

**Interview with Val Brunker
Interviewed by Jessica Roemischer
Date: January 16, 2023
Location: Blue Haven, Kiama**

Q: So, to begin, here do you live, Val?

Val: I live in Minnamurra. It's a beautiful spot. I've been there 42 years.

Q: And where were you born, Val?

Val: I was born at Royal North Shore Hospital in St. Leonard's. We were living at Cammeray.



Q: Did you grow up there?

Val: I left there when I was seven and we moved to Willoughby.

Q: And that's all in Sydney, am I right?

Val: Yes. Then when I was 17, we moved up to Kogarah Bay, which is on the other side of the city.



Q: Do you have any special memories from that time that you would like to share?

Val: Yes, in my teenage years I have. I was a tomboy. I hated being a girl until I was about fourteen or fifteen. Then I realised that boys were stupid! (laughing) And I thought, I can do anything that boys can do.

Q: Really! So, what was that like? To be quite independent in a way?

Val: Well, I was quite independent. I was the oldest of three, and I was very independent. My sister was two years younger, but she was always a doll person. But I was never I like that. I liked to be independent.

Q: Tell me about some early memories, of how you were saying that you wanted to be like the boys.

Val: I used to love fishing with Dad, and all the things that boys do. And I used to get really annoyed because boys were allowed to do a lot more than girls in my youth.

Q: Do you mind me asking how old you are?

Val: I'm 86.

Q: So, that would have been in the 1940s?

Val: Yes, there were good times. Then I got to a teenager, I started going dancing. That was my big love--ballroom dancing. I used to teach it.

Q: What did you like about it?

Val: I just loved it. It was *dancing*. I started to do my medals. And then I started teaching a couple of nights a week. I got a studio four nights a week. Then another night, I got Dispensary Hall. And then Sunday night, I'd go square dancing. I just loved moving all the time, I think!

Q: That's fantastic! I have this image of you, of what you're describing.

Val: It was really lovely, really nice.

Q: And was that something that was easy to find at that time, that you could engage in?

Val: Yes, it was quite easy. Where I lived in Willoughby, I had a nice big studio there. And the very first night that I went there with my friends, I absolutely loved it. So, then I just kept going.

Q: So, tell me about that first night, the feeling that you loved it.

Val: I was just doing it, just learning how to dance, and being around people. It was something!

Q: Were there a lot of other girls who did that? Or was it a little unusual?

Val: It was a mixture of girls and boys.

Q: Is there something else you'd like to share about your early life, your feeling of growing up in Sydney?

Val: Life was really easy. It was a great life. You could go out. You could go tad poling. You could do all these sorts of things. Growing up, I had a really good young life. It was just free and easy. You could walk the streets at night, anytime, and things like that. It was lovely. It was a nice time.

Q: Where were your parents from? Were they both born in Australia?

Val: Yes, they were both born in Australia.

Q: And your grandparents?

Val: My Mum's family was from Ireland. And the other family—Dad's father—was from England. My grandmother who was from Irish descent came out to Australia when she was about 18 or 19 as a domestic, and they took her right out to the middle of Queensland. But my grandfather was a police constable out there, and he was from a different part of Ireland. So, they met him, and then they met up, and got married. I'm a little big on the history of families.

Q: Is there anything else that's fascinating that you found in your history?

Val: I haven't found any convicts! (laughing) It's quite interesting. On the side from England, my great-great grandparents came out. They brought the family out from England with four children. That was about 1840, or something like that.

Q: That's amazing. So, Australia would have been fairly rugged at that time.

Val: Yes, yes.

Q: People really were pioneers at that point.

Val: They were. It would have been. But just reading everything, it seems to have been a pretty average life. Actually, one set of great grandparents, they came and settled in Kiama. And one of them, their daughters married one of the Dinnings from Kiama. I've got a lot of newspaper cuttings from her time there.

Q: So your connection to this area goes way back.

Val: Yes. I didn't know that at the time we moved here. They're buried in Kiama Cemetery – a couple of them.

Q: So how did that feel when you found out that your ancestors had lived here?

Val: I thought, that's great. That's really good.

Q: Because you had a connection here that you didn't know! You have a connection back in time through history here in Australia, and how your family came from Ireland and England. Then your great-grandparents settled, and they began their lives here. You were born in Sydney.

Val: Yes.

Q: But how your family has seen over the course of you know several generations has seen an enormous development and shift and change in Australia.

