Swimmer and Actor

ANNETTE KELLERMAN
(1886–1975)

Born in Sydney, Annette Kellerman received swimming lessons early to strengthen her weak legs. Few would have guessed it would lead to an amazing career! Annette went on to become a women's swimming and diving record holder. She also excelled as a long-distance swimmer—a sport women hadn't competed in before. She swam the Yarra, the Thames and the Seine (where she was the only female competitor and placed third)! Annette was also the first woman to attempt to swim the English Channel. She was a force to be reckoned with!

Instead of wearing the heavy, skirted swimsuits of the day, Annette wore a one-piece costume, which was more practical for swimming. Annette's outfit was controversial, though—in 1907 she was arrested in Boston for indecency. This scandal helped change society's attitude towards beach fashion—for the better. Soon, Annette's one-piece bathing suit was the accepted female attire for the beach and pool.

Annette, nicknamed the Australian Mermaid, moved on from swimming to become a vaudeville artist and a silent film star, appearing in over ten Hollywood films.

Being a savvy businesswoman as well as an advocate for health, fitness and positive body image, Annette opened health spas and a health-food store, created exercise techniques and wrote books on women's health, fitness and beauty.

Annette, thank you for pushing boundaries and inspiring us in the area of fitness and health. Your can-do attitude shows us anything is possible.

We won't forget the way you broke new ground.

ILLUSTRATION BY CATHIE GLASSBY