

SHIPLEY
(HUNTERS)

CHARLES ANCHOR

INTRODUCTION

Surfing the wave of life. Wind blows over the surface of the water creating waves. The potential effects from the energy of waves are tremendous. Over millenniums mankind has been tapping into this type of nature's energy source. The ancients used waves when rafting, boating, fishing, and probably body surfing. Polynesians started riding waves centuries ago and it was them that showed the modern world how to stand on top of the waves using planks of wood.

Harnessing the ocean's energy and positioning myself in the pocket that is the engine room of a wave leads me to become one with it. The experience is exhilarating. There is a wonderful feeling that comes from riding nature's turbines. Mastering the act requires more than just physical strength and nerve. It includes respect and understanding. The high that comes off a well-executed ride is just one of the many bonuses we get when we go surfing.

Philosophically speaking, a lot of the decisions we make in our daily lives mimic the actions we take in the surf. Just as life offers us a variety of opportunities, a wave lets us determine if and when and where we get on it. How far it will take us depends on the

type of wave we choose. We turn and stall and cutback, always thinking, always moving. Sometimes being on a ride no bigger than a ripple, other times life threatening. Whatever life throws at us we make the choice whether we want to paddle onto it, run away, or sit and watch it pass us by. I am young; almost all the choices I make in my life are dependent on being able to keep on surfing. To have a healthy, fit body, to live by the sea, and to have a job that will afford me the opportunity to go surfing as much as possible.

My story is about events that took place in a time when Australia was changing from imperial to metric measures, from sterling to decimal currency, and from meat pies to pizzas. Our citizen's psyche went from mourning old soldiers to denigrating heroes returning from the Vietnam conflict. All the nonsense our country didn't get right created a generation gap. In turn, it inspired Baby Boomers to take chances, to ask questions, and experience as much of everything we could pack into our young lives.

As for me, I wanted to pack more in than the average bloke. My life was in shreds. Before I turned seventeen a family tragedy forced me to leave school, get a job and learn how to look after myself the best way I knew how. The best way I knew how was to spend as much time in the ocean as I could. The best job I could think of was one that allowed me to spend the most time in the water. The best thoughts I ever had were when weather conditions were perfect, when the surf turned magic and I was in it.

By chance, I knew a guy who had just returned from a fishing job in West Australia. The money he earned and the leisure time he could spend in the offseason led me to go west, young man! Seek out a way to surf till I busted. When I arrived in the western state, I found a job on a cray fishing boat. We made obscene amounts of cash money in a few months. Money that allowed me

to live exactly the way I wanted. Funding my life to go surfing for roughly five months of the year. It was a perfect job for me until my employers turned out to be, well, let's just say, more villainous than I first thought.

I'll go long story short here. It wasn't the money that was important to me, it was the lifestyle. Like I keep saying, surfing was all I wanted out of life. I loved to read books, which normally makes one more knowledgeable, but in my case, not necessarily smarter. My headspace at the time had me living in a dream world. My naivety trapped me into a deal with the employers to smuggle a boatload of drugs back from Africa. Motivation? Money to chase my dreams of surfing the best breaks around the globe. Crazy! And it *was* crazy.

Turns out my employers tried to kill me, and I don't mean from overworking. No! They literally tried to murder me. They were nasty Mafioso types and I worked with them for years. It never clicked with me, even when I heard the occasional bit of grapevine gossip or the odd comment about mob ties. I was distanced from all that. With only the dreams of my youth floating around in my head, I never believed the lengths they would go to gain wealth and power.

Anyway, like I said, long story short, the smuggling operation went to Bartlett County, you know, where the pear factory is. Everything got screwed up. I lost a good mate, and it still haunts me that maybe it was my fault for suggesting the hair-brained scheme in the first place.

When someone describes an event that involves murder and shipwreck there usually isn't anything good to say about it, but my situation was different. If it hadn't been for the disaster that washed me up half-dead on a deserted beach, I might never had met Alice.

Alice was the girl who filled my brain and my heart in a way I found difficult to describe, but I liked what I felt. Just being in her company balked my desire to run off and go surfing. So much horrible stuff had gone on in my life until Alice appeared. She filled all the empty spaces, the dark rooms, and all the broken dreams I'd ever had. Finding her in the middle of a wilderness turned a switch inside of me. Until I met her, I had never known such a forceful attraction to any other human being. If this was love then I could finally see what all the fuss was about, where all the love songs come from and why people are ready to die for it.

