

From the Archives of South Maroubra Surf Club.

Part 3: Good and bad sharks plus early struggles to maintain patrols.

By Bob Wurth.

Following the initial flush of success in establishing South Maroubra Surf Club from 1959, over the following few years the club fell on hard times. The season 1960-61, saw a slowdown of activities in the club, 'especially in competition and general enthusiasm', as the second annual report stated. Members felt 'burnout' after building their own clubhouse. Some initial patrols could muster only five members. By the 1962-63 season additional facilities had been added to the club, including a private barbecue area on the club's northern side and a boatshed. But it was still difficult to muster trained patrol members. Club captain Ross Milne in 1963 wrote: "Patrols are still not 100 per cent, but they are improving. I know it's hard when there's not a large membership and the patrols are fairly frequent, but I'm sure the membership will increase and our task will be easier this coming season." The total number of patrolmen was a mere 24. Juniors and cadets made up the bulk of some patrols. The 1963-64 annual report stated: "Membership this year has increased, mainly due to the influx of cadet and junior members." And then a shark came swimming in between the flags causing concern for Ross Milne (below left), Frank Gidley (right) and everyone else on the beach.



TWO RISK LIFE TO KILL SHARK

DAILY TELEGRAPH, 4/3/1963.

Two lifesavers risked their lives yesterday when they stabbed and battered to death an eight-foot grey nurse shark off South Maroubra Beach.

The lifesavers waded waist-deep into the surf to kill the shark.

One stabbed the thrashing shark with a harpoon and the other battered it with a piece of wood.

About 30 people fled the surf as the shark—which was trapped in a channel near the beach—swam towards them.

The shark was seen about 4.30 p.m. about 20 yards from the beach.

Frank Gidley, 21, of Malabar Road, Maroubra, and Brian Chenhall, 26, of Franklin Street, Malabar, who were on a double surf ski, gave the alarm.

Gidley said later: "We fell off our ski as a wave overturned it."

"I think Brian and I saw the shark at the same time."

"We probably broke some sort of a record getting back on to the ski."

"We paddled flat out back to the beach and told the beach inspector, Joe Pearson."

About 10 swimmers and 20 surfboard riders scram-

bled from the water when Pearson sounded the shark alarm siren.

The captain of South Maroubra Surf Club, 21-year-old Ross Milne, grabbed a steel harpoon from the clubhouse and ran to the beach.

Another surfer, Peter Barron, 17, of Marine Parade, Maroubra, armed himself with a piece of timber, and waded out with Milne to the channel.

Milne said: "We were about waist-deep when we reached the shark."

"Peter bashed the shark with the piece of wood while I stabbed it with the harpoon."

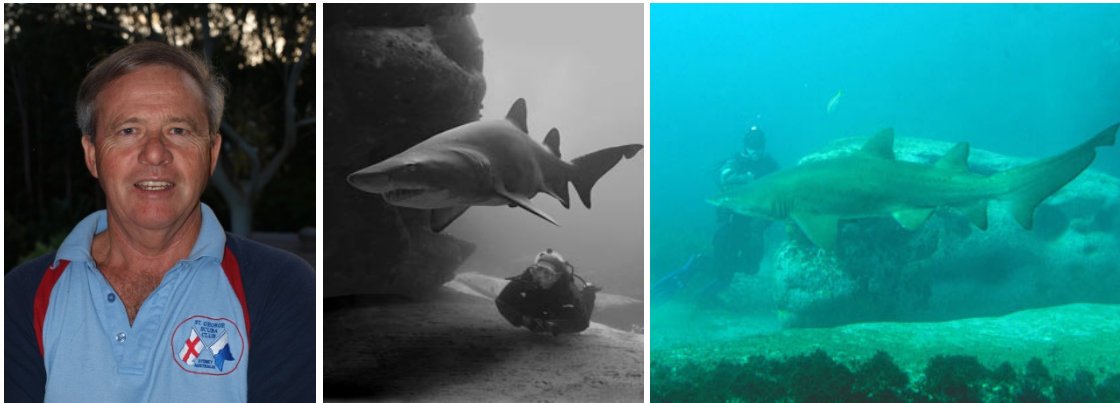
"The shark bit the end off the three-by-two piece of timber."

"I kept spearing the shark until it stopped fighting."

"We were in water only knee-deep by the time we had killed the shark."

Mr. Pearson said the swimmers and surfboard riders has been in great danger of being attacked.

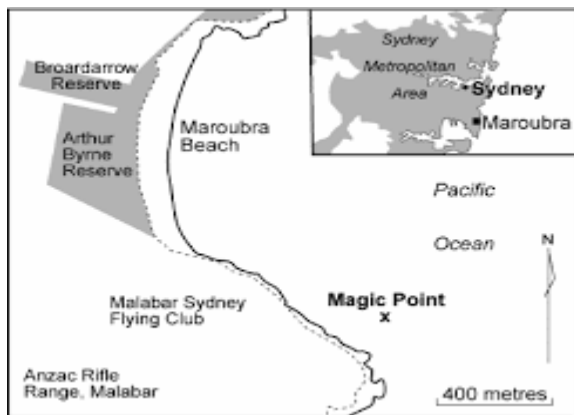
"The shark was full of fight when the boys began to hit it," he said.



Surf club member and diver Michael McFadyen and grey nurse sharks off Magic Point, South Maroubra.

On patrol that day and I looked up to see a shark coming in towards shore between the swimmers who hadn't noticed they had unwelcomed company. I raced up to the clubhouse and activated the shark alarm on the club's roof. Ross Milne raced in and grabbed the blunt shark spear hanging on the wall. Ross soon was up to his knees in the surf trying to kill the shark, but it took time because the blunt spear, never before used in anger, was bouncing off. Young Peter Barron belted the shark with a lump of timber. Soon the press arrived on the beach. What we didn't know in 1963 was that the water off Magic Point, near the tip of the southern headland at South Maroubra, was the home and breeding ground of the gentle grey nurse shark. Regrettably grey nurse sharks were killed in their hundreds by divers in the 'fifties and 'sixties using power head spears. Around the year 2000 grey nurse sharks were discovered in two caves in a rock wall about 30 metres apart at around 16 metres depth some 100 metres out from the headland and about 750 metres off South Maroubra beach.

Michael McFadyen was a youngster in South Maroubra Surf Club: 'I became a junior surf club member with some school friends. This was a great time'. Years later Michael learned about the grey nurse sharks off Magic Point: "Not being a spearfisherman - I can't stand the taste of fish! – at first I didn't often swim down below the surface more than ten feet. As I got older I spent more time at the beach." He loved to body surf, but soon diving became his passion: "I think back before the sixties the site off Magic Point near the southern point was probably a grey nurse shark aggregation site where they gathered, but it certainly was not by the late 1980s when I first dived out there. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the pioneer spearfishers and scuba divers found a new 'sport' that promoted their 'bravery'. This was the killing of sharks using power head guns. We now know that these sharks were grey nurse sharks, a totally benign and harmless species and it didn't take much bravado to kill these slow moving fish." The grey nurse sharks now are protected by law and their numbers are slowly increasing at Magic Point. Pity we didn't know how gentle they were in 1963.



The location of the protected grey nurse caves off Magic Point and (right) Lady Bay, Warrnambool, Victoria



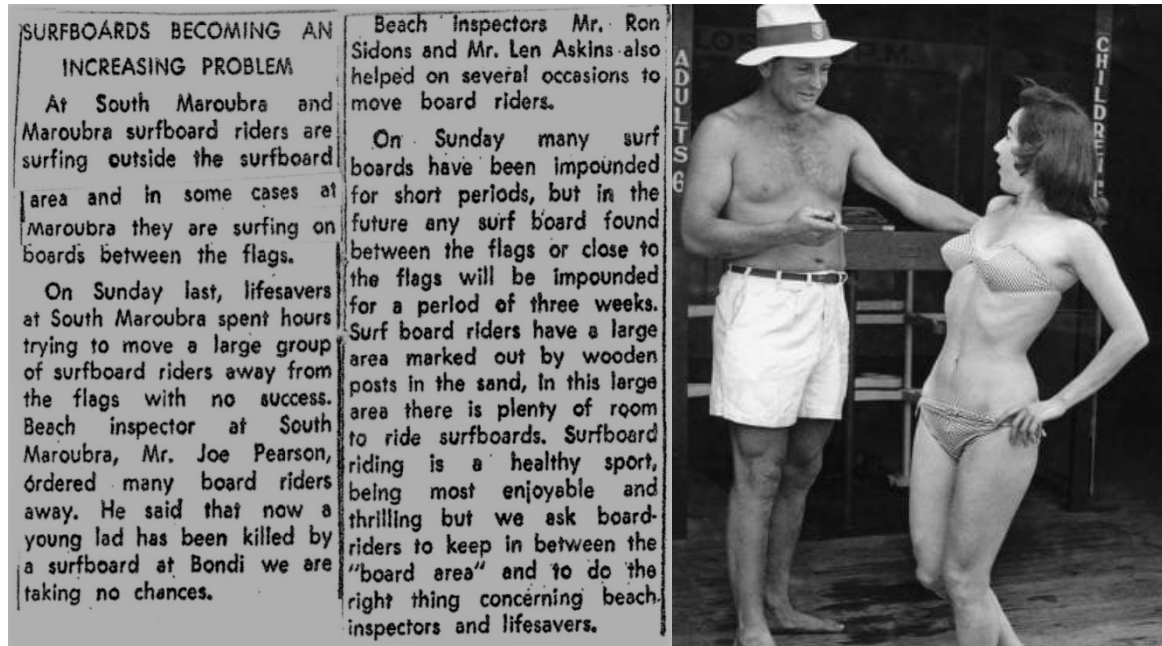
South Maroubra founding members Ken 'Spud' Murphy and John Ludlow were present in March 1961 when a shark attack occurred at Lady Bay, Warrnambool (*picture above right*). The lads were in Victoria returning from the Australian surf titles in South Australia. When they arrived at Warrnambool local surf club members were taking part in a swim in the bay. John and Ken were present when a local club member, Ken Smith, 21, was attacked by a shark and brought to the beach on a skiff, as John recalled: "Spud and I waded into water to help carry him up the beach. The shark had attacked him from the side in the stomach, hip and buttocks areas where he had plenty of flesh. We carried him out of the water and up onto shore. Something I will never forget as I walked beside him was carrying his intestines in the palms of my hands. They marvellously put him back together at the Warrnambool hospital and he survived."

