



Olympic Stories

# Lisa Carrington

## Canoe/Kayak – Flatwater

### Early Years

Lisa Carrington was born in Tauranga on 23 June 1989. When she was eight years old, her family moved to the scenic coastal town of Ohope Beach, near Whakatane. She is of Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki and Ngāti Porou descent.

The beach was Lisa’s backyard growing up. She remembers, “Dad taught me how to swim when I was really young. We were at the beach, in the water all the time”. Her two older brothers, Shaun and Brett, loved the ocean, and Lisa was always determined to keep up with them. “She was only a little girl and very young, but without her even realising it,” her mother Glynis told the *New Zealand Herald*, “she was training really hard ... there’s no way the boys could do anything without her wanting to do it too”.

With that family encouragement, she entered the Nipper programme at Whakatane Surf Life Saving Club at the age of ten. There, she discovered a passion for surf ski. Lisa says, “If it was not for the Nipper programme and the great encouragement I have had throughout my life

**“She has unbelievable talent.”**

*– Ian Ferguson, four-time Olympic Gold Medallist*



- Lisa with Alana Nicholls of Australia at the London 2012 Olympic Games.



**New Zealand  
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from Surf Life Saving and Canoe Racing New Zealand, I really do believe I would not be in the position I am in today”.

Lisa has always been a competitive and determined athlete. When she was twelve she entered a surf lifesaving competition in New Plymouth, battling and overcoming six-foot waves crashing around her. Lisa recalls, “I was almost in tears on the beach ... But tackling those big waves, it was such an achievement to be out there in massive surf. It’s awesome to be able to do something like that”.

Netball was also a great passion for Lisa from a young age, and in 2004 she represented Bay of Plenty as a junior. She had her first experience of serious sport and of overseas travel when the squad went to Australia to train. Lisa loved the team environment and camaraderie of netball, but when she stopped growing at 1.68m (5 feet 5 inches), she knew she was unlikely to make the professional grade.

By fourteen she had found a great love in surf ski, and initially took up kayaking as winter training for this. She sees it as an important experience for young athletes to try a variety of sports before they become too focused on a single activity. But the Olympics had been Lisa’s dream, since the day many years earlier, when eight-year-old Lisa was watching the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games with her father. He turned to her after they watched Danyon Loader swim to a Gold Medal, and said, “why don’t you go to the Olympics?”.

So with her netball career over and surf ski not being an Olympic sport, at age 17 Lisa turned her formidable determination and drive to kayaking. But it wasn’t an easy decision, as Lisa told the *New Zealand Herald* in 2013: “That was hard, especially with all the training I was doing on my own. At that age you want to be hanging out with your friends, having a great time, so yeah ... But my friends were great, they still are, they understand sport. So even if I wasn’t going to all the parties, we hung out when we could”.

In the meantime, Lisa’s kayaking had taken a lucky leap forward when her dad Patrick found out that four-time Olympic Gold Medallist Ian Ferguson (Ferg) lived nearby at Lake Rotoehu. Pat gave Ferg a call, and on seeing Lisa’s drive and ability, Ferg was hooked. “She was a natural,” said Ferguson. “She showed she had the flow from the start”.

**“I love being able to paddle on the stunning lakes and rivers in New Zealand and all over the world – it is so beautiful when the water is clean and pristine. I struggle to find many lows in my sport other than those days when my training targets are not met – or it is windy!”**

– Lisa Carrington



# International Competition

After deciding to focus on kayaking, Lisa joined the Eastern Bay Canoe Racing Club in Whakatane. She attended Ferg's formal training camp in Rotorua, then started her kayaking career with a high at the New Zealand Canoe Racing Regatta. She and kayak partner Jaimee Lovett won the pairs, and Lisa took home the top title in the singles.

In 2007, seventeen-year-old Lisa represented New Zealand in single (K-1) and double kayaking (K-2) at the Australian Youth Olympic Festival. She also raced in the K-1 500 metre and 1000 metre events at the canoe junior world championships in the Czech Republic. These exciting achievements were not without sacrifice however – the world championships were at the same time as her Year 13 school ball. But the experience of competing internationally as part of a New Zealand team was thrilling and addictive. Though she did not place at these events, they provided valuable experience and encouraged her to work harder than ever before.

2008 saw huge changes in Lisa's life – a move to Auckland to concentrate on high level training meant she was now working with some of the best. But it also separated her from her friends and family who remained further south. Lisa stoically described the change as “a wee bit intimidating”, but set out to prove herself in the new environment.

In 2009 she competed with a new K-2 partner, Teneale Hatton, at the World Cup regatta in Szeged, Hungary. Teneale had been Lisa's competition for many years in surf lifesaving, but they found themselves becoming an A-grade team. All the training began to pay off, with the pair winning a Bronze Medal in the 1000 metre event at the World Cup. The following year they had even more success, winning a Gold Medal in the same event at the World Cup regatta in Vichy, France. They won three more Gold Medals at the Oceania Canoe Championships in Sydney, Australia, including one in the K-4 500m sprint, with Rachael Dodwell and Erin Taylor. The pair then made it to the World Championship A final at the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships in Poznań, Poland.

Lisa returned to Szeged in 2011 for the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships. Although she had achieved a lot already, these championships made her a bigger name than ever before in New Zealand. Lisa and Erin Taylor



- Lisa (right) competing in 2007.