Val: Oh, yes. Yes. Definitely! (laughing) I've got five children. I was married quite young. I always felt that part of my life never completed properly.

Q: What part was that?

Val: Well, I was dancing and everything. I met my husband quite young, and he didn't like me teaching dancing. So, I had to choose between him or going dancing.

Q: That would be challenging.

Val: It was. I did love the dancing. But I loved him more!



Q: Oh, that's wonderful! What is his name?

Val: Maurice, or Maurie . That was it. And then we had five children. We had the first four children really close. And then we had a ten-year break and had another one.



Q: Where were you living at that time?

Val: When I had the kids, Maurie had to do some National Service. It was put off because he was working down the Snowy, and that was classed as a vital thing. So they put it off for a couple years. So, when he went down there, I had one child. So I went back and stayed with Mum and Dad for a while. Then went over to Perth for a while and lived there for about nine months. He was working over there. Then we came back and moved up to Blacktown in the Western suburbs.

Q: What was your husband working as?

Val: He was a plant operator driving bulldozers.

Q: And were you raising your children?

Val: Yes, so we moved up there. Then I started to get involved in sports. I played netball at school. Well, it wasn't netball. It was ladies' basketball. Then I dabbled in other things, like athletics and things like that.

Then when I had kids, and they started to grow up and play in sport, I got involved with the football club because the boys were playing footy. Then I got involved with netball because the girls started playing netball. I've always believed that if you've got children playing sport you've got to help.

Q: Tell me about that, because not every parent thinks that way.

Val: I think that if people are putting their time up to train your children, then you should do everything to help them. I've always firmly believed that. So I got involved with netball when I took my daughter down to start playing. The first thing, they registered her, and said to me, "Would you like to coach?" I hadn't coached before, but that didn't matter. So they gave me two teams. And it was great. That was my first passion. I coached, I umpired. Then I became junior register of the Blacktown Netball Association. They had nobody else to do, so I put my hand up!

Q: So, it sounds like your family life and your sport life came together.

Val: Yes, that was it.

Q: It's because you felt like you should be helping your kids and being involved.

Val: It was the same with the boys' football. I'd work in the canteens, and wash the jerseys for the senior teams, and things like that. To me, that's just giving back a little bit. It was a good life, though. You meet a lot of lovely people and meet a lot of lovely people, mix with a lot of lovely people.

Then my other son started to play cricket, and they had nobody else to score. I so put my hand up to score. That's good, yeah.

Q: Did you continue to play sport after your kids were grown?

Val: Yes, I started playing netball once the girls started playing. Then we moved down here to Kiama, and there was no netball down here. There was a school competition after school, on a Thursday afternoon. And someone I knew was running it, and when they knew that I was involved up in Sydney, they asked me if I'd run it for them here. So, I started. It was a nice little Thursday afternoon school competition. And then the parents said to me, "We want to play. There's nothing down here, and we'd like to play, too." So, I thought, "Well, why not?"

So, I started to put notes around the shops and everything. And on registration day, we had enough for eight teams turn up, which was good. So, we put them in teams, and it was a good competition. It was only seniors at the time.

Q: So, when was that?

Val: Well, we moved down here in 1980 – so it was about 1983. And from then on, we just grew. We had the first comp at the Leisure Centre. And I arranged insurance with some insurance company because I will not run anything unless I have the place insured. It came back, so that was fine. So, I went from there and started putting notes all around the schools, trying to organise some of the parents into forming a club. So that's where the clubs come from.

Q: So, you established them around here. You were the impetus behind getting netball clubs around here.

Val: Yes, the Netball Association in Kiama. It's named after me. The Netball Association is called, The Val Brunker Centre, which is great.



Val: Then we had to do battle with Council. They were good, but they never understood what netball was. They never had a clue. So, first of all we used the Leisure Centre, and when we got the juniors started, the Council said, "OK, we can mark a court out either side of the soccer field." (laughed) So my husband was the one who did all the marking. He was great. He was a really good support.

So, the first year we played there, and then after that one, they said, "You can't keep playing there, because the cricket is going to start. You have to go over here." So, we had to do more courts. (laughing) So, that's how we first started. We started hassling Council about courts, and about courts, and they wanted to put us up on the highway. And then somewhere else. And I said, "You can't do it. We've got too many teams now." We'd started to get a lot of teams. I was going to Council all the time. And luckily, early in the piece we had a really good Mayor – a female mayor, who started to understand. So, rather than saying 'you can't do this, you can't do that,' I got her onside.

Q: You had an ally, Val.