We began to make a life together between one side of the world and the other. Physically we were apart most of the time, but we were always together in spirit. Back in those days the expense of international travel was out of reach to most people. You could see it in the way those lucky enough to go 'OS' (overseas) behaved. They would talk about it at cocktail parties like they had just returned from another planet. Airplane passengers would dress in suits and polished shoes and smart frocks and fashion jewellery because it was such a big deal. More often than not you'd see a little scar on the shoulders of jet setters that signified a small-pox vaccination, a must if travelling to exotic lands. Pilots and airhostesses were the privileged few that got paid for jet rides, and ad men used the kudos of the Glamour Set to sell ordinary products for out of this world prices. Nowadays, things couldn't be more different. I've seen passengers in shorts and tees, and one literally wearing pyjamas.

As far as romance went, Alice and I kept it alive with expensive flights and even more expensive phone calls. One particular call cost \$800 and went on so long we had to keep getting reconnected by the telephone exchange. We didn't worry too much about costs because we were loaded. Smugglers Incorporated, as

we affectionately called our business, kept us in the million-dollar club. In those days, the exchange rate from Australian to American dollars was around 85 cents. That meant I had enough money to surf anywhere in the world, but my revamped motivation was to catch up with Alice. All my travel plans linked to where we would be able to meet again and spend time together. But, like Bob Dylan's song, back then played almost daily on the radio, 'The Times They Are A-Changin'".

Major events in the twentieth century changed the world forever. Two world wars were the results of the worst human decisions ever made. The jury's still out on whether or not the development of the pill, the transistor, and the microchip will prove to be good or bad decisions. There were more technological advancements during the twentieth century than any other time in the history of man. The ripple effects from these events on civilisations all over the world were massive. As for Australia, its population changed to become multicultural. White Anglos were not the last invaders that the aboriginals would be forced to contend with. We learned, we grew, we showed our unique culture to the world and for the most part the world loved us. Australia's not perfect, and it never likely will be, but it's still the best country on earth.

Jerry Shipley

PROLOGUE

BREAKING NEWS

Badger heard the news repeat for the umpteenth time that afternoon. He waited expectantly for the phone to ring. In his heart he knew what the caller was going to say. The flight number blared from the radio so many times reinforcing his parent's death before he had been officially informed. Excited journalists could not wait to tell everyone about the tragedy. Raw emotions had him imagining that reporters would be paid a bonus, maybe even get famous for being the first to report such a horrific scene to the world.

The textbook response for someone losing a loved one didn't apply to him. There was no denial, no false hope that his parents weren't on the plane. Even if the bad news phone call didn't come, he knew his parents were never coming home.

Mr and Mrs Wolver's printed itinerary was ripped off the fridge door and screwed into a ball in their son's hand. It was their plane all right, and they were on it, and it crashed. No survivors. *No survivors!* Couldn't the media at least be a little bit subtle and lend him some hope? At least give him a chance to breathe before the crunch of his parents' death hit him like a hammer blow.

The expected phone call didn't happen. Instead, the doorbell

rang. The young man traipsed to the front of the house and took a peep through a slit in the venetians. Two cops stood on the doorstep; hats on meant official visit. He opened the door.

A young police officer standing slightly behind his partner shuffled his feet while the senior erected his large frame into an officious pose. Bearers of bad news were trained to assume a certain manner before unloading on the recipient. Assertive of authority in a domineering way would not ease Badger's suffering, but the policeman could leave the premises knowing he had delivered the message and performed his duty as a capable officer of the law.

Badger didn't bother to look at the man speaking; instead, he held the shuffling younger officer's gaze. With a nod and a barely audible whisper he signified his thanks to the officer for his show of respect. The irony in his thanks got completely lost on the senior but didn't get past the young policeman. The constable slighted a knowing smile to the new orphan, reached out, offered a handshake, and said, 'Sorry to bring you such terrible news, son. I hope you are all right? Is there anything we can do to help?'

For a split second the elder cop looked a little uncomfortable about his usurped position before taking back his leadership.

The sergeant handed Badger a business card and said, 'Here's the contact number for a counsellor if you want to talk to someone. Do you have any other family who may be able to help you?' The snide look he gave the young policeman made it apparent he'd overstepped the boundaries of their duty.

A picture of his big brother popped into Badger's mind. He flashed on Troy's wife Rosemary and their six-year-old daughter, Bernice. Could they help? Thoughts of horrible experiences spent growing up with a brother who'd only just stopped short of physically torturing him. Quick decision, he could not ask Troy's

help and wouldn't accept it in the unlikely event it was offered.

Fresh images of a plane crash came to mind and brought him back to the doorstep. Badger shook his head. 'I'll be right,' he lied. He thanked them again and motioned to close the door. As they walked down the path to the police car, he overheard one of them refer to him as a poor little bastard. It was a cruel validation that his mother and father were officially dead.

The young man grabbed a glass of water and sat on the kitchen sink, his mind swirling with images of beautiful experiences he'd had with his parents. From as far back as he could think, not one bad memory loomed into the smoