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Jodie Cooper's first love was skateboarding.

And with a bunch of other kids in her hometown of Albany, Western Australia, she helped raise money to build the first skate park in Australia, the Snake Run.

But once Jodie discovered surfing as a teenager, she fell in love with the whole scene and she really loved being better than the guys she was riding waves next to.

Jodie turned pro at 19 and became a trailblazer in all kinds of ways.

She was the first woman to regularly brave the big waves in South Africa and Hawaii and went on to win 13 major championship events.

She loved most of life on the pro surfing tour, except for the buffets.

Hi, Jodie.

Yeah, hi.

So you grew up, as I say, on the southwestern most point of Australia.

What was it like being a kid at Albany in the 60s and 70s?

It was absolutely awesome.

We were absolute ratbags.

You know, having that open space back in the 70s, you know, we all had a lot of room to move.

We had, you know, there wasn't a lot of rules and regulations back in those days.

So, yeah, it was a real sense of freedom being brought up in a coastal country town in southwestern Australia.

What's the landscape look like?

Beautiful.

It's a really stunning place.

Some of the best beaches in the world, white sand beaches, beautiful, huge granite headlands, a lot of open space, a lot of beaches that face different directions.

Back in the day, it was a sort of like a wheat sheep kind of town.

And yeah, there was just lots of room to move and a lot of places to hide and get up to mischief.

That was pretty cool.

A bit like Huckleberry, Huckleberry Finn sort of style.

Who were your main partners in crime when you were getting up to that?

Probably my two older brothers and, you know, the different gangs we used to hang out with.

Gangs saying their term, they were like little kid gangs, you know, it was like fighting over who had the best kind of packet of biscuits or something like that.

You know, who got the cream biscuits or who had the dry nieces or something.

But yeah, it was great.

It was just the local kids who lived in the street or my cousins.

How did your family expand in 1975?

I was brought up with two brothers and one sister.

And then when we were older, my parents decided to adopt.

And so they went down that pathway.

And of course, 75 was the end of the Vietnam War.

So they decided to adopt a war orphan.

And so my little sister came in a shoebox when she was nine days old.

And she was on one of the last planes that left Saigon before it all was taken over.

So, yeah, it was pretty exciting for us.
Amazing. Yeah, it's a big decision for your mum and dad to take.
Yeah, well, I suppose so.
I think I've always been a big family and mum's always been a professional mother.
I've always described her.
And, you know, she just loves kids and dads love kids too.
And I just think they wanted to, you know, they were financially stable.
And they probably felt there was room enough for more.
And so they thought, well, let's get a little orphan.
How big a part did sport play in your life at school, Jodi?
You know, sport played an absolute huge part in my life.
It just I was addicted to sport, hyperactive.
Like I just I came from a sporty family.
Hand eye coordination for me was something that just came naturally.
So I suppose I just excelled in it.
And even even as a young girl, I used to can play cricket in the playground
so against the guys and kick the footy.
And like did you get pushback from from other kids around that being a girl?
I wasn't very girly like put it that way.
So like I said, I was kind of brought up by my two older brothers,
my two brothers, I had a younger sister.
And then when she was born, my mum just handbooked me over to my
I was brought up by two brothers and I just got punched and kicked
and locked in cupboards and, you know, totally picked on a, you know,
brother abuse for years.
And so to keep up with them, they were four and five years older than me.
And I was, you know, like when I was five, they were nine and 10.
So, man, I had to like really learn quick and keep up.
Otherwise, I was left behind.
So I just learnt really fast.
You were keen on AFL as a kid.
What did your mum think about that?
Yeah, well, I was like I said, I loved every sport.
And I used to go to football every weekend with my dad and my brothers
played football and my dad was a really good football player.
And, you know, we'd all go to the footy on Sundays and watching play
and have the cars parked facing the ovals.
And I remember I was just a footy addict.
And I used to kick all the, you know, at half time and quarter time,
you run on the field and you kick the footy.
And I used to boot the ball as good as the blokes.
And I wanted to play AFL football.
This is back in the 70s, you know?
And that was just when my mum put a foot down and said my dad's name's Peter.

And she was just like, Peter, that's it.

If she's not playing football and she's not allowed in the men's club rooms.

Because I always used to want to go into the men's club rooms at half time

and like I couldn't work out why I wasn't allowed in there.

It was pretty funny.

Something very exciting was built in Albany when you were a kid.

How did the snake run start?

Yeah, really interesting.

You know, of course, the snake run was the first skate park ever built in the Southern Hemisphere and it was in a little old Albany, you know, not in a city like Sydney or Melbourne or something like that.

But it started from this really cool dude, this really cool guy called Jim Macaulay, who he was an older guy.

But, you know, thinking back, he probably was only 40.

And we all thought he was this old dude.

Anyway, he had a couple of sons and they were sporty.

And oh, Jim Macaulay, really cool guy.

He was right into Little Athletics.

And I used to go away with him because I used to be in Little Athletics as a kid.

And he was just a real true champion for kids and like getting kids into sport and stuff.

And, you know, it was in that era where skateboarding just really skyrocketed.

And it was like this cult cross between surfing and skating.

It was this real cult and, you know, companies like Coca-Cola advertising and things like that, using it as their campaign.

And, you know, I suppose there's so many kids just riding in the roads, riding in the streets.

And this is back in the day where we didn't have a lot of ready-mixed streets that were all made of this really weird bitumen that had rocks in it.