Val: Yes, it was good. We got things going, we got them established. I always had good support – really good committees, and things like that. And then Maurie was always there. He was wonderful. He was good. We started our canteen – a little table with food on it. And Maurie was working at Brambles, so he talked them into giving him an old caravan. It was an old thing, it was gonna fall to pieces, but every day he towed it in, and towed it home to our place. It would sit there for a long time, and he said, "It's gonna fall to pieces on the road!"

So, the canteen functioned as a place for refreshments. We'd heat meat pies and things like that and keep things cold for everybody for when they were playing. Then eventually we had a committee about doing the building. We looked for grants and everything. It was good. That's how we got our building.

Q: Where is that building?

Val: It's up at the Leisure Centre. Our courts are all out the back. How we got the ones we got is, the Council was going to put overflow car park out the back. So, I went to Council, and I said, "how about marking that out for netball courts? We could put three courts there." So, they did that. We got three courts. The grass was still there, so they marked that into courts for the juniors, for a while. Then we needed more room. But then Council started talking about moving the tennis courts out of Kiama and put them out at the Leisure Centre. I said, "You can't do that! Our whistles are going all day with netball. The tennis players will all get up in arms!" So, they saw the sense in that. So, they said, "Okay, then we'll leave the rest for netball." So we got more courts there then. And they moved the tennis courts somewhere else.

I always had a lot of support then, a lot of parents. They'd pitch in and help. And someone had a great rapport with the outdoor staff of Council. They were really good. If they were working there, I'd go in the middle of the day and have a chat. And they'd say, "Just tell us what you want, Val. We'll do anything for you." They were really lovely. And one of the head of the outdoor staff, if I wanted anything, I'd ring him. I'd say, "This is the lady that's always

asking you for something.” And he’d say, “Ok, Val, what can we do for you this time?” (laughing) The top knobs at Council didn’t know a lot about it, but the workers were really good. The outdoor staff, very helpful.

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Proud day for our Val

THE opening of the Kiama Netball Complex took place on Saturday, commencing with a colourful march past of young players representing all the clubs which make up the Association.

The opening was the culmination of a great deal of hard work by many people over the 13 years the Kiama Netball Association has been running.

Kiama Mayor, Cr Joyce Wheatley, who is also the original Patron of the Association, officially declared the complex open.

Marilyn Melhuish, President of NSW Netball, officially named the new clubrooms 'The Val Brunker Centre' much to the surprise, amazement and disbelief of Val.

Members voted to honour Val with the naming of the centre because she had not only been President of the association since its inception, but had been the driving force behind many of the young association's successes.

Other official guests to attend the opening were Member for Kiama, MP Matt Brown, the representative for the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Hon. John Watkins, Member for Illawarra, MP Marianne Saliba and Federal Member for Gilmore, MP Joanna Gash.

Deputy Mayor of Kiama, Cr Sandra McCarthy, Regional Director of the Department of Sport and Recreation, Lyndee Matthews, Director Illawarra Academy Sport, Cheryl Battaard, President Illawarra Netball Association, Val Curran, Councillor Les Davey, past and present club presidents, players from the original competition, present members and the numerous business people who had assisted with the completion of the project also attended.

The day was a very proud one for the association, representing a great achievement for the club and everyone involved in its development.

Q: Val, I can only imagine that they really sensed your dedication and your passion for this.

Val: I think so. And I'd always thank them. I would always make sure that I thanked them for any work they'd done. And then after some time – in 1986 – we officially became an association. At the same time, I was playing comp tennis for a little while since we'd moved down. And they wanted someone to run the ladies comp. So, I put my hand up. Then for the next 30 odd years, I ran the ladies' tennis comp in Shellharbour and Kiama. It kept me busy. I couldn't get into mischief! It was good. I enjoyed it.

Q: You know what's amazing to me, Val, is that when you're describing your early life and how with the dancing, and you were so pulled towards and attracted to these wonderful sport things and so on, that's really carried through your whole life. In a very big way. Lots of people play netball and tennis, but not many people take it upon themselves to carve out that opportunity for others. Can you tell me about that? What was it that inspired you to be so involved?

Val: I don't know. I just love sport. I really like sport, and I just want to do all I could to help with them. The ones I knew about. It's just something you do. I like to be doing something. I like to be involved and doing things. That's what I miss today.

Q: Your efforts made sport available to others. It was like you were putting yourself out there to make netball and tennis available to other people in the community. To really carve out that opportunity.

