accept myself again. I'm home. I'm where I'm meant to be.





An underwater photograph of a person swimming, viewed from below. The water is a deep, murky green, and sunlight filters through from above, creating a shimmering effect. The swimmer's legs and feet are visible in the foreground, moving towards the surface.

GRECIA, 37

COUNSELLOR
SEAFORD

I AM FROM VENEZUELA

and came to Australia nine years ago to learn English. I grew up in the mountains, far from the ocean. When I first arrived, I lived in Ballarat, also away from the water. After a relationship ended, I knew I needed to live by the sea. Now I'm five minutes from the beach, and I love it.

I began with the Cold Water Club in Frankston, joining through Instagram and plunging in every morning at six. Later, at one of their fundraisers, I met Fiona (the author), who invited me to Seaford. From that moment, I felt included and welcomed.

The water has given me so much. It's been my coping mechanism in difficult times. No matter how hard my day is, once I go in, it gives me strength to keep going. Sometimes it's calm, sometimes wild—just like us. At the beginning it was scary, but afterwards I thought, 'I did it! It was scary, but I did it.' If I can do this first thing in the morning, I can face anything in the day. The water teaches you resilience.

When I swim alone, I use the water as meditation. I let go of everything I need to do and simply connect with myself and sometimes with God. It is also where I feel close to my dad. When I lost him, the ocean became the place I could remember him and feel that connection. It is my space to reset and breathe. Every time I get out, I feel proud and grateful for my body and my strength. I want to be a better swimmer, and a better person.

The community at Seaford has also been so important. Everyone is kind and welcoming. I love sharing the water, the sunrises, the rain, and the waves with others. The hugs and laughter stay with me all day. It is a beautiful feeling of belonging.

The ocean has healed me when I needed it most. And after healing, it gave me what I longed for: love, family, and joy. It brought me Tim, my partner, who loves the water too. Now it has given me a baby and a family. Every day I thank the water.



WHEN YOU'RE UNSURE OF YOURSELF,
nature has a way of showing you who you are.
The water reminds me of my strength, and my adaptability.

ANDREA M

LISA, 45 & CASSIE, 3

PARAMEDIC
FRANKSTON

YEARS SPENT WORKING

as a paramedic took a quiet toll. I didn't see it happening at first, but the trauma built up until I was diagnosed with severe PTSD and burnout. I was barely leaving the house, too scared even to take the bins out. When I finally did, ocean swimming became the only place I found clarity and peace. Floating out by the poles, weightless and present, time stops. It has been a major factor in my healing.

I started swimming in November 2023, and from day one the Seaford swimmers were instant family. Within minutes of arriving, I was welcomed in, and that warmth has never left. In the water there's an unspoken bond—laughter, support, and connection. It really is community.

I swim for the peace it brings. Every time it's different: the colours, the conditions, the wildlife. I'm not the fittest, I'm not the fastest, but I give it a crack. I've swum all four poles, and some days I just float, soaking in the stillness. Mentally it's so soothing. Physically I'm stronger and healthier. Spiritually it feels like heaven. We're so lucky it's right on our doorstep. The ocean takes me back to my inner child, to days at the beach diving under waves. It's the best drug.

Special moments are everywhere: dolphins, the bay like glass some days and wild on others, swimming in the rain, and the fish and starfish all around. What has surprised me most is that I'm not scared. I'm more afraid of things on land than I am in the water.

My golden Labrador, Cassie, often swims with me. With her webbed feet, she's a natural. She loves it. I'll never forget the first time she swam to the Melbourne pole. Everyone cheered as she slapped the pole, so proud of herself. When she's tired, she climbs on my shoulders like a baby koala, rests, then pushes off again. She's my little soulmate.

The water has given me clarity, joy, strength, and confidence. It has brought healing and new friendships. Out there, I'm not afraid. Out there, I'm free.





RITUAL

noun

A way of doing something in which the same actions
are done in the same way every time.

GEMMA, 43

TEACHER
BERWICK

I WAS SEVEN when I first made it across the pool by myself, though my mother says I was only four when I started swimming in floaties and loved being in the water. The water has been my world ever since, through squad training, competing, coaching, and even running my own swim school during uni.

In 2024, I swam my first open water event over the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland. It was the most exhilarating, addictive experience. While holidaying and ocean swimming in Port Fairy, I came across the *Immerse* book about open water swimmers in Seaford. I instantly connected with the stories, photography, and the love and power of both the ocean and community reflected in every smile. After not being able to put the book down, I courageously contacted the group and within weeks became a regular sunrise swimmer. To be so instantly welcomed, included, and supported by this community has been incredible. With deep friendships formed, joy and gratitude have grown with each new connection.