So we all were all like getting...

It's a bumpy ride.

We were losing a lot of skin left, right and centre.

It was a bumpy ride.

And anyway, he just came up with this whole concept that we're starting to raise money to build a skate park.

And that's what we did.

And we all did our little bit to do that.

As you say, if it's the first skate park, I mean, you wouldn't have even seen a skate park before.

Exactly. It was bizarre.

It's like, you know, it's so true.

It was like we'd had seen it in America.

And, you know, in that stage, people were riding, breaking into people's places and, you know, skating swimming pools and stuff like that.

And all those skate parks were in America.

And even in Australia, like, people were riding car parks and stuff like that.

That was a skate park.

You try and find some shopping mall or some car park that's got an angle or something to it.

And, yeah, that's where kids would skate.

So how did you go about raising money?

Lots of different ways, really.

Lots of sort of different fundraisers.

But one I can remember that I played a part, which is really hilarious.

We had these funny little markets that we'd run in this old sort of building.

And the markets, we had a Flurry Floss machine.

And they put me in control of the Flurry Floss machine.

That's like putting an alcoholic in it, Dan Murphy's, looking after the, you know, the supply.

So you were just spitting that sugar all day long.

Yeah, it was a really old, ridgy, didgy one.

And it was like an old washing machine that span around.

And you had a stick.

And, yeah, I probably ate more than I sold.

And I'd go home ping-pong off the walls, probably.

But, yeah, so we sold Flurry Floss on the end of this big stick.

And it was a win-win.

It was a win-win.

Well, somehow, despite your best efforts, you did make enough money to eventually open this skate park, the Snake Run.

What do you remember about the day it opened?

Oh, absolutely fantastic memories.

Look, I spent my whole life up at that skate park.

I look back at pictures of myself and, man, I was this skinny little twig, little brown leg thing.

I used to have to, like, pretty much skateboard 10Ks to get to the skate park.

What do you mean?

Well, I lived, like, 10Ks out of town.

And my mum was home doing her thing.

And I'd either ride my bike or I'd skateboard the whole way there.

And then I'd skateboard all day.

And then I'd skateboard home.

So, yeah, it was crazy.

I spent all my life up there.

Just obsessed, you know, with it.

Absolutely loved it.

And, you know, it was a great kind of, like, social thing.

You know, all the older boys would go and not many girls skateboarded at all.

I think my cousin, who lived across the road, she would come over every now and then.

And we used to do a little bit of skateboarding together.

But it was 99% blokes and me.

And where did you get your first board from?

Do you remember?

I remember stealing my brother's skateboard years ago.
You know, it was the old Surfer Sam sort of thing.
And the wheels were, like, rock hard.
If you hit a boondi, you'd go head over heels and, you know, fly over the handlebars.
But then these polyurethane, I think, wheels came in, which were a lot softer.
And I think Mum and Dad just bought me a skateboard.
And it had the, like, the plastic deck that was kind of, like, had a lot of flex into it.
But interesting enough, and I always say to Dad,
mate, this is one year, let go.
But he started making, he made me a skateboard deck that was curved.
This is before anyone was doing curved skateboard decks.
And he got the idea because he was making his own skis.
So he'd get plywood and glue them together in a mould.
And then I remember one day, he goes,
I can make you a skateboard with a little kick on the back if you want.
And I was like, yeah.
And he made it for me and he moulded it with a little kick.
And then he put some sandpaper on it, which was like, oh, my God, you know.
And I think now that we could be billionaires...
I don't know, you'd be on the air of this.
Exactly.
Skating family fortune.
Exactly.
This is in the 70s.
So...
And I...
Damn it.
Well, it could have been, Jodie.
So you're so into skating, other kinds of sport.
How did you first start surfing?
Well, it was kind of like that progression because I hung around skaters.
And a lot of the guys, they all surfed, you know, it was that really crossover.
And a lot of them were a lot older than me.
And my brothers started getting into surfing.
And to me, the image just looks so cool.
Like it just looked like not a sport, but a lifestyle.
And back in those days, all the hottest guys were surfers.
You know, let's face it.
They all had blonde, bleached hair.
And I don't know, it just looked really intriguing.
Your hormones led you to the waves.
It started to.
It did, it did.
I don't know.

What are waves like in that part of Australia?

It's pretty powerful.

Pretty crazy.

Like the main town, there's no surf in the main town.

There's one beach.

In fact, they're actually building an artificial reef there now because of the fact that we've got heaps of swell, but it doesn't have any shape.

So I kind of grew up surfing six foot dumpers.

So I really learned at a young age how to get flogged.

You know, there'd be like, you know, four of my cousins, my brothers, sitting on one of those giant tractor tyres, just getting heaved over the falls on a six foot closeout.

And so I just sort of learned the basic skills of rips and, you know, learning to be confident in the local town.

But a lot of the beaches were sort of out of town, like 10 to 20 Ks out of town.

So it was really hard to get to all our local beaches.

So luckily, my brother, we get on really well, I'm born on the same day as one of my eldest brothers, and he's five years older than me, but we're on the same birthdays.

But he took me surfing to start with.

So he'd drive you out.

Yeah.

Well, he went and the mum sort of basically blackmailed him that he had to take me, you know, so he had his driver's license.

So I sort of just tagged along with him and then, and then, you know, and then I sort of, when I was 16 and a half, I had a boyfriend, I wonder about my parents sometimes.