Val: I was rewarded for it. I got life membership with the Seven Hills Netball Club and Blacktown Netball Association. Life membership with Kiama Netball Association and Beachette's Netball Club, and with Kiama and Shellharbour Tennis Association, and with the Minnamurra Tennis Club. I was rewarded. I just enjoyed it all. It kept me from getting bored. You'd race from one thing to the other and thought nothing of it.



Q: And were you continuing to play netball or tennis yourself?

Val: Yes. I played tennis a couple of times a week, and I'd coach a lot of netball teams.

Q: Tell me about your experience coaching. What did you like about it?

Val: It's just that I loved working with the girls, with the kids. And just teaching them something about netball. Having a laugh with them. We had a lot of good times. We'd go away. I had a State age team, a rep team. We'd go away. It was good.

Q: Tell me a little more, Val, about what it is that you liked about coaching the girls. What was giving you satisfaction and inspiring you about that?

Val: I just think it was seeing them improve. That gave me a big satisfaction, and we always got on really well, the young girls. You can see them become better. You can see confidence in a lot of them as they improved. It was good. It's so important.

Q: Are you doing any of it at all at this point?

Val: No, I'm not. Not now. I get to games sometimes. Last year, it was very wet. There was covid, so there was hardly anything on. But, this year, I have a little friend whom I want to watch play, so I want to go see her!

Q: So, you started doing it here in the 80's.

Val: Yes, that's when I started here in Kiama. I was coaching up in Sydney. And I continued coaching until I was about 75 or 76.

Q: That's a good 25 years.

Val: I enjoy it. It kept me busy. It kept me out of mischief! (laughing)

Q: The beautiful thing, too, Val is that you're making opportunity possible for young people, keeps them out of mischief, too. It gives them a positive context.

Val: Yes, that's right. Sport is really good. Girls can get involved with coaching and umpiring themselves.

Q: Do you see any of the girls you coached?

Val: Oh, I don't recognise them today. But they'll often say to me, "Hi, Val! How you going?" And I wonder, who are you? And they say, "You coached me, remember?" Because they changed so much! They'll all grown up!

I got my grandson living with me, and he's 12 and he's just finished at Minnamurra school. And when I went down there, there were all these teachers that I used to coach! So, he's just finished, and is going to high school now, this year. So, a lot of people were involved. I always speak as though I remember them, but a lot of the time I don't.

Q: It's a little bit of an uncanny feeling, seeing a student many years later. Your students have grown, and you see a little boy, now 40 years on.

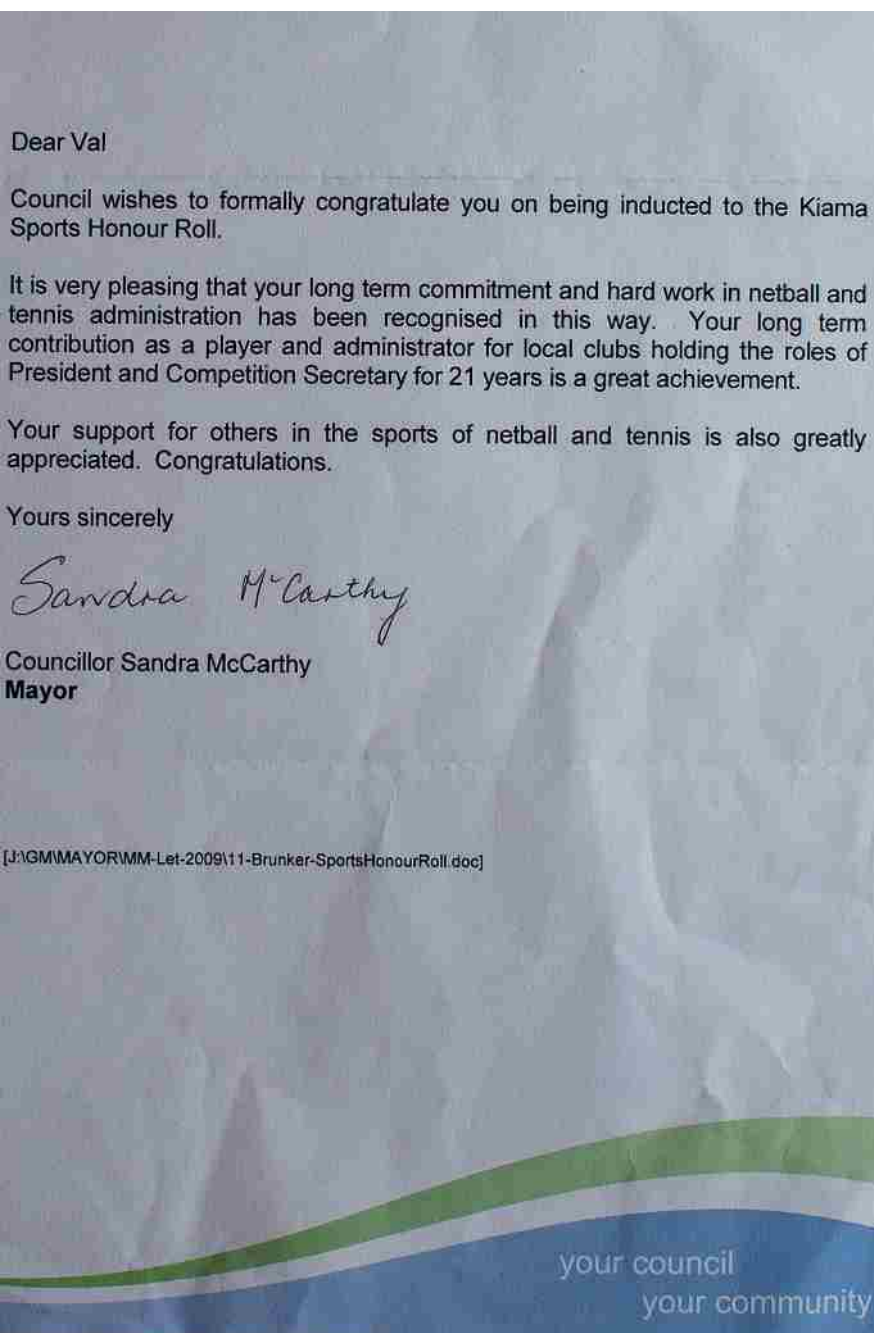
Val: It is! And they change so much in their looks and everything.

