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## RIDING LIFE'S WAVE

# LAYNE BEACHLEY

## AUSTRALIA'S FAVOURITE GOLDEN GIRL IN HER MOST INTIMATE INTERVIEW EVER

Layne Beachley scoops a combination of six powdered vitamins into her berry smoothie – a disciplined routine she has committed to since her days fighting off chronic fatigue syndrome. While she whizzes the reddish-purple concoction, we admire the dozens of trophies proudly displayed in the lounge-room cabinet of her Curl Curl home, in Sydney.

After winning six world titles and beating Kelly Slater to be the most successful surfer of all time, plus receiving a host of awards – including the Laureus World Alternative Sports person of the Year, Australian Female Athlete of the Year and NSW Athlete of the Year – she's still eager to improve on her surfing, and there are still major events she's hungry to win. Layne relinquished her title to Peruvian Sofia Mulanovich late last year, and she admits being addressed as 'former world champion' feels kinda weird. Still, Layne's a battler. You may spot her smiling from billboards and posters on the back of buses, but there have been some pretty painful speedbumps on her road to surfing stardom.

Here, she snuggles up on the couch and opens up to *OK!* about dealing with death, her singing voice, and how with her boyfriend, INXS's Kirk Pengilly, it wasn't exactly love at first sight...

### Was it all 'Puberty Blues fetch-me-a-chiko-roll' stuff when you started surfing in the late '70s?

It was really hard. Guys are so threatened when a girl is confident – I was such a tenacious little rug-rat! Manly was divided by the storm-water pipe. I was from the southern end, so God forbid if I paddled past the Manly Pacific [hotel]. It taught me to give as good as I got. If they'd say, 'You're a girl – you're not meant to be out here,' I'd bite back, 'Well, what the hell are you doing out here then?' [Laughs.]

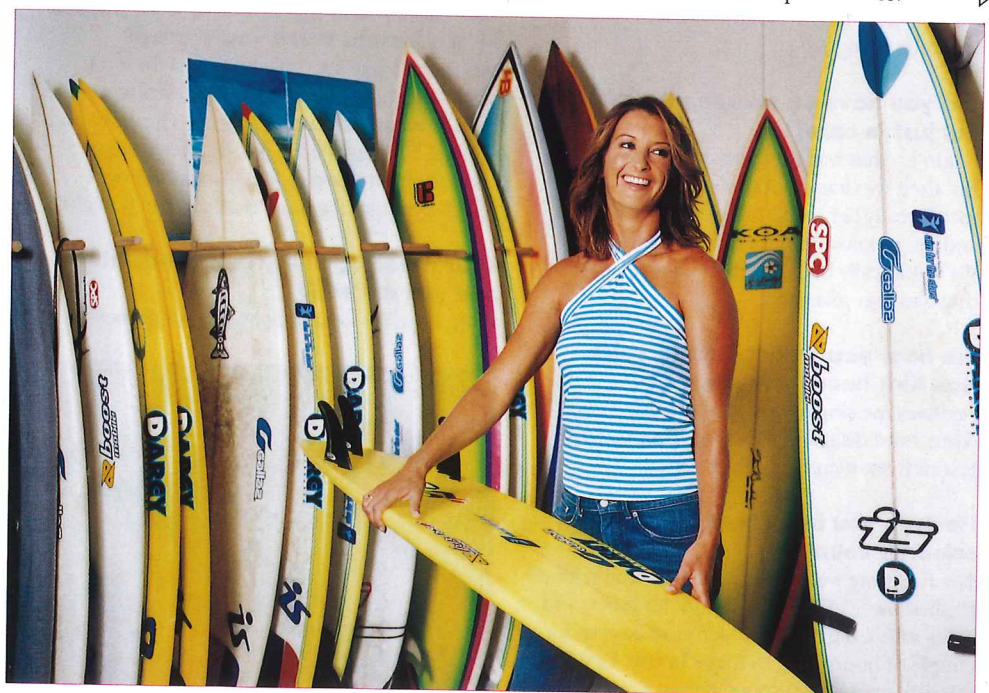
### Speaking of boys, what's Kirk Pengilly like as a boyfriend?

[Sighs.] He's really experienced, understanding. And he also brings a lot of nurturing, love and affection, and an ability to talk about absolutely anything.

**'I was such a tenacious little rug-rat!'**

### How did you get together?

Jon Stevens [from Noiseworks] said to me, 'You've gotta meet my mate, Kirk.' And I said, 'Oh, I don't want to!' [Laughs.] But I promised Jon I'd ask Kirk on a date. So we met at an INXS party, and it didn't go well... I went up and said, 'I'm Layne.' He said, 'It's nice to meet you,' and turned his back on me a couple of times!