My boyfriend was 20, so and he had his driver's license.

And they were cool with that.

Where they were so cool.

Yeah.

And so that was good.

So and he was going to uni when I was like 16, 16 and a half, when I first learned to really get into it.

And he was on obviously summer holidays because uni had stopped and I was on school holidays because I was doing about do year 11.

And yeah.

So we went surfing for two months every day.

So it was brilliant.

And the skateboarding that you'd done, Jodi, like

does that develop certain skills or a kind of fearlessness that you can transfer on to water?

Look, to be honest, it's it isn't really different because skateboarding, you've got a variable that doesn't move.

But you're sure, you know, hand-eye coordination, balance, yeah, definitely.

There is a crossover there for sure that it helps.

And the skate, skate park and skate ramps, you are coming down vertical surfaces.

It can hurt a lot more if you're sort of riding a hard surface.

But, you know, surfing is probably one of the most hardest things you'll ever do.

Like it's people like I've seen Olympic athletes, you know, all sorts of, you know, people who have tried to surf and it takes a month to be able to do it.

And which part?

Which is the hardest bit to track?

It's just that it's the unpredictable.

It's the ocean, you know, like nothing is the same.

No two waves are alike.

There's rips, there's currents, there's an energy pushing you in towards the beach.

You've got to try and paddle out, slaps you around the ears.

Then you've got to try and balance on a surfboard.

I mean, it really is it's got so many elements to it.

But the good thing is like, you know, a lot of people that do it, like I remember just flapping about in the white water and just loving it, even though I was getting pounded and just I couldn't get out the back.

I still loved it.

And that's why people keep going with it.

You know, it's what were you loving while you're there in the water?

It's weird, isn't it?

Just the challenge of it.

And then when you get one, even if you're surfing the white water and you stand up, it's that it's just the most amazing feeling when you're just riding on top of water.

It's epic.

Well, there are many other girls out there when you start.

No, I was the only girl surfer in my whole town.

And I sort of didn't really see another girl surfer for quite some time.

I knew I knew there was a couple kind of in Perth and maybe one in Margaret River, which is about a five hour drive away.

But we were very we were as rare as hands teeth.

You know, there was probably five of us in the whole state of Western Australia.

So it was really very rare and especially in my hometown.

Yeah, I was the only girl that served.

And how did the guys who were surfing react to you?

You know, the guys were insane.

I was so lucky, like such beautiful guys.

Like I have nothing but, you know, oh, good thoughts.

And, you know, they were so encouraging.

They're always they'd always pick me up and take me.

You know, there was a time where I was at high school and I didn't have much money and they'd always pay for petrol and, you know, and they always supported me.

And like when I was learning, if it was too big, they'd say, no, no, no,

you've got to stay in the white ward.
It's too big for you out here.
And and then the days where it was a bit smaller, they'd encourage me to come out
and say, come on, come on, paddle, paddle.
And, you know, like whenever waves were coming, they'd say, your wave, go, go, go.
So, you know, they were incredible.
You know, I just can't thank them enough.
As as was my hometown was with my surfing.
I always thought if I ever won a lot, I'd go home and I don't have a big party
and invite them all fill the the snake run.
Yeah, exactly.
Surf movies were were such a big thing in in that era.
Did you get the chance to see any of them and imagine what surfing
might be like outside of Albany?
Look, it was so rare.
Like, you know, we'd have we didn't have a have a cinema in Albany.
We had drive-ins, you know, so we'd all go to the drive-in,
which was pretty classic. We all love that.
And but, you know, so we had a big town hall and then maybe.
Twice a year, you know, there'd be a guy taking a surf movie around the country.
You know, it'd be like like the Leyland Brothers version, but it was a surfy guy,
you know, and he just take it from town to town.
And man, that was the best.
It was just like Christmas, you know, like we'd all all we'd all be frothing
and and all the surfers would come from hundreds of miles to go to this town hall.
And we'd all be, I don't know, hilarious, you know, and it was just such an amazing event.
And that's the only time we really got to see what, you know, our idols were doing.
There was a couple of there was a surf mag magazine, tracks magazine kind of thing.
But other than that, we never got to see it.
What was the kind of atmosphere like in that town hall?
There was lollies being pinged left, right in the centre.
You get to get hit in the back of the head with not a not a fan tower
because they were too valued, but like an old, like mint, I don't know, mint leaf or, you know,
one of those cheap lollies that you got the bottom of your lolly back.
It was pretty raucous, actually.
And it was so good because it was this really, you know, diverse, you know, there was a lot of
there was the old guys, you know, the older tier of guys.
And then there was like the probably the 20 year olds.
And then there was like the full, you know, younger, like myself, you know,
he was probably 16, 16 and a half.
And so it was a real crossover.
And then, you know, we'd have a half time intermission and we'd all
bolt down to the local lolly shop.
And yet they'd get smashed.

They'd have to have eyes in the back of their heads, you know, with it.
So once you finished high school, where did you head first off with your surfboard?
Well, a lot of I decided by the end of high school that I was going to be pro surfer.
That was it. There's just no way I wasn't.
So I kind of decided to
travel around Australia for a year because, you know, being from Western Australia,
this is back before internet back before.
I mean, we all thought we lived in another country in Western Australia.
Like, you know, this is back when, you know, everyone had their type of beer.
Like everyone had, I mean, I didn't even see an avocado.
I'd never seen a mango and avocado.
So we always wondered what the hell happened on the East Coast, you know?
So it was a real common thing for
like Western Australians when they're young to travel around Australia or go to the East Coast.
And it was just one of those pilgrimages that we all did, you know?
So I did it with a mate of mine and I needed to get out of town.
I was kind of just sick of that small town mentality.
I just felt like I needed to see what was going on out in the big bad world.
So yeah, I traveled around Australia.
Well, I didn't get all the way around.
I got to Nusa as far as the wet weather surf stop.
Then that was it.
And then turned around and came back.
What's the attitude to surfing or girls surfing different on the East Coast?
Yeah, I really, I really felt that was like it was like that year of like puberty,
blues kind of thing.
And I never really got that because I was like, wow, like, what's that all about
until I hit the East Coast?
And mostly, to be honest, in the big cities, you know, in the country,
it was fine because guys had probably never.
And by that stage, I was a really good surfer.
So, you know, I could really hold my own.
And a lot of guys have probably never seen a girl that could surf that well
because we were very dispersed minimally throughout even the East Coast.
And most girls that surfed surfed in cities.
And so when you're here to country area and they saw that you could surf,
they were pretty flabbergasted, actually.
They were like, wow, that must have been a great feeling.
Yeah, that she conserved.
So they were pretty cool.
It wasn't until you got to like Sydney or the Gold Coast or sort of those sorts
of places that you I discovered that full misogynist, you know, male chauvinism
that really shocked me, actually, because it was just I wasn't used to that.
I was used to the exact opposite.

So it was a real kind of eye opener for me.
You say you knew already that you wanted to be a pro surfer.
Who gave you advice about turning pro?
Well, at the start, no one, really.
I just was one of those kids that went, right, I'm just I'm just going to make this happen.
It's just got to happen.
I don't know what I've got to do, but I'm just going to invent it.
But, you know, I pan barrage was always my idol.
Like I remember, I think we're at we're a very similar age.
I think I might even be a year older than Pam, actually.
And I had the full fan, you know, she was like my idol.
Like I remember because there wasn't a lot in the media about women surfing.
And even at a news agency, when you picked up a surf magazine,
it was extremely rare to see any information.
But pan barrage at the time was, you know, Australia's little favorite icon.
Like, and I remember seeing an article of her in Australian Women's Weekly.
And that was made it.
Oh, my gosh, she has made it all right.
And I just was just like so in awe of that of that girl.
And I thought, I want to be just like Pam Burridge.
The funny thing was, is when I travel around Australia, I stopped in.
I went to a couple of amateur events and did well in them
and then met some Sidneyites and then went to Sydney.
And then I hung and they sort of adopted me.
It was really cute.
They took me in under their wing and let me sleep on the couch.
And, you know, I went surfing with them.
And then they were they and, of course, Pam Burridge lived in Manley.
And that's where my mates were that I met.
And I was like, do you know Pam Burridge?
And they're like, yeah, yeah, we surfed Pam all the time.
She's a mate. And anyway, I got to meet her.
And oh, my God, I was just like one of the highlights of my life.
And then we ended up becoming really good mates, actually.
And so I really, because she was on the tour at the time, she was still very young.
And so I just picked her brain about it.
And then I continued on around Australia and I started venturing
in a lot of the amateur events back in those days, amateur and professional
were really separate. You had to either be amateur or professional.
And if you went in a professional event, you couldn't go back.
And then I just looked at it and thought, well, this is pretty stupid.
Why would I be amateur?
Because if I'm going to win an event, I might also be professional
and make money out of it. So I kind of left all that.

Did you do some fundraising back in Albany?

I did, actually.

Well, that's when I decided to sort of go home

after a year and gather the money together and then back on the fairy floss machine.

No, that was I hung up my flurry floss machine boots.

I did pretty much everything else, though.

Everything from I worked in a fish canning factory for a while and hated that.

And I anyway, I got out of that.

And then we did a lot of fundraising.

We used to have like these surf event, local surf event.

Really grass roots.

Like, you know, like I think I'm sure I'm allowed to say it.

But I think a few of the bloke's smoke joints behind the sand dunes back in the day.

Shocking me. This is not what I imagined at the surf.

Oh, no, no, no.

And it was really just a fun thing.

You know, we'd all be out there and we'd have a little back in those days.

There weren't a lot of four drives and my may have a four drive

and my auntie would be selling cups of hot soup and Milo and she'd bake cakes

and, you know, of course, they'd have the munchies and they'd eat everything.

And then we'd have these surf events.

And then we'd ended up we'd have what we used to call a rage.

So it was just a party in a in a hall, which was out of town

because then we couldn't get in trouble.

We could all sleep in our panel vans and our cars.

And the local community would donate things like a meat pack

or the pub would donate a couple of kegs and a local band would play.

And we'd have these great big shindigs or these rages

and, you know, it'd be five bucks to get in and you get a meat pack.

And so we did things like that.

And then we also did like lambs and drives.

And we, you know, pretty much barricade the footpath and, you know,

make them buy the lambs and so a lot of fundraising like that.

And also, you know, my uncle and aunties gave me money

and then the actual town itself gave me some money.

So, you know, like I said, I just cannot thank the people of Albany enough.

You know, they were so cool.

Broadcast.

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So, Jodie, after you had raised all your money in Albany,

you headed off to start surfing overseas.

What was life like on the tour when you started out?

Like, where were you staying?

Pretty much on anyone's couch that would allow me.