In this community, you feel welcome, seen, heard, valued, loved, and supported.

The ocean soothes my nervous system and calms my mind. At first, swimming in powerful rolling waves stirred deep inner turmoil. In time, I discovered calm within the chaos, released the struggle, moved with the flow, and surfaced joyful no matter the conditions. I learned quickly it's not the water that shapes your day but how you meet it.

What I love most is the ocean's constant changes and the sense of freedom it offers. I love the ocean's untamed beauty. There is always wonder and awe: the marine life, the ever-changing skies. Every swim leaves me feeling grounded, grateful, and mentally refreshed as I surface. I spend so much of my life holding others, in my work, in my family, in all the roles I play. In the water, I feel held. The ocean wraps around me like open arms.

Day after day, week after week, I still get that giddy feeling knowing it's a beach day. It's like a new love, an excitement that hasn't faded. The laughter, the friendships, the freedom of the water bringing joy and growth. Being immersed in the ocean and this wonderful community has allowed my whole being to flourish.

Swimming, once centred on training and competition, has now become my most profound form of meditation and a way to reconnect with myself.





EMMA, 37

MEDIA AND BROADCAST MANAGER
SEAFORD

BEING IN and on the water has always been part of me. Swimming was my sport as a kid, and my dad was a sailor. When I was little, he bought a yacht because he thought every girl should have a boat, and there started my love of the ocean.

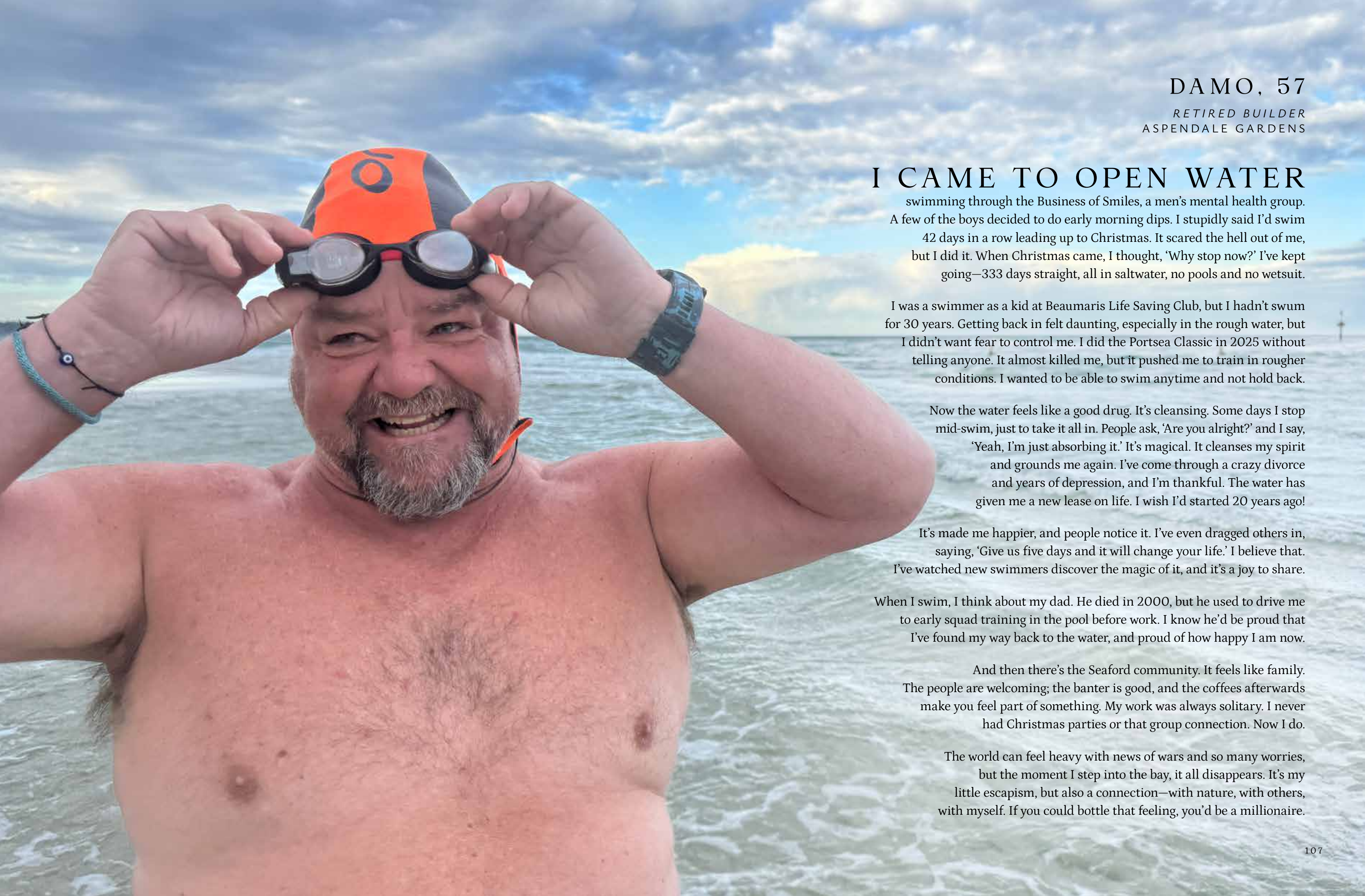
When my partner Steele and I were looking for a house, I wanted to be close to the beach. If I was going to live further from the city, I wanted to come home to the sea. So, we settled in Seaford. Discovering the amazing community once we lived here was a bonus.

During COVID, I walked the beach daily, sometimes dipping in after a run. I often saw the group on my morning walk, promising I'd get in the water with them soon. Three weeks before a Melbourne Half Ironman, I finally joined them. I put on a wetsuit, swam to the Melbourne and Sydney poles, and thought, 'I can do the Half Ironman now.' From then, swimming became part of my week.

What I love most is how it makes me slow down. Out there, you're present, watching for a banjo shark on the sea floor or seeing the pink sky at sunrise. Even when it's rough, you focus only on the water. It's like a moving meditation for me. I come out refreshed, centred, and more appreciative of everything around me. The benefits go beyond fitness. My skin is clearer, my haemoglobin jumped when I started dipping, and I feel steadier, lighter, less rushed. The cold brings good stress—my heart rate soars, like I've been sprinting, but in the best way.

I'm also aware of the sea's danger. My uncle, a strong swimmer, died of a heart attack during the Lorne Pier to Pub. He swam every morning with his mates at Lorne during summer holidays and loved it. I often think of him when I swim, knowing he'd be proud of me. His story reminds me never to take the sea for granted. You need others around, keeping watch.

That's why the community means so much. At 7am, everyone greets you with a smile. There's no pretence, no judgment—whether you're a strong swimmer or just floating to the pole, you belong. I wouldn't have kept getting in without them. It's the beauty of the environment, being part of the ocean and the people, together, that make Seaford so special.



DAMO, 57

RETIRED BUILDER
ASPENDALE GARDENS

I CAME TO OPEN WATER

swimming through the Business of Smiles, a men's mental health group. A few of the boys decided to do early morning dips. I stupidly said I'd swim 42 days in a row leading up to Christmas. It scared the hell out of me, but I did it. When Christmas came, I thought, 'Why stop now?' I've kept going—333 days straight, all in saltwater, no pools and no wetsuit.

I was a swimmer as a kid at Beaumaris Life Saving Club, but I hadn't swum for 30 years. Getting back in felt daunting, especially in the rough water, but I didn't want fear to control me. I did the Portsea Classic in 2025 without telling anyone. It almost killed me, but it pushed me to train in rougher conditions. I wanted to be able to swim anytime and not hold back.

Now the water feels like a good drug. It's cleansing. Some days I stop mid-swim, just to take it all in. People ask, 'Are you alright?' and I say, 'Yeah, I'm just absorbing it.' It's magical. It cleanses my spirit and grounds me again. I've come through a crazy divorce and years of depression, and I'm thankful. The water has given me a new lease on life. I wish I'd started 20 years ago!

It's made me happier, and people notice it. I've even dragged others in, saying, 'Give us five days and it will change your life.' I believe that. I've watched new swimmers discover the magic of it, and it's a joy to share.

When I swim, I think about my dad. He died in 2000, but he used to drive me to early squad training in the pool before work. I know he'd be proud that I've found my way back to the water, and proud of how happy I am now.

And then there's the Seaford community. It feels like family. The people are welcoming; the banter is good, and the coffees afterwards make you feel part of something. My work was always solitary. I never had Christmas parties or that group connection. Now I do.

The world can feel heavy with news of wars and so many worries, but the moment I step into the bay, it all disappears. It's my little escapism, but also a connection—with nature, with others, with myself. If you could bottle that feeling, you'd be a millionaire.



