

## MY SPORTY COURTSHIP

Love can be a slippery slope but for me it was perfect



Our wedding had everyone jumping for joy

# Love's WILD RIDE



## I never expected to find my soul mate in the surf

When I was a teenager, my mother Vicki gave me some sound advice.

"Chase after your dreams with all of your heart," she said. "And if you look over your shoulder, and there's someone keeping up with you, then maybe they're worth considering."

It had been five years since I'd had someone special in my life trying to keep up with me.

After growing up in the country, I'd graduated from university and moved to the Sutherland Shire, NSW, to take a job in sales.

I loved to surf, so I'd spend most of my spare time catching waves at Cronulla Beach. I'd also found happiness in a local church where I'd made some great friends.

One day I spotted a new face in the congregation. He was tanned, athletic and his piercing blue eyes were staring right at me.

After the service, he came over with my friend Chris and introduced himself as Paul.

"I've never seen you here before," I said with a smile.

"That's because I've never been," Paul replied. "Chris brought me along."

Paul and I got chatting and I learned that he loved surfing, too. In fact, he embraced any kind of boarding, including skateboarding, wakeboarding and snowboarding.

I was impressed when he told me he'd been a professional snowboarder in Europe for seven years, before an accident led him to start coaching young

pro snowboarders instead.

Paul lived in Cronulla, too, so we spent the next few months hanging out and surfing.

We shared a passion for sports and adventure and both longed to help people less fortunate than ourselves. We'd talk for ages about our longing to help children in Third World countries.

It was great to have a friend I could be completely open and honest with, and gradually

I began to wonder if I might be falling for Paul.

During our regular surf one Friday morning, I noticed Paul seemed a bit quiet. I was about to catch a wave when he paddled over, looking nervous.

"Um, Sal, would you want to go out to dinner?" he asked.

"I'd love to," I replied.

Our relationship changed pretty fast after that and soon we were inseparable. When we weren't surfing we'd be doing boot camp-style exercise or training for triathlons.

We even jumped together off a 15m bridge and did

a mission trek through Indonesia.

Our mates nicknamed us "The extreme couple".

"Do you two ever rest?" they'd tease.

Then on the day of our first anniversary, Paul showed up at my office at 3pm, carrying our skateboards.

"I won't be finished for a few hours," I told him.

"No, you can finish early today," he said. "Don't worry: I cleared it with your boss."

Gobsmacked, I followed him

Everyone gasped when I surfed down to the aisle

out of the office, hopped on my skateboard and rode alongside him to the train station.

I was thrilled when he told me we were going to the airport. He was whisking me off to Tasmania for the weekend. He'd even packed me a bag!

"You're just full of surprises, aren't you?" I said.

"This is nothing!" Paul replied cryptically.

The next day was magical as Paul showed me around Tassie. He'd lived there as a kid and had always wanted to play tour guide with me.

I was overwhelmed on day two when Paul surprised me again with a beautiful gourmet picnic overlooking Waterfall Bay.

After our feast, he made his most surprising move of all.

"Will you marry me?" Paul asked, presenting me with a gorgeous diamond ring.

"Of course!" I said, jumping straight into his arms.

We spent the rest of the weekend excitedly discussing wedding plans. We wanted to tie the knot somewhere that defined us as a couple.

Eventually, we settled on the sand dunes at Cronulla.

I couldn't wait to tell my parents the news.

"The sand dunes?" my dad Steve spluttered.

"It's the perfect location for us," I replied.

"Oh, while you're at it, why don't you hang-glide in, or sandboard down the dune?" Dad joked.

I knew he was only teasing me, but it wasn't a bad idea.

Nine months later, Paul and I invited our 200 guests to meet us at the sand dunes.

Everyone gasped and shrieked with delight when I surfed down to the aisle in my white strapless gown.

Paul had surprised them all by boarding down in his suit earlier, too.

"It was the best way to get me to the aisle," I said, laughing.

The ceremony was perfect and afterwards we moved on to the Cronulla RSL Club, overlooking the beach, for a surf-themed reception.

As Paul and I took to the dance floor for our bridal waltz set to Brooke Fraser's *There's Something in the Water*, I couldn't believe how my passion for surfing had led me to find love.

Today, Paul and I are happily settled in Cronulla, still surfing, boarding and exercising.

We're also working on building a not-for-profit surf retreat in Indonesia that will create education and employment opportunities, as well as providing financial assistance for the local children's home.

I can't help but smile when I think back to Mum's advice about finding someone who could keep up with me. Nobody

doubts that I've found that person in Paul. In fact, I'm usually the one who's paddling at double speed, trying to catch up with him!

Sally McMahon, 29, Cronulla, NSW.



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