Yeah, I did a lot of couch surfing.

The great thing was, like, this is back before the whole Paul Hogan put a shrimp on the barbie campaign.

And like, Americans absolutely loved Australians.

Me and Pam would be in California.

We'd just be sitting in a cafe, eating breakfast.

And I can't tell you how many times

like the waitresses would come over and say,

those people over in that table have just paid for your breakfast.

And we'd be like, what?

And they would just say, oh, my God, we just love your accent.

You know, we'd be like, I'd have conversations with people for 15 minutes and they'd say, at the end of it, so do you speak English?

And that's a true story.

Like, I mean, I've got a really heavy Aussie accent, obviously.

But back in those days, it really had an Aussie twang, hey.

And just crazy.

It was so funny.

You had this incredible trajectory once you turned pro.

You were voted rookie of the year.

And then within two years were ranked number two in the world.

Yeah, it was awesome.

I mean, I came out of the blocks pretty fast.

Like, I qualified to make the main events in my first year.

I think I nearly won the world title in my second year.

So that was a pretty big thing.

You know, it was a big step up.

Were you able to be friends with the women you surfed with?

Or were you competitors?

Like, was there too much rivalry to be close?

I had my mates, for example, Pam Murrige was my good mate, but we had the most healthiest full-on rivalry.

Once you get in that water, man, that hooder goes, it's just eat or be eaten, get out of the way.

But, you know, and on tour, you had some friends on tour.

And there are other competitors that you're kind of, you know, it's just natural in life.

It's like workforce.

You like some people more than others.

And some people you don't really like, you know?

What about the organisers of the tour?

I mean, how supportive were they of women's events back then?

You know, if anyone hasn't seen the movie Girls Can't Surf, go see it because it'll give you a good indication of what it was like.

Pretty hard.

Out of a whole pile of Ningongs, there was, or buff heads, as we call them, there was a handful of really cool guys who were in the sport promoting surfing that really could see the positiveness of promoting women's surfing.

So they all weren't idiots.

So that was great, but the majority of them, yeah, they really didn't throw us a crumb at all.

So it was really difficult.

We were thrown out in the worst conditions.

And we'll just kind of use as fodder to fill the gaps.

And, you know, they didn't see the potential of women's surfing.

And, yeah, it was really, really hard.

So you were kind of the side show to the main event.

Yeah, we were the side show.

And we were allowed to be there if we shut up.

Basically, if you just shut up, do what you're told.

Paddle out there when the wind turns on shore.

Don't squawk too much.

Don't fucking flap your wings.

You know, you'll have a position here.

If you start yapping on too much, we'll pull the pin and you won't be allowed to even come.

So.

It's only a couple of years ago that prize money was made equal between men and women.

That certainly wasn't the case when you were competing.

No, no, no, no, not at all.

Yeah, it's only been a recent thing.

It's only been the last, what, probably five or six years, five years maybe, that that happened.

I mean, obviously, as the years went on, that that gap was smaller and getting smaller.

But definitely in the 80s and 90s, it was huge, the gap.

Tell me about your first big win then in America.

What did you do with the money that you started to make from surfing? Oh, my God, my first big win.

That was, I'll never forget that, 1985.

There I was, wall to the back, back to the wall, I should say.

Huntington Pro was, you know, the IP Pro,
that was like winning the Wimbledon.
That was on par.
It was like one of the biggest events
you could win in surfing.
I kind of went from rags to riches.
I literally, no lie, probably had about five bucks,
Australian bucks, which is probably \$2.50 American
in my pocket.
And I won it.
I won a car and I won \$4,000 US dollars.
And that was like, like when the dollar was probably
59 cents the dollar.
So I was just like, yeah, it was insane.
What did you do with the money?
Well, I sold the car because I didn't live in America.
And then my dad called me up and he goes,
this is really good block of land, buy this block of land.
Thanks, dad.
I was the best he ever did, yeah.
You made the mistake about the skateboard,
but he was right on, exactly, with the real estate.
This is the good old days when you could buy block of land
for 8,000 bucks.
So I did that.
And then I used the rest to get to the next contest.
So did success change life on tour for you?
Were you now kind of famous, Jodi, in the surf world?
I think that event did change things.
And I think that was a real big event for me
because it was that confidence booster.
And it sort of, you know, made me realise
I'm as good as the rest and I can do this.
And it was, so it was really, really cool.
And yeah, I think it just definitely put me
on stage, winning a big event like that.
And how did that suit you, your personality?
Yeah, it suited me right to the ground.
I wanted to wear that suit the rest of my life.
I think I look good in that suit.
Yeah, I mean, you know, of course I wanted to be the best surfer
I could possibly be.
I wanted to be the best in the world.
But, you know, I was a middle child.

I wanted to be, I wanted lots of praise.
Best revenge for a middle child ever.
Yeah, like I need a lot of attention.
I was lost in that family.
No, I wasn't.
Yeah, of course, you know, I loved what came with it.
I've been lucky that I've come from a beautiful family
that instilled great morals within me.
And I, you know, I always had that thing
where I'd never want fame or anything like that
to go to my head.
So I kind of didn't want to become an idiot
or anything like that.
But I definitely, I liked what fame,
a little bit of fame brought you.
It got you out of a long queue
and got you to front line a few of the times, you know?
You had the sweet spot of fame.
It sounds like free stuff, jumping head at the queue,
but no nightmares.
Exactly, not too many.
I had a few when I lived in Bondi,
which I did for quite a period of time
in the highlight of my career.
Yeah, it got a little bit funky.
Like kids, it sort of nicked my t-shirts off the line
because they knew where I lived
and they'd push their faces up against my window
where they found out where I lived a little bit.
But, you know, it was a really good learning aspect for me
because I kind of learnt a lot how the world worked
and how the media played with things.
Everything that you read is not necessarily true.
When you were surfing on the tour,
what were your favourite places?
Where did you love competing?
Let's see, well, different places for different reasons,
like I really love going to Southern France.
Like, my God, that place is paradise.
We all loved it.
Kilometres of beaches with beautiful beach breaks,
gorgeous climates, the obvious, the wine, the baguettes,
everything, the food.
And back in those days, hardly any surfers.

So I loved Southern France.
I loved Hawaii, obviously,
because of the power and the quality of the waves.
You know, I loved going anywhere
that had a good quality wave.
Those huge waves in Hawaii are one of the things
that you became so well-known for surfing.
Those waves that are called the most dangerous in the world.
Why do you want to surf something like that?
Well, good point.
A lot of people have asked me that question.
A lot of people have shaken their head.
I think being from Western Australia,
and it's super powerful,
like there's some places in WA that are on par with Hawaii
with the power,
I think I was brought up in a lot of powerful surf.
So my style of surfing really got better
when I was in more powerful surf.
That's one point.
Second point is, in Hawaii, where we were in Oahu,
it's a small little rock in the middle of the Pacific Ocean,
and it's within a two-kilometer radius.
There's 15 to 20 well-class surf breaks.
And in that era of where it was really hard
for a woman's surfer to get any acknowledgement
or, you know, pats on the back from any of the pro surfers
or anyone,
the one aspect where you could was,
if you could surf well in big waves,
you kind of got some prestige from them.
You know, they'd say, wow, that chicks really good.
That really strove me to want to do really well in big waves.
Would you have to psych yourself up to go out into them?
Like if you're there on the shore or paddling out,
and you see these massive things,
what's going through your head?
Well, yeah, yeah, for sure.
But, you know, let's put it this way.
Like, you don't just wake up one day and go,
I'm going to paddle out and surf 10-foot sunset.
You progress to these things.
And it's one of those things,
you either like it and do it or you don't.

And there was a lot of well-champion surfers,
male and female,
that hated surfing the big waves in Hawaii
because they, you know, had a fear of it.
And I don't blame them because it's really scary.
And I think for myself, I just,
I don't know, I just kind of taught myself
how to deal with that fear.
Taught myself how to block it out.
I trained for it.
I, you know, I used to paddle out on the really big days
and maybe say, oh, it's huge.
And if I'd say to myself, I'm just going to go out
and I'll sit in the channel.
And if I get one wave, that's great.
And so I just would work my way up to it, you know?
And that's sort of how I did it.
When you're catching or riding a wave like that, Jodi,
what's going through your head?
Like, do you have time to think
or is it all over in a second?
I think you've got to do all the work beforehand.
Like you've got to be,
got to be able to hold your breath for a while.
You've got to be physically fit.
You've got to have the right equipment.
And the thing is with riding big waves
is he who hesitates fails or is lost
because you've got to commit.
And then once you've committed, you just go
because you have that split second.
Oh, I don't know about this.
That's when you get in trouble when you'll go over the falls
or you'll hesitate.
You've just got to back yourself and then just give it 200%.
And what the next thing you know, you're up on the beach.
It's all over.
Well, hopefully.
Give me one pace.
Plenty of times I did it
and I just cartwheeled down a 10 foot wave
and got absolutely annihilated and come up spluttering.
Did you have time and space for relationships
when you were on the tour?

I did, not at the start,
when I was probably about 23.
And then I was with my partner for 10 years
throughout my whole career.
And were you able to be open about dating other women back then?
No, no.
So that was another really huge thing
that I went through in the prime of my career,
which was really hard to deal with.
And that was another thing I had to balance,
trying to win a world title.
And then, you know,
realizing that I was probably gay,
you know, I've been with men before that, boyfriends.
But, you know, I just kind of thought,
nah, something's not quite right.
But I kind of felt that I was drawn towards women.
And so that was a pretty big thing for me
to have to deal with.
Because, you know, you've got to deal with it yourself.
And then obviously act upon it.
It was, yeah, very, very not well accepted at all.
So it was sort of hidden at the start.
Then I met my partner
and I decided that things had to change
because I couldn't live a lie anymore.
It was that.
But then what happened was,
I left my diary by accident one day
in one of my fellow surfers rooms and they read it.
And then that's kind of how they found out.
And then they kind of used it to,
not blackmail me, but kind of, you know,
then I decided, you know what,
I'm just going to come out
because I'd rather be free.
And I wanted to come out
because I wanted to make a difference.
And I wanted to show the world
that we're all not a bunch of freaks.
We're just normal people.
Was the stress of that part of what made you want
to leave the circuit?
Yeah, definitely.

Yeah, for sure.
I just got sick of being around
such a closed-minded bunch of people, basically.
Even though it's only been the last sort of 10 or so years,
it's really gone gangbusters with acceptance, really,
to be honest.
You know, like everything when it came
to finding sponsorship,
and it was just like, oh, you know,
it was really difficult because you were that gay girl.
And, you know, people stereotype you.
And, you know, I had people saying
that I was a man-hater.
All these ridiculous things
where men are just so important in my life.
I absolutely adore them, you know?
And they're like some of my best mates, guys.
So there's a lot of all that stereotype stuff
that I just got sick of, yeah.
There still must have been a really big decision
to walk away, because I can't imagine
there were very clear pathways for women surfers
once they left the circuit.
Yeah, so true.
Like, it was literally like when I left pro surfing,
it was like hitting a brick wall,
doing 60Ks kind of thing, you know?
I knew I needed to leave it because I wasn't happy.
To be honest, surfing was probably my first ever love,
true love, like deep love.
And I was addicted to it.
I loved it with everything, everything.
And I kind of got to a place in my life
where I just wasn't even loving surfing anymore.
I fell out of love with it.
And that really saddened me.
It really made me sad.
So I thought, go, why be unhappy?
You know, go find something else that makes you happy.
So I probably left it too early, really,
when I think about it,
because I was still like in the top six,
I think I was in the world.
And then, yeah, when I left pro surfing,

there was nothing, there was no life raft, you know?
So what did you find yourself doing at first?
I actually went on the doll for about three months
just to find out,
because I had rent to pay and everything like that.
I mean, you know, I worked in cocktail bars.
I was, you know, a couple of friends had nightclubs.
So I worked, you know, making cocktails
and pulling beers and all that sort of stuff.
And when I was on the doll, unemployed,
there was all these different courses we could do.
And I went to this course where it was a,
it was a bushy regeneration and landscaping course.
And there was this awesome woman that took her.
She's still a friend to this day.
And she was just teaching a bunch of us, you know,
how to pull weeds out and identify the different species.
And I really loved it.
And then at the end of it,
she told me that the council were looking for some people
if they wanted to start up a little gardening business.
And if you had a flyer,
that they would put it in their council letter drop box,
because their idea was to keep elderly people
in their homes.
So one of the services is odd jobs and gardening.
And out of like 30 people,
I was the only one that pulled my finger out
and I've still got the flyer to this day.
It's pretty cute.
But Jodie Cooper will come and cut your lawn.
Yeah, exactly.
And pull weeds out.
And I was living in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.
So there was a lot of real cross-section of people.
A lot of people who fled the World War II,
the prison camps and stuff like that.
It was unreal.
Like, I loved it.
And I formed some relationships there
who were dear friends
and I were good friends of them until I went to their funeral.
I formed some great bonds.
You know, some of them became so close.

Like, you know, like I was their daughter kind of thing.
And yeah, it was awesome.
You'd been an athlete all your life,
but how did gardening do you in physically?
Well, I ventured into just not just pulling out weeds.
I got a little old lawn mower
and then I couldn't really afford a ute.
But then I had an old Valiant S series car
and the boot's the size of most vehicles today.
So lugging my mower in and out the back of the boot
and just I think picking up the lawn mower
and twisting and putting it in the boot,
I ended up doing my back like a really bad.
And then I kept gardening on top of it.
And I was always born a kind of strong, really strong person.
My dad's renowned for being super strong.
And I took after him and so I'd be picking up big,
big boulders and doing really stupid stuff.
So anyway, I ended up herding,
adding the discs in my lower back
and I had to have back surgery.
So I stopped surfing for three years,
which was a very big thing in my life.
It's not about a surf.
And I was sort of hobbling around in denial,
thinking it'll get better, it'll get better.
But then it did it.
And I started taking painkillers like lollies.
And then I met this really cool doctor and he goes,
you know what, I'm not gonna prescribe you any more of these.
You're gonna go and get a CT scan.
And that was probably the best thing that ever happened to me
because straight away they could see
that I had done some serious damage to my lower back.
And there was no sort of question.
I was one of those candidates that had to have an operation.
So I had the operation and it was the best thing I ever did.
It went well.
Yeah, it was a miracle.
It was unbelievable.
So three years away from surfing,
how did you start finding your way back into the water?
Just slowly.
And it was like a challenge for me.

It was like, what?
What do you mean?
I can't surf.
I'll prove you wrong.
So it took me three months and I was back in the water,
just surfing straight.
I couldn't do any turns.
For months, I wasn't even allowed to lift anything
above my waist.
I wasn't allowed to put dishes up in a high cupboard
or anything like that.
So once again, it was really another real big challenging
part of my life.
It was another part of your life where you felt like life
came along and hit you over the head with a big lump of wood
and said, you know, give that a crack right now.
Get up from that one.
So I just sort of dusted myself off and just started slowly.
And yeah, it just worked my way back at it.
And it was unreal.
Because by the time when I got, when I healed and I got back,
I was surfing better than I ever was.
So it was awesome.
How often do you think about sharks when you're out in the ocean?
I try not to think about them.
Thank you very much.
I blocked them out of my head.
Well, what happened one day when you were surfing out
on your home break?
Yeah, well, a few years ago, I've forgotten how long ago.
It'll be a while now.
Probably about 12 years ago, I think.
I got nipped by a small shark out front of my place
at South Island Beach.
Nipped with shark.
That's not the though that I'm used to.
I know, well, I can say nipped because that's the wrong word.
I didn't lose my hand, you know?
Like just a few gashes.
I was surfing out front of my house.
It was an absolute beautiful day, middle of the day.
So it wasn't on dusk or dawn or anything like that.
And a mate of mine was out from California.
And we'd been surfing all morning.

