# Episode 17 - Nikki Mackintosh-v1.mp3

**John Pratt:** [00:00:05] Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's podcast. This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania. And before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respects to elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**John Pratt:** [00:00:47] If you've seen the title of this episode, you may not be surprised that today on This is Tas Police we're talking to a former Dolphin trainer. We often say Tasmania police officers come from all walks of life with diverse experiences behind them. So we thought it was about time we chatted to one of our officers about their life before policing and how they navigated the career change. In 2014, Constable Nikki Mackintosh decided it was time for something new. Swapping her blue-finned friends for a blue Tasmanian police uniform. Thanks for being here today, Nikki.

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:01:17] No worries.

**John Pratt:** [00:01:17] Before we get into your policing journey, can you tell us about your life as a dolphin trainer? How did that come about, and what was an average day for you like in that?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:01:25] I went to uni after I left school and studied marine science and obviously made a few friends there and they suggested coming over to Australia because I was originally from New Zealand for a working holiday on the Gold Coast with the aim to get a job at Sea World. It didn't start straight away in the animal area, I started out in food and bev so it wasn't just an easy path to work with the animals because it is quite a popular area to work in. So I started in animal care working with the seals, polar bears, penguins and obviously the dolphins as well. An average day would look something like a lot of cleaning. So a few hours of cleaning followed by food preparation for all the animals. So they are on a balanced diet, I suppose, of fish and other marine creatures. Then we'd go into a bit of training, do programs and education with the public tours, any shows that you're involved in, and followed by more cleaning. So at the end of the day, you'd go home smelling like fish.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:19] So you were actually in the tank doing the shows for the public?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:02:22] Yes.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:23] Did you have any great stories out of that? Things that went wrong, Interesting interactions.

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:02:27] Quite often the animals would misbehave and a major part of our role was to make it look like that was meant to happen. Smile and wave and try and make sure that everything calmed down and continue with the show as normal. We generally got away with that really well. No one knew what was going on except us.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:43] How long did you do that for?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:02:44] I was at Sea World for just over six years.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:46] And was there a fair bit of training that went with that to get into the dolphin training?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:02:51] It was a case of working your way around the different animals and gaining experience. Working with the dolphins was just a small part of what I did there, but it was probably considered the pinnacle of animal training for a lot of the public. It was kind of the best job in the world, which is a lot what a lot of people said to us. In reality, though, it did involve a lot of cleaning and a lot of behind the scenes things that was not so glamorous. So some people didn't stick around in the job for as long as you would imagine.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:22] So you just said that's basically the pinnacle of animal training, but you then look for something different. What did you then decide to join Tasmania Police?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:03:30] My partner and I wanted a lifestyle change, even though the work there was fun and it was quite good. We didn't really like the Gold Coast as a place to live. It's very commercial, very touristy and quite busy. I was interested in policing from a young age, but obviously went down a different path with the marine science and I thought it was a good time to have a look at policing again. And I did see that expressions of interest were open for Tasmania Police again. So I put one in and waited.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:59] And what was it like to transition from being a dolphin trainer to then joining Tasmania Police and coming to the academy?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:04:05] It was a completely new world. It was very eye-opening. It's much broader than the uniform police that you see driving around the streets or around town. So it was a real eye-opener to what policing involved in a much broader sense.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:19] And what were the biggest adjustments that you had to make moving from the Gold Coast training dolphins to then driving around the streets?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:04:26] Well, I think it was I realised that relatively early you just had to be prepared for anything. A lot of times, the information coming in from Radio Dispatch wasn't what you were going to go and have a look at. So you just really had to be prepared for anything and have a really open mind about what you might come across.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:42] So currently you're in helicopter operations. How did you progress from being a uniform officer through to working on the helicopters?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:04:49] I think it was a bit of good timing. After I graduated, I did the probationary period of a year and was quite interested in the search and rescue area prior to the helicopter. And after about two years of being in the police, the land search and rescue squad opened up positions for selection, and I was lucky enough to get one of those. That gave me a much better insight into what the helicopter operations section did and how to be involved in that. So I applied when that came around a couple of years following search and rescue and got in.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:24] Good timing.