THE SEA REMINDS ME
I am part of something bigger;
that I am held.

KELLIE JO



TRANSFORM

verb

To make a marked change in the
form, nature or appearance of.



CASSIE, 43

BON BEACH
FIRST AID TRAINER

I'VE ALWAYS LIVED beside the bay, but my open water journey only began about three years ago when I decided to do a triathlon. At first, I swam breaststroke only. I got through my first series that way because I was convinced I couldn't swim freestyle. I trained in the pool, and the only time I swam in open water was on race days. I endured it but never enjoyed it.

Then Mark, a colleague, and Deets, a friend I'd met through work, encouraged me to come down to Seaford, and everything changed. Suddenly I wasn't just swimming for events; I was choosing to get in, even in wild conditions. I taught myself freestyle, and now there's no turning back. What once felt like survival has become joy.

Seaford is my happy place. Every time you go down to the pier, it looks different—the colours, the sky, the water. Out there, you feel tiny in the vastness of the bay. It's humbling and grounding. If I don't swim for a while, I crave it. I need it to feel balanced again.

What I love most is the community. It's such a broad range of people from all walks of life, shapes and sizes, but everyone is included. When I first joined, everyone was so welcoming. Coming out of COVID, when connection had been missing, that sense of belonging meant even more.

Swimming has surprised me. I never thought I'd enjoy it. I used to be terrified of creatures in the water, but now I swim over banjo sharks and watch the fish beneath me. At first, I always needed someone beside me, but now I'm comfortable swimming solo (though I still prefer company).

Open water swimming has become about much more than fitness. Running and riding can be exhausting, but I come out of the water feeling rejuvenated. It's calming, meditative, invigorating. The sunrise colours, the way the light plays on the water—it's like swimming through a painting. I even got a tattoo—a small wave and sun—to remind me of the beauty of the bay. This has become an integral part of my life, something I can't imagine giving up.

I'm grateful for the friendships I've made. As a single mum, life once felt unbalanced, but through this group I've found connection and support. Even as I train for an Ironman, with its huge demands, the swimmers are there cheering me on. Their encouragement humbles me.

A man wearing a blue swim cap and goggles is swimming in the ocean. The water is dark blue, and the sky is a mix of orange and blue, suggesting sunset or sunrise. The man is looking towards the camera.

ROBERT, 80

RETIRED
SEAFORD

SEAFORD IS A HIDDEN GEM,

an old-style beach town where you can forget the hassles of life. Coming here from the inner suburb of Glen Waverley was a big shift, but it's been one of the best moves of my life.

At first, I took long walks (about 3 kilometres a day) until one winter's morning I crossed the pier and met Don and Clive. They'd just come out of the water looking like lobsters. They invited me to join them. I told them there was no way I'd go in during winter. The following summer, I gave it a go, and I've been swimming ever since—even through winters!

Now I swim most mornings. If I don't get in, the day doesn't feel like it's begun. At first, I could barely reach the end of the pier. I hadn't swum any distance for 40 years. But slowly the poles became milestones. Each one gave me confidence. Eventually I found myself swimming out to Bob (a buoy) and the Kathmandu pole, distances I'd never imagined possible.

Being in the water is calming. On longer swims, my mind settles. Sometimes dolphins pass underneath, an octopus appears, or the sun rises just as the moon sinks. In those moments, you can't help but think, 'How good's this?'

But it isn't just the swimming. I've probably made more friends here in eight years than in nearly five decades before. There's no hierarchy, no competition, just camaraderie. We swim, we laugh, we share a coffee, and we look out for each other.

At 80, I may be the oldest in the group, but open water swimming has given me health, peace, and friendships for life. It's been a new beginning.





ESTER, 42

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST
SEAFORD

I MOVED TO SEAFORD in 2009, but for a long time I didn't feel part of the community. That changed when I had my first daughter and joined a mothers' group. Suddenly I knew people, I'd walk down the street, say hello, and have conversations. But the real sense of belonging came when I found the swimmers.

I've always been drawn to water. As a child, I was a water baby. We had a creek down the back of our street in Emerald, and we'd spend whole afternoons there. As a young adult, I did my bronze medallion at 13th Beach, kayaked, and swam at the pool for fitness. Water has always been my happy place. The peace it brings is why I've always wanted to live near it.

My first love was running, but after kids, my body began to break down. My back was sore, and I couldn't run anymore. Don, my neighbour and one of the Seaford swimmers, said, 'Come for a swim.' From that first dip in early 2022, I loved it. I thought, 'Why didn't I discover this during COVID?'