And the wind came on, Sean.
I thought, you know, I'm going to go in, but that it was so lovely.
And he's used to surfing such crappy conditions.
I thought, no, I'll stay out.
So we stayed out for about another 45 minutes.
And then I just finished the wave.
And I was in the section of the ocean where there's like a gutter.
It's like a deep section where the wave finishes.
But you kind of haven't hit the shore.
And I just lied down on my board and put my left hand in
to take the first stroke.
And then I felt this.
Obviously, the shark came from underneath me
and just glitched onto my hand and just yanked me off my board
and bit into my hand.
And then I mean, I knew what it was straight away.
And because I didn't even see it, I didn't even see the attack.
And it was just like they say, you know, it came in from underneath.
But I pulled my hand out.
My hand was all puffed up like a football and it was bleeding.
And then my friend looked across and I was screaming, shark, shark.
So he saw it and he saw it swim away.
So look, I was just really lucky.
It was only a small shark.
It was probably three to four foot or something like that, he reckons.
So, you know, it was just a baby shark, which I'm not bragging.
And this is one time I'm happy to have no bragging rights
about how big the shark was.
Small as possible, a smaller shark you got.
But, you know, it was really terrifying.
It was probably one of the most terrifying things
that I've ever happened to me.
It was, yeah, really scary.
Did it knock your confidence about going back in?
Yeah, it did, it did.
It certainly floored me for a bit.
But once again, it was another one of those things that's happened
that I went, OK, here we go.
You've got to get back in the water.
So literally, with a rubber glove on my hand,
because I had it on my hand down, he stuck.
Within that week, I went back down, I went swimming,
and I got back in the water as quickly as I can
to just sort of get over it.

You said before, Judi, that by the time you'd come to the end of your time on the tour, it sort of felt like you were falling out of love with surfing. Are you back in love? Are you infatuated again with this thing? Oh, 600%. Yeah, I'm like a gromit again. Yeah, well, gromit, I love it. It's just, it's a part of my life. It's just, if I don't have surfing, you know, like, look, I can go days or weeks without surfing if I have to, you know, because of some sort of situation or whatever. That's fine, but if I can surf every day, I love that. It's a part of my life that I just have to incorporate in my life because it's, people think surfing is a sport. It's just so much more than that. That's why you're seeing so many people take up surfing because it's your best mate. It's like you're, it's like doing yoga. It's meditative, you know, you meditate while you're waiting for a wave. It's your social hour. Like I go surfing and you meet people, you have a little chat out there while you're waiting and you don't even know them. It's got so many elements to it, you know, and then there's the fun factor. You surround them by nature and then you're in the ocean, the salt water, it's got all those minerals. So, yeah, it's just, you talk to my surfers, if you don't go for a surf for a while, you become a cranky bitch. Like, or a cranky bastard. Bullfet. Or a bullfet, yeah. It's just, it's so good for you. You were back over on the West Coast surfing not too long ago. What happened? Who did you run into on the waves over there? It's the second year I've done this. Last year, I went back and went up north, West Australia, up around the Ningaloo Reef area

with my sister and my nephew and my nephew's partner
and they surf and we camped for three months up there.
Three months?

Yes.

Wow.

It's just absolute paradise.

Anyway, we did it again this year
and I was up there and I was surfing out
this cool little spot and there was about, you know,
15 of us out there and sitting out the back
and we were having conversation
because it wasn't really big or consistent.
So a lot of time for chit-chat.
I caught a wave and I noticed there was this little grommet
on the inside, this young girl,
and she was surfing and then I thought,
how cool, because she was ripping
and I was thinking, wow, she's awesome.
And I got this wave and I was paddling back out
and then from about 30 meters away,
I heard this little voice like,
with this funny little creaky voice.
Excuse me, are you Judy Cooper?
Like that and I was just like, I looked across
and I went, yeah.
She goes, you're my favorite server.
I'm probably doing the worst voice.
You'll hear this and go, why don't you stay like that?
Anyway, and then I'm going, really?
And she goes, I recognize your voice.
Ah, voice to voice.
She goes, yeah, she goes,
you're my most favorite surf movie.
And I go, oh, what's that?
And she goes, girls can't surf like that.
And she goes, I've seen it 103 times.
And I just pissed my pants laughing at her.
I was just like, no way.
And I was going, no way.
And anyway, we just become mates.
We just surf with each other and then I'd get a wave
and I did like this cut back and she was in front of me
and I sprayed her and then she paddled over to her dad
and he goes, I just got sprayed by Judy Cooper.

It was so cool.
And then she went in and then I was like,
oh my God, where'd she go?
I've got to meet this girl, you know?
I was totally fanning over her because she was so funny.
She was such a little grommet and she was just ribbing.
And I think she's like 11, right?
And her parents were out surfing with her.
And then I came in onto the beach and I said to my mate,
did you see where that little girl went?
And she goes, I think she went up to the car park.
So I grabbed my phone and I was running up the beach.
So I wanted a photo with her, you know?
As I was running up, she come running down the beach
with a mum and we just met.
And I'm like, can I have a photo with you?
And do you mind if I put you on my Instagram?
She's like, oh, can I have a photo with you?
So anyway, we had photos together and swapped
and we follow each other on Instagram now.
Her name's Ruby, she's awesome.
That's such a cool story.
Jodi, I've loved talking to you.
You're as good as a swim in the ocean.
Thanks so much for being a guest on Conversation.
Thank you very much.
Thanks for having me.
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