

Love affair with pools makes for summer's bestseller

Author **Therese Spruhan** reading by the pool



It seems everywhere you went during our hot smoky summer, you'd see at least one person reading the *Memory Pool*, Therese Spruhan's collection of stories about Australians' relationships with the swimming pool.

Spruhan interviewed a wide selection of famous and not so famous Australians, from popular author Trent Dalton, filmmaker Leah Purcell, Olympic champion Shane Gould, iconic actor Bryan Brown and funny man Merrick Watts, to less well-known but equally interesting Aussie characters.

They detail their experiences with swimming pools in their childhoods and how that impacted their Australian experience, and prepared them for later life. Spruhan then wrote their stories in the first person so their voices can come through strongly.

For many kids the local public pool or a neighbour's backyard pool is where they passed those halcyon summer days. This delightful, nostalgic anthology brings together reflections and recollections about the swimming pools of childhood from a range of Australians of diverse ages and backgrounds and is evocative, funny and sometimes bittersweet.

Youth in the pool

Below are some quotes from some of the stories.

"Paul Kelly has this beautiful song called Deeper Water and it's one of the greatest songs about coming of age. My coming of age happened at Sandgate swimming pool with me going into deeper water constantly."

Author Trent Dalton

"Right from the start I loved swimming. I loved being in the water, mucking around and diving down deep, and I loved the feel of the water over my body."

Actor and producer Bryan Brown

"When I was a toddler I was already an official member of the Darwin Swimming Club based at Parap Pool – apparently ABC TV did a story on me as the youngest club member. Mum tells me I could swim before I could even walk."

Anthropologist Tess Lea

"We had intricate rules and regulations for each of these

games and we were always arguing whether one of us had broken a rule. With pool basketball you had to bounce the ball on the surface of the water while you were swimming; with pool tennis the rule was you had three seconds to get the ball and hit it back."

Former Tasmanian premier, David Bartlett

We set up our committee of five girls aged between nine and 12, we didn't really have much idea of how much we had to raise.

Lily Sisa, who as a primary schoolgirl started to raise the funds to build Lightning Ridge pool.

"Mum was very loving but Dad was a difficult man. He didn't drink for a long time, then he busted badly. When he'd been drinking and there was trouble at home, we'd escape to the pool."

Former Queensland chief magistrate Diane Fingleton

"Swimming was part of the therapy I did for my cerebral palsy but I quite enjoyed it because water gave me more freedom than I had on land."

Paralympic champion Priya Cooper

"The Murgon Pool gave us freedom. We trusted the place. We relied on each other when we were there – all us kids from the five blackfella families in town."

Filmmaker and actor, Leah Purcell

The author

Therese Spruhan has a passion for swimming pools. She writes about them on her blog *Swimming Pool Stories* (swimmingpoolstories.com.au) and shares photos on Instagram @swimmingpoolstories. She has published articles on places to swim in the Weekend Australian and contributed words and photos to *The Pool*, Australia's exhibition at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, which was re-exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2017–18. She lives in Sydney. ■

The Memory Pool: Australian Stories of Summer, Sun and Swimming, is published by Newsouth Books and retails for \$29.99. To purchase the book go to your local bookstore, Booktopia.com.au, or go to splashmagazine.com.au for a QuickLink.