

### **Russ Walker, A Moment in Time**

*It was the fall of 1964 at Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut, California, that I met a man who would change my life. He was a teammate on our water polo team. His message one day was a brief presentation to the team about becoming an ocean Lifeguard for the County of Los Angeles. He was very enthusiastic about the profession. After his presentation he continued to encourage me to participate in the upcoming exam in March of 1965. His rationale was that since he was successful in 1964, he saw no reason that I could not be successful in 1965. This man is Rescue Boat Captain Shelly Butler. So I began to prepare in the spring of 1965, while competing as a member of the Mt. San Antonio College Swim Team.*

*I participated in the March, 1965 exam and was successful. There were approximately 112 swimmers who participated, and 25 were selected. I was number 23. This exam was the most challenging exam in my life. I had not swum in the ocean before, especially in sub 60 degree water, nor did I spend much time at the beach since it was far away from my home. Two visits a year was good for my family.*

*My experience in Rookie School was good. John Baker, Ed Heinrich, and Mark Lozano to name a few were Rookies in my class. We became good friends over the years. They are true legends in the ocean Lifeguard profession in my book. I am proud to know them.*

*After Rookie School, I was sent to Puddingstone Dam. I worked there for three years until I joined the Navy to serve my country as a hospital corpsman. I spent some time in Vietnam, and Okinawa my last year. During that year I was notified by Captain Bob Burnside that the Lifeguard service was looking forward to seeing me return after my tour of duty was over. Upon returning from overseas, I was able to work on weekends in various areas throughout the county beaches and complete my military obligation at Camp Pendleton during the week. It was then when I met Frank Abney. He was the only African American I knew of, besides me, who had become a Lifeguard. He was the first African American permanent ocean Lifeguard for the County of Los Angeles. I later met his wife, Marsha, and learned that Marsha had attended school with my wife's cousins, and her mother and mine went to school together in Washington D.C. We soon became close friends.*

*It was during this time that Captain Burnside asked me if I could write the first aid section of the new Lifeguard Manual due to my medical background and experience as a hospital corpsman. I felt honored to do it. After its completion, it appeared that it was very well received. I had included new information that had not been written before. For example, the Rule of Nines in the treatment of burns, various ways of bandaging wounds, particularly the hand, in the position of function, a section on diabetes, to name a few. This first aid section was written before we began receiving*

*training in EMT at USC, and many of those techniques were included in the USC training.*

*I also upgraded our medical supplies such as bandage, scissors, coban, kerlix, and the use of normal saline in the treatment of wounds which are still used today. I also was fortunate to be able to teach first aid to the Lifeguards for a short time before we were trained and certified as EMT's. Through this experience I believed that this was the career for me, and that I had something that I could contribute. I became a permanent Lifeguard in July 1973.*

*For the next 31 years, there were many other accomplishments. I had worked for many years on and off the job as a recruiter to inform and encourage potential candidates from my area of Los Angeles County to participate in our exam and become ocean Lifeguards. My first success was Mike White, from a recommendation by Captain McFarlane, another legend for whom I have the greatest respect. It was an honor to work with him. He taught me a lot about Lifeguarding. Then came Andre Todd and Adrian White, Marcus Chatman, Remy Smith, and many more to follow. There were two African American females that I met and encouraged to become ocean Lifeguards: Allison Bailey, from Santa Monica College, and my old swim team, the Marlins at the 28th St YMCA; and Ingrid Walters from the Mission Viejo and UCLA swim teams. I developed the Lifeguard Training Program in 1978 that recruited and trained candidates from inland communities to become ocean Lifeguards, started the W.A.T.E.R. Program that is in its 25th year, initiated the 9-1-1 system that was implemented by Section Chief Bud Bohn. Towards the end of my career, I successfully provided headquarters for the Rescue Boat Section with a houseboat, and worked to secure a marketing contract with Izod for our uniforms. This contract was the biggest challenge for me as a manager, but the biggest success as well. The Lifeguards have a wide variety of uniforms at no cost to them. It has been extended and renewed and is still in effect today.*

*I retired in March 2004 as the Assistant Chief of the Lifeguards. These years were the best of my life to date. My retirement years are yet to be completed. I still teach Supervision to Fire Department employees including Lifeguards. What a ride!!*

*I have had the privilege of meeting and working with great Lifeguards such as Mike Stevenson, Alf Laws, Larry and Paul Cooke, Bud McKinley, Paul Mathies, Jim Jacobson, Jim Richards, Norton Wisdom, John Burrich, and many more.*

*My message is not to emphasize my accomplishments and successes. It is just to state that people who have the potential of becoming good Lifeguards don't just come from the beach communities, nor do they have to come from one group of people. History has taught us that they can come from anywhere.....even from the inner city. For me it was all because one person took a moment of his time to share this profession with me.*