Q: But they don't forget you!

Val: That's right. It's nice to run into them. And they're up at the netball courts, coaching their own little girls, and little teams.

Q: Yes, you're passing on that legacy.

Val: Yes, it's good to see.



Q: And even when you said how when you had your own children, you said, I need to be involved in their sport. And do my part. Now you're seeing the kids who worked with you are doing it with their young children. That must be satisfying.

Val: It is very satisfying. I miss it. I do miss it.

Q: Because this was a big part of your life for a long time.

Val: It really was, yes. Yes. And like I said Maurie, he was really good. The Council were good – not the big knobs in the Council. I was talking to one of the guys on Council. He used to be the general manager here awhile back, "Oh, Val, do you know the headache I'd get!" And I said, "Oh how come?" And he said, "You'd come in and want this and that, and I'd have to try to get that for you." And I said, "Well, we got what we wanted, didn't we!"

Tag three a row

Markman got a dream start to the game when they crossed through Brian Hebbington in the early part of the game, however Alex Ward was quickly repelled, then Stolo's skipper Lindsay Phillips dived through two defences on the line to give his side a 2-1 lead before halftime.

The second half was a typically tight and uncompromising affair, with play moving restlessly from one end to the other, with the controversial sub-banning of Hebbington midway through the second half taking some of the spark out of the Markman effort.

However in the end, Stolo's thoroughly deserved their 2-1 win, with Phillips, Ward and Chris Dunham outstanding, while Kerry Flynn, John Morgan and Mark Burns tried valiantly for Markman.

Markman Air Conditioning had more luck than their division two namesake, when they had just one match left for the cup and coming late winning 2-0.

Markman looked well on their way through the first half when they led 4-2, with the highlights being a brilliant strike by Brett Fitzgerald, however two fine counterattacks by the Ipswich Park team, saw the

Val gets "life"

WHEN Minnamarra's Val Brunke moved to the area 11 years ago, she never envisaged that she would become the Kiama Netball Association's first Life Member, an honour that was bestowed on her at the association's annual meeting last week.

Even more meritorious is the fact that it is the third Life Membership for the founder of the association.

Val's involvement in sport goes back a long way, including her involvement with the Blacktown Junior Rugby League club when her two eldest sons were playing, however, her great love has always been netball.

Val was involved with the Seven Hills West Netball Club and the Blacktown Netball Association as their Registrar as well as a player, coach, manager and NSW hinged umpire, leading to her awarding of Life Membership to both bodies.

Val and husband Morris moved to Minnamarra in 1980 and as there was no netball available in the Kiama area, Val formed her own club and became the club's first administrator, Val took on the position of Ladies' Competition Secretary, a position she still holds today and culminated in her being awarded the Maspout Trophy as KSDTA Member of the Year this year.

In the meantime, Val had started coaching junior netball players at the Minnamarra Public School, a move that eventually led to the formation of the Kiama Netball Association.

"While being involved with the children at Minnamarra school and their junior games against other schools, one of the mothers mentioned that she used to play netball at school and would like to play again, so we decided to put signs in shop windows and see how many senior players were interested in playing."

"The response was extremely encouraging, so we started a social competition and after twelve months affiliated with the NSW Netball Association, allowing us to field representative teams in the State Age Championships," Val said.

The competition now boasts six clubs, Gerringong, Gainsborough, Kiama Downs, Kiama Central, Stella Maris and Beachington, as well as several other individual teams which please Val Brunke greatly.

"The growth of netball has been phenomenal and



Val Brunke proudly displays the Maspout Trophy, awarded to the Kiama and Gerringong District Netball Association's member of the year.

Marriotts leave Bricklayers flat

Marriott's Panthers caused a major upset coming from fifth position four weeks ago to defeat J.L. Bricklayers.

Marriott's continued their consistent form through the semi final series to the grand final. J.L. Bricklayers have won 13 games straight prior to the grand final and having won the major semi 11-3 were full hot favourites to take out the title.

From the start of the game the Bricklayers had the young Marriott's side under tremendous pressure. Marriott's defended desperately, however, Bricklayers went full up after 12 minutes through John Bonan.

Marriott's hit back shortly after with Adam Steel finding his way through J.L.'s tight defence.

Marriott's were 2-1 up after 20 minutes through a Gary Keen touchdown but the Panthers hit J.L. in for two quick touchdowns for the Bricklayers to lead 3-2 at half time.

The Bricklayers appeared to have the game in their keeping when they led 5-3 with 10 minutes to go but Marriott's hit back with another touchdown in just seven and five minutes from full time Adam Steel

Major singles underway

The first round of the Jamboree Bowling Club's major singles have been played.

The second round should be played by March 8 and the remaining counts to be cleared weekly after that date.

Results of first round: Danny Keenan def. John Saunders, Harold Rutledge def. Keith Parker, Ian Alexander def. Geoff Paschiano, Kevin Harris def. Len Anderson.

Tuesday Men's Club second round winners Les

Major singles underway

Davey, Geoff Shearn and Keith Parker from Chris Balson, Geoff Pincher and Brian Hogan.

Friday twilight mixed winners Ron Edwards, Billy Balson, Norma Taylor and Ron Kirkham from Marj Angus, Betty Warby, Uta Freeman and Allen Taylor.

Saturday mixed triples winners Mabel Leun, Daph Evans and Don Graham from Betty Saunders, Marra Dorran and May Hair.

The number seven side suffered its second defeat of the season going down by one shot to Woodona 71 to 50 in an exciting final.

The number seven side have yet to win a game but they are all keen to get results on the board. Prizes next Saturday – No.4 plus Dip to W. Dapto and No.2 plus Whisman Park at Jamboree.

Val: Those were good years. And parents were helping and pitching in. And I came from the Blacktown Netball Association, and it was the biggest association in the Southern Hemisphere at the time. It was a really big association. Because it was such a new area out that way – at Blacktown. It was all new and all people with kids moving out there. So, it was very big, and I'd known of the battles that had gone on before I'd got there, how they got their courts. So, I had a bit of guidance. And with Council, you have to keep hassling them. (laughing)

I was also involved with ORCA. When a whale or seal is beached, you go out and make sure that people are kept away until the authorities come in. It was very interesting.

When Maurie died, I took on the secretary of the dialysis association. He had kidney failure. I used to go to meetings, and I'd put my hand up. And I thought, it's another thing on my plate. I thought someone's got to do it, so I became secretary.

Q: You take the lead in these situations, not just participating.

Val: Well, someone has got to do it. So, I was there for four or five years, and then I had a heart attack, and the kids said, "You have to give something up." I wasn't giving netball up, but I had to do something. Now, I've got to be content to just to watch it.

Q: That must not be easy.

Val: It's good to see it continuing on. Good to see the people continue on – the same aims in life to keep it going, and for the kids.

Q: That's your legacy.