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:05:24] Good timing. Yeah. I think my background with outdoor experience and that sort of thing probably helped as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:30] So in the Land Squad, any memorable jobs that you did whilst with them?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:05:34] Yeah, one of them was to go and search for a missing hiker up in one of the ranges around Lake Saint Clair. And that actually involved getting flown up there in the helicopter and was about to be put on the ground to start searching for them in quite bad weather. And we saw the person. So it was a job I probably didn't actually do, but it was a very memorable one just because of the circumstances and the nature of how he got found and brought out of the wilderness.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:02] And a satisfactory outcome.

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:06:03] Yeah, very much so.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:05] So how was the training to get into the helicopter operation side of things?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:06:09] It was extensive and I think coming from a background with no real aviation experience, it was again, a completely new world. So it was very full on and you get quite immersed in everything they do down there. So it was a total change from what I was used to, but amazing experience as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:28] So as far as helicopter operations go, can you tell us about some of the more exciting jobs that you've had doing that?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:06:33] I think anything we do in the Tasmanian wilderness is amazing. The terrain and the wilderness here is quite unique and as most Tasmanians know, the weather is a major factor and what we can and can't do. I've spent a fair bit of time in the snow looking for people. I've spent the night on the side of a cliff face for about eight hours with a person with spinal injuries and that was a very memorable job. I think probably water rescues are quite memorable as well. We don't get that many of them in Tasmania, but the ones we do get are generally quite involved and serious.

**John Pratt:** [00:07:09] So if you look back now once again transitioning from being a dolphin trainer to helicopter operations, are you glad that you've made that change?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:07:16] Yeah, definitely. I'm definitely glad I got into policing. There's so many opportunities within the job and the variety of work is awesome. Getting into the helicopter definitely don't have any regrets about that. That's an amazing job to do. We get to help people out and what's probably one of the worst days of their life. So it's very rewarding.

**John Pratt:** [00:07:33] So what advice do you have for anybody who's in a different career currently and is considering transitioning to Tasmania Police?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:07:41] I would say do it. There's lots of resources available now to inform yourself. Go and talk to police at your local police station. The open days and things like that. Take opportunity of them. Don't let other people's perception of you influence your decision to become a police officer. I think when I joined I got quite a few comments like, "you're too small to be a cop or you're too short to be a cop". But there are many roles in policing that take a variety of people to fill. So have a go.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:07] Before we finish up our conversation today, I'd like to know, like you've told us about how much you do love helicopter operations, but what is your favourite part of being a member of Tasmania Police?

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:08:17] Probably the people and the colleagues I've met along the way. I've met some friends for life here and the opportunities within the job are seemingly endless at the moment. So probably all the things I haven't done yet and the things I'm looking forward to.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:30] Thanks very much for speaking with us today, Nikki, and sharing your experience in changing careers to Tasmania Police. You and I both know police officers make a difference to the Tasmanian community every day, which makes it a very rewarding job to do, even if you don't get to play with dolphins every day. Thanks for your time.

**Nikki Mackintosh:** [00:08:45] No worries.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:51] That's it for today's episode. I hope you've enjoyed it. So far on this is Tas Police we've chatted to our commissioner, Donna Adams, our recruitment services team, some new recruits, and we've experienced a day in the life of a constable on the beat in Launceston. We've also heard from an investigator of a long term missing persons case and we've jumped aboard one of our police vessels and heard what it's like to work for marine and rescue services. There have been some interesting and inspiring conversations from people who have experienced everything Tas Police has to offer.

**John Pratt:** [00:09:19] In our next episode of this is Tas Police we're talking to Senior Constable Will Broadbridge, who is based on the east coast of Tasmania at the St Helens police station. Will came to Tas Police as a fast tracker who completed the accelerated training programme and we're going to talk to him about what that process was like.