- Lisa winning gold in 2011.



placed ninth in the K-2 500 metres, which qualified them for the 2012 London Olympic Games. Competing solo in the K-1 200m canoe sprint, Lisa took just 39.998 seconds to win a Gold Medal, the first for a New Zealand woman in a world championship. This was a surreal moment for Lisa, who said, “I was shocked to realise I had won. It was an amazing feeling, since I had never achieved anything like that before”. With this victory, New Zealand secured a spot at the London Olympic Games, and Lisa took a big step towards her dream of an Olympic Medal. She was honoured for this achievement by being named Māori Senior Sportswoman of the Year at the Māori Sports Awards.



Trillian Trust, Māori Sports Awards

- Lisa was named Māori Senior Sportswoman of the Year in 2012.

## Olympic Games Success

Lisa was selected to represent New Zealand at the 2012 Olympic Summer Games in London, and an Olympic Medal was now within her reach. In the lead-up to the Olympic Games, Lisa won two more Gold Medals at the 2012 Oceania Championships in Sydney, individually in the K-1 200m, and with Erin Taylor in the K-2 200m.

On the 27th of July the London 2012 Olympic Games were officially opened, but Lisa wasn't at the Opening Ceremony. Her events were scheduled for the final week of the Games, so she was still training in Munich at the time.

Lisa joined the New Zealand team in London in time for a superb start in the heats for the K-1 200m, living up to her status as world champion. Because it was the first time the event was held at the Olympic Games, Lisa set an Olympic record with the fastest time of 40.528s seconds in semifinal one of the K-1 200m sprint. Lisa qualified for the finals with the fastest time.

Lisa also warmed up for her specialist event by competing with her K-2 partner, Erin Taylor. They placed seventh in the 500m sprint.

The K-1 200m kayak final was on the morning of the 11th of August. The pressure was on, but Lisa appeared calm before the race, and her smile did not waver. Recalling that morning, Lisa commented, “Deep down I was quite nervous, but it's good having a great team, they distracted me for the hour before ... but it [the world title] gave me confidence”.

**“All I can concentrate on is my race and I'll be doing everything I can to make it the best of my career. There's definitely pressure going into the Olympics as a world champion, but that's good, it's important”**

- Lisa Carrington, before the London 2012 Olympic Games



Getty Images

- Erin Taylor and Lisa Carrington.



Lisa made sure to take in the experience of finally being at an Olympic Games, but once she was at the starting line, her focus was entirely on the race. The starting-gun fired, and the kayakers flew out from their starting positions, paddling with all their might. Marta Walczykiewicz of Poland and Inna Osypenko-Radomska of the Ukraine were in first and second, with Lisa behind in third place. At the 100-metre mark, Lisa surged forward, vying with the other two for first place. Lisa felt herself edging ahead of the others and thought to herself, “just go for it, gold medal, gold medal”. She crossed the finish line almost half a boat length ahead of the Ukrainian. Lisa had achieved her childhood dream of winning an Olympic Gold Medal.

After her win, Lisa commented,

“You always want to be on top of the podium, so to finally be there ... I’m speechless”. She added, “It’s exciting to win it, you spend so long just preparing and carrying on the journey. It’s nice to look back on the experience of this last year and a half. It’s great that it paid off”.

Not only had it paid off, but Lisa had become a New Zealand Olympic hero and household name, all at the age of 23!

Taking her place on the Olympic podium, Lisa wore a pounamu necklace from her family in the shape of a whale’s tail, and smiled her trademark smile. An ecstatic welcoming committee of friends, whānau, and two very proud parents awaited the medal winner back at the Olympic Village. Her grandparents and other supporters were glued to television sets back home. Her grandmother, Doreen Carrington, said “We actually went wild ... she’s put in the hard yards and she never, ever boasts about her achievements”.



- Lisa Carrington wins gold in London 2012.

The 2012 Games in London was the first time that the K-1 200m kayak sprint had been contested at an Olympic Games.

**“To be the first female to win the K-1 200 at the Olympics is cool. To win a gold medal, you never dream of it. You do dream, but you never think it can be reality”.**

- Lisa Carrington



# Post Olympic Games

After Lisa's success at the Olympic Games, she returned home to New Zealand. In November 2012, she was again named Senior Māori Sportswoman of the Year at the Māori Sports Awards, and was also chosen as the Albie Pryor Memorial Māori Sportsperson of the Year. She received a further tribute when she was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2013 New Year's Honours for her services to kayaking. Among all this success, Lisa has studied toward a Bachelor of Arts in politics and Māori studies at Massey University.

A little time has allowed Lisa to adjust to her Olympic success. She remains down to earth and keeps a strong sense of what is important to her. Of her achievements, she says simply:

**"It's really cool and I have absorbed it. I know I'm the world champion, I know I'm a gold medallist, but they are not defining moments in my life. I haven't finished yet and to be honest, things like that aren't a part of what I work for. They're obviously things I like to achieve, but they are outcomes, not inputs. It'd all be hollow if I hadn't taken the journey to get there".**

([http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=6&objectid=11134857](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11134857))

So far in 2013, Lisa has already had victories in five of the six World Cup races. She has also increased her medal chances by adding a new distance to her schedule, racing in the K-1 500m sprint, as well as the 200m. In August, she won Gold in the K-1 200m race and Bronze in the K-1 500m race at the World Championships in Duisberg, Germany. Lisa's long-term goal is to defend her Gold Medal at the 2016 Olympic Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Not content to be a world champion in one sport, Lisa is also competing internationally in her first love, surf lifesaving. In September 2013, Lisa and the rest of the New Zealand team came second at the International Surf Rescue Challenge in Japan.

Lisa may have achieved her childhood dream, but this is only the beginning. Expect to see much more from this talented young athlete.

*Photos courtesy of Getty Images, Canoe Racing New Zealand, Trillian Trust Māori Sports Awards.*



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