Val: Yes. The Council had never heard of netball when we came down. They hadn't heard about it at all. When the school comp was going, the headmaster of Kiama Primary School was really helpful. He liked netball. And I'd had good support from the Sports Council. They helped us a lot. So, I got on well with them, really good. And it got a lot of publicity from *The Independent*. They gave us a lot of publicity. So, I'd get a nice write-up. I always felt like I've had a lot of support with netball, which is good.

Q: I'm sure that people could feel your dedication and passion, and they were responding to that, because they can feel your intention.

Val: I just loved it! I think my car would automatically go to the courts! I don't know how many times, I'd drive on the highway, and find myself at the courts! That was my life, and my car automatically went there! It had a mind of its own.

Q: One of the things I wonder about is, you went into sport as a woman when that was not so common. I grew up in the USA and I remember in high school in the early to mid-1970's, that's when girls began to get more opportunity in sport. And you came through that period when girls didn't have that opportunity.

Val: Netball was virtually the only sport. I think there was hardly any sport they played with the males. There weren't girls football teams in those days. We had a rugby league team with the mothers of my son's clubs. We'd play a few games. That was a one-off thing. But normally they didn't play. The girls didn't start playing until, I don't know how many years back now. It was after the 1970's that the girls teams started.

Q: So, you were quite central, that is important, to the movement towards enabling girls to have opportunity in sport. You would be an example for them.

Val: Yes, netball was the only sport unless it was swimming, or something to do with that. There wasn't much in organised sport. There wasn't much at all for women. But that's why netball was so big, I think, early in the piece. When I started playing at school, it was called "ladies' basketball." Then, a couple of years later, it got changed to netball. The rules were slightly different. We played different rules when I went to school, than when we played when I grew up. And then they changed the rules a bit.

Q: I played basketball in high school, and I loved it. It's such a good sport.

Val: It is, yes! Basketball nowadays is completely different to netball. Because not everybody can shoot, and you have a main defence, and the centre court players, and things like that. You've only got two people on the court who can shoot.

Yes, I've had a good life. It's been good.





Q: What would be one memory you'd like to share? Something that stands out from the years.

Val: Some good games my girls played, things like that. I enjoyed the two sports – tennis and netball. Never took golf up. They have the golf course right the back of us! I just like to be mobile all the time.

Q: What brought you to Kiama?

Val: Well, we used to live up in Blacktown, and then I had five children. And we bought a nice van and we'd come down at Easter and stop at the Blowhole Caravan Park in Kiama. That was the caravan park then – at the Blowhole. And we'd have a good time, so we thought we'd come down at the Christmas holidays.

So every year, we'd bring the caravan down. We bought a nice big van and had it updated and as soon as school broke up, we'd bring the van down, have it down for six weeks, take it back before school would go back, and Maurie would go back to work in Sydney. So, we'd spend all the school holidays down here. We loved it.

And we went into Minnamurra one day, my daughter was out with one of her friends, father's friends, and they were in Minnamurra. The highway used to come straight past Minnamurra, so you didn't stop there. But one day, we went looking for her, and it was a perfect day. And if you've ever been to Minnamurra on a perfect day, it's beautiful! And the next day, I said, "I'm going to live here one day."

Maurie liked it, too, so we went looking for somewhere to live – looking at land and the houses. So, we ended up buying the block of land that we're on. But we nearly sold it. We couldn't move down then because our four oldest ones were still in high school, and we didn't want to interrupt their high school.

So, when the last one finished, I said to Maurie, "We have to do something now because we're going to be stuck up there." So, we started building down here. It was the best thing we'd ever done! I loved the river. Right up near the mouth. It's beautiful! I *lived* in the river! I used to live in that river. So much so, that they used to call me "The River Lady!" I even got a letter once addressed to the "River Lady!" I'd swim in it, and I had a little boat. And I'd be fishing there every day. So, they all got to know me. It was nice. It was great! It was a lovely time.

Q: So, you made a good choice.

Val: It was the best choice *ever*. It's handy to everything. We're handy to the train. We're handy to the water. And it was handy to the school when our grandson was going to school. He was riding his bike every day to school. And my other grandson – I used to look after him when he was little. He went to Minnamurra school. They lived in Shellharbour, but they got permission for him to go to Minnamurra school because I was his carer. It was a lovely school. It's a beautiful spot for kids. Great spot. It's quiet. You can ride your bike anywhere down there. So nice. Safe.

Where Geoffrey lives, that's my grandson who's living with me. He's been down here since the schools closed the year before last. He came down. When I knew that Musselbrook was going to close down, I said to his father, also named Geoff, I said, "Why don't you bring him down here? He can bring his home-schooling down here." Because I knew that both parents worked. So, they brought him down that night and he's been here ever since! (laughing)

It's a great life for him because up there, they're right on the highway, so he can't ride his bike. It's busy there. So, he's at home at present because in the holidays he goes up for a week, and he was supposed to go on a cruise with us. But he wants to stay up there, and not go. Because his dad is teaching him how to drive an excavator. He wants to be an excavator driver! (laughing)

Q: That's like your husband was!

Val: Yes. Well Geoff has always been in that line of work. So, he's still up there. So, we're going on a cruise without him. We're going on an eight-day cruise down to Tasmania. We were booked on a really long cruise that was going to South America and through the Panama, which I would have loved. But it was cancelled the last two years. So, this is just

credits that we had. So, we thought we'd use them. And we had to try to fit them in with schooling. It will be nice and relaxing.

I'm disappointed that my grandson is not coming with us. But I understand that it's good for him to be with his dad. He and his dad are very close.

Q: It's beautiful these things that you're sharing with me. Well, you know, I'm a pianist. This is an interesting question: Is there any music, song or piece that's special to you. Any music that you especially love?

Val: I love any singalong music. I do like those ones that singalong. I've got a few people that I really like. Max Bygraves. I'll sing along. The modern ones I don't have time for. But I play a lot of music at home. I play it really loud. I have to shut my house up, so the neighbours don't hear it!

Q: What song or singer do you like?

Val: I like Max Bygraves. I like Al Jolson. I would have loved to have seen him in real life. He was a complete entertainer. Just those songs that you can sing along to.

Q: I can relate to that. I do the same thing! Music is my life.

Val: And I love Mark Vincent. He's one that sings "The Holy City" and Christmas carols. I have a lot of his records. I have a big collection of records. I've played them a long time. Yesterday, I thought I must get that player out and play those old records, the really ancient ones!

Q: You clearly love music.

Val: I do! That's the sort of stuff that I like. Something that makes you feel good.

Q: That's what music does – it changes us, our moods. I see it all the time.

Val: I feel that if I haven't got something going on, I'm living in a morgue! (laughing) I'm going to be there soon enough. I said that to my daughter the other day! But, no, it's good.

Q: Thank you, Val. What a beautiful conversation with you. I'm delighted and grateful to you for speaking with me.

Val: I've had a good life. I always think, I've had a really good life. I've enjoyed it. I wouldn't change anything. I'm just sorry that I lost Maurie so early. He's always been very supportive and that's what helped me. If he wasn't, I couldn't do it.

Q: Isn't that something. I have a very dear friend who's 97, and she said to me, because she knows my gift in music. She said to me, "Jessica, you've come to this Earth with a gift. And the person has to appreciate it." So, I'm hearing her voice and advice to me when you share how much that support has meant to you in your life.

Val: Good on you!

Q: You know when you're tracking together.

Val: Yes, that's it. That's good.

I didn't start travelling on until I was old! (laughing). Maurie never used to go. He used to go four-wheel driving with the boys around Australia. I never minded him going because he was with the kids. Then I started travelling with my son probably about ten years back, twelve years back. Cruises and everything. Good trips! He and his family, his kids. He takes his kids away a lot, his grandkids. And they always ask me if I want to go.

These days it's hard – I can't keep up with them. And it's not fair. But we've done some really good trips and good cruises. This one coming up will probably be the last one with them. On that last one we did, I really knocked my leg up. I was playing table tennis and I stretched too far and tore my hamstring. Then I was going to Japan with Steve, and the kids and grandkids, and I went to the physio and they said, you should be alright to go. But all the walking and that. I'd come home and could hardly move my leg. He said, "It wasn't ready to go." All the muscles went on strike!

Q: That's why you have a cane.

Val: Yes, that's why I have a cane. I can't walk easily without it. Sadly. When I was young, all you could get were these cheap sand shoes. They were cheap and nasty. But you couldn't get any others. There wasn't even Dunlop when I started.

Q: And good shoes make a big difference.

Val: They do. My feet are full of arthritis. But they get me around, so that's the main thing!

Q: I hope that I'll see you again.

Val: I hope so, too!

Q: It's a delight to meet you, Val! I love hearing your story! This is an unusual way to meet someone, but it's perfect!

Val: Thank you so much!

Q: Maybe some time I'll come and play the piano for you and everyone.

Val: That would be lovely!

END



Jessica Roemischer and Val Brunker

Acknowledgements:

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