One astounding figure from the 1962-63 season was the total of 158 recorded rescues at South Maroubra, comprising 65 with surf line, 87 without surf line and six using other gear. A further 20 surfers were given first aid. Membership received a boost with a swag of new cadets and juniors joining the club in the following 1963-64 season, bringing the total of active youngsters, cadets and juniors, to 34. In the following season, 1963-64, there were 142 rescues and the annual report starkly revealed the dangerous condition of the summer surf: 'During the rush and desperation that took place in the Boxing Day rescues, a squad of juniors stood on patrol in waist deep water literally for hours, holding back a mass of surfers eager to sample the surf... when they did this they had just completed a morning of frantic rescues and line work, but still there was no complaint.'



The early sixties was a difficult time for surf lifesaving clubs with the introduction of the large Malibu surfboard (*right*), initially made from heavy balsa wood with no leg ropes.

Our surf club welcomed Malibu board riders like Max Murphy, brother of Ken, an early club captain. Board riding became a great, inexpensive sport. But soon some boardriders began riding between the flags and that started a bitter conflict and caused numerous injuries in the surf.



The surfboard problem (above) in The Messenger newspaper, February 1963. Right photo, Maroubra beach inspector Keith Willmott checks bikini sizes in the late fifties. But in the early sixties the issue of Malibu boards being ridden between the flags plagued lifesavers and Maroubra beach inspectors, especially Ron Siddons and Len Haskins, who occasionally encountered violence when attempting to confiscate wayward surfboards.



Bruce White with a very big early Malibu board, 1964. Right, foundation gathering of Maroubra Surfers' Association, 1963.

Because of the worsening issue involving board riders on one side and swimmers on the other, Randwick Council appointed all surf club patrol captains in the municipality as honorary beach inspectors, each complete with a 'beach inspector' hat band and a certificate of office. Handing the Council paraphernalia out on the beach, our club captain Ross Milne wisely warned: "Don't ever let me catch you wearing that band on a hat!" His warning no doubt was an attempt to prevent violence

against his members. But patrol members copped plenty of abuse as they tried to wave boardriders away from swimmers or confiscate boards. But beach inspectors fared much worse, with one hulk of a boardrider trying to punch Len Haskins as he was marched all the way from South Maroubra to the Maroubra dressing pavilion. In the 1964-65 season Randwick Council called a 'war conference' to discuss the surfboard issue. John Dynan and the writer represented the South Maroubra club. Alderman Evan Hughes was indignant at the actions of the beach inspectors and surf lifesavers. His son was a boardrider. There had been many injuries to swimmers from out of control surfboards and our then first aid officer Barry Gobbe and others were always kept busy. On a number of occasions swimmers had to be taken by ambulance to hospital with nasty wounds, often to the head. Another significant problem was ongoing vandalism against the fibro clubhouse (*pictured below*) in 1965. As The Messenger local newspaper reported: "Vandalism is still the greatest enemy in trying to improve the amenities of South Maroubra Surf Club, the retiring secretary, Dave Duffy, said." They wrecked the club's telephone, smashed windows, lockers and fittings. The club had appointed a caretaker resident member, but he couldn't be at the club all the time. "I sometimes wonder what enjoyment people get out of destroying equipment that other people have worked so hard for" Duffy said.



By 1965 John Dynan (*right*), a paper merchant, had become president of the surf club. JD or 'Have a Chat' was an excellent mentor to the young office bearers in the club, although his often repeated saying 'Now hasten slowly boys!' drove young guys crazy. The urgency now was all about building a large new brick clubhouse, especially as the number of senior and junior active members in the 1964-65 season had grown to a record 64 and they were needed with 116 rescues that season. John Dynan had a vision, not just for a big new clubhouse, but for the development of whole of the South Maroubra beachfront. At this stage the big old swamp behind the fibro clubhouse slowly was being filled in. JD told Randwick Council of his vision in a letter: "When the tip at South Maroubra is completed adequate parking facilities for beachgoers is of paramount important... (This) could become one of the nicest beach areas if Council foresight is used. On the area known as Byrne Reserve, Council could construct the badly needed car park as well as picnic areas, complete with all facilities. This area could undoubtedly become one of the best beach areas in Sydney." And so it is.

Younger members began taking over the reins from the Fifty Niners. JD would challenge the younger fellows to take on more responsibility. He listened to us and we'd argue, but he was constantly urging us to go further in life generally. Even at his favourite pub - the 'Dugout' at Maroubra Junction - after the surf club talk diminished, JD would quiz the fellows on all manner of subjects and he was the fellow we went to when we had problems and needed an ear. JD loved the sun and beach. In later years he contracted a melanoma on his chest and tragically he died from it.