CLOTHES: FACING PAGE, TOP BY BETTINA LIANO, JEANS BY MARCS BABY DOLL. THIS PAGE: TOP, LAYNE'S OWN

**Layne Beachley**



Statistically, Layne is the greatest surfer in history, with 26 World Championship Tour victories to her name. **Bottom:** Layne and boyfriend Kirk Pengilly of INXS



**Ha! How come?**

[Apparently] he was feeling nervous. I just thought he was downright rude! Eventually, he reluctantly gave me his number; so I rang him and took him tenpin bowling, then out to dinner at my friend's Italian restaurant. Halfway through I thought, this ain't working! [Laughs.]

**Did you have an escape plan worked out just in case?!**

I didn't – that was the problem! [Laughs.] But then we drank a bottle of Limoncello, which really lightened things up! We talked and got to know things about each other. We've basically been together ever since – that was two years ago.

**We hear you've got a good voice. Has Kirk heard you sing?**

He loves me singing and says I've got a good voice, but I disagree! He says, 'Can't you just be our front man?' [Laughs.]

**How do you feel about being a celebrity couple?**

The first time we got stalked by paparazzi kinda freaked me... We were in Bondi for lunch and a guy with a big telephoto lense stalked us for a couple of hours back to Kirk's house. I thought, this is bizarre – it's such a different world for me.

**'I promised Jon Stevens I'd ask Kirk out on a date!'**

**You rode the biggest wave ever surfed by a woman. Were you scared?**

Not really. I was mentally prepared for it – I basically prepared myself to drown! It was like a roller coaster: vroom... weeee! The wave had a barrel 10 metres wide and 10 metres high, and I thought [gasps], just keep standing! I remember thinking, I'm glad I'm alive! [Laughs.]

**Your autobiography is in production. Are you excited?**

Yeah, I am. It's been quite a painful process...



bringing up emotions and difficult times in my life. But it's been fun going through my diaries, remembering all the stuff I've done.

**Do you remember your reaction when you found out you were adopted?**

My brother tells me I went into my shell. There were times when I would lash out at my family unnecessarily and say, 'I'm not your blood!' That really hurt them, you know, so I learnt to deal with it. After Mum died, when I was six, I guess Dad thought it was time a couple of years later to tell me she wasn't my mother after all. When I'm confronted with really heavy emotional trauma I tend to remove myself from the world and try to figure out exactly how I feel.

**How did your mum's death affect you?**

I remember coming in and Dad telling me. I lay down on the bed, cried, then got up and went and played on my skateboard – I was too young to understand.

**Did you want to find your birth mum?**

I was starting to get a profile and kept getting asked questions about it. I was tired of not having the answers... I just wanted the answers myself. In about 1995, I applied for my original birth certificate. It said [my biological mother] was 17 when she gave birth to me.

**When she found you in '98, did she know who you were?**

No, 'cause she lived in California. She tracked me down on the Internet, and that's when she rang me up and just headed straight into it – 'I'm your mum, this is why I gave you up, here's your sister, Melissa...' I was so overwhelmed. I said, 'Listen, this is too much too soon.' And the relationship hasn't really developed into anything more.

**Even with all that's happened, you give back, though. Can you tell us about your Aim for the Stars Foundation?**

I started the foundation out of frustration at the lack of support I had. I wanted to quit [competing] because it started to be

**'I get so excited seeing a girl with a surfboard'**

a financial burden. We've given grants to all sorts of fantastic and amazing women. Last year this working mum, who went back to study to do a PhD or something, applied. She wrote a 60-page thesis by hand because she couldn't afford to buy a computer! I had an old one sitting here, so I sent it to her and she cried. Just that little bit of help makes such a difference.

**What kind of women inspire you?**

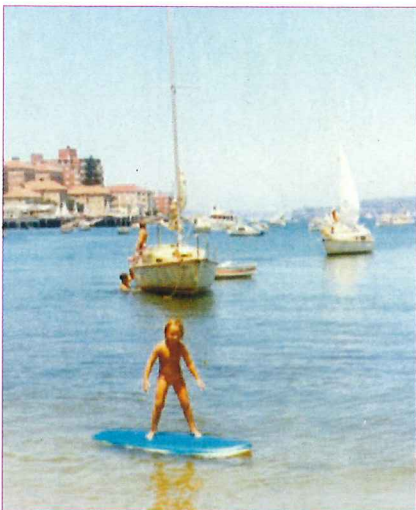
I'm inspired by people who stretch themselves. I wasn't born a world champion, I fought for everything and I've worked f\*\*king hard! I get so excited seeing a girl walking down the street with a surfboard under her arm.

**OK!**

*OK! star donation*

To thank Layne, OK! has made a donation to her Aim for the Stars Foundation, which 'offers support to applicants who have an ambition but need financial support to achieve it'. Go to [www.aimforthestars.com.au](http://www.aimforthestars.com.au)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE NEWLING @ VIVIENS  
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HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY LIZ JONES @ NAMES



**Above: Four-year-old Layne, ready to catch a wave on Sydney harbour!**