Now, swimming is part of my life. Every Wednesday, I go with girlfriends from work, no matter the weather. We chatter about the conditions—the wind, the rain, the waves—then plunge in. However bad your day has been, the water washes it away. You come out laughing, faces numb. It sounds awful, but it fills the bucket.

For me, swimming is both exercise and meditation. It raises my heart rate, but more than that, it clears my head. Work can be frantic, rushing from one crisis to the next, but in the water, it's just me, my breath, the bubbles, and the sky. It gives me peace and perspective. Sometimes it feels almost religious—those evenings when the bay is flat and the sunset lights up the clouds, you think, 'There's nothing better.'

The friendships are the best part. My Wednesday swims get me through tough weeks—debriefing, laughing, washing off the stress. The Seaford group itself is special: people from all walks of life, drawn to the pier and the water, connecting in a way you wouldn't elsewhere.

Swimming has carried me through big changes. After my marriage ended, I found not just community but a soul-deep connection with someone who shares my love of the water. It opened my eyes to a new way of living.





I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the freedom of the water—
no noise, no distractions, just you and the silence.

BEC

BETSY-SUE, 63

HEALER
FRANKSTON

MOUNTAINS HAVE

called my heart since childhood, this connection always feeding me. Moving to Frankston meant finding a new way to be with nature, and so I turned to the sea. At first, it was about testing myself against all the things I'd previously said no to: 'No, I don't want to be cold; no, I don't want to be out in the sea; no, I don't want to be dragged out; no, I can't deal with the waves; no, I can't swim good enough.' One by one, I worked through those fears.

Then it became about the nature. In the water, I could just be with the birds, be with the feeling of the water, whether it was pushing me one way or the other. I'm always looking at what's happening in and above the water—an unstoppable flock of gulls working together in the sky, the joy and exuberance of dolphins. Every morning brings something new that makes me pause in awe and whisper to myself, 'Will you just look at that.'

The whale was my most unforgettable moment. I'd been whale watching for years, and they'd never come. But this time, the whale chose to come where we could see it, while we were looking in the right direction. You could feel its hugeness before it appeared, a soft and powerful energy in harmony with everything around it. Even now, it brings me to tears.

It feeds my spirit being down here every day, connecting. It's love that I feel. It fills me up. Nature is showing and teaching us all these amazing things. What would we be like if we didn't have the sea and the birds and the crashing waves? Or the wind, and the beauty, the calm, the softness? It's all worth waiting for and paying attention to. They remind us of the ever-changing nature of life, and they offer us daily moments of awe, right here on our doorstep. How lucky are we?

For anyone who might be feeling stuck in any way, simply start with the sea. Start with connection with nature every single day. Because no matter what, the sun rises. Nature shows us what's real and the empowerment in recognising that can help us step into a new way of living.







INDEX

SWIMMERS

Aimee	15	Katie	123
Andrea B	67	Kellie Jo	96
Andrea M	31	Lidia	100
Bec	37	Lisa & Cassie	90
Betsy-Sue	130	Lou	46
Blaženka	55	Louise	34
Brian	50	Mandy	26
Cassie	114	Melinda (Min)	80
Cecilia	21	Naomi	74
Damo	107	Paola	83
Deborah	70	Penny	63
Emma	103	Peter K	42
Ester	120	Peter P	40
Gemma	94	Robert	116
Grecia	87	Ruth	59
Hilary	111	Stu	77
Ingrid	17	Taotao	22
Jessica	126	Vanessa (Ness)	56

POEMS

<i>When nothing makes sense anymore</i>	
Joel McKerrow	2
<i>Serenity</i>	
Deborah Williams	39
<i>I come to the sea</i>	
Melinda (Min) Saunders	60
<i>Immersed</i>	
Vanessa (Ness) Breden	78
<i>Sea river</i>	
Andy Hamilton SJ	99

THANK YOU	142
-----------	-----



THE NEXT WAVE is the sequel to Fiona Basile's internationally award-winning book *Immerse*. It celebrates the growth and diversity of an open water swimming community in bayside Melbourne, Australia. Through stunning photography and intimate reflections, it captures the joy, resilience, and friendships forged in the sea.

Thirty-six swimmers share how the water heals, challenges, and transforms them, offering stories of courage, wonder, and gratitude. These pages honour both the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life in and by the ocean, from sunrises and laughter to loss and renewal, revealing the strength of community and the beauty of connection. Dive in. Be carried by the next wave.

ISBN: 978-1-7644049-0-7



9 781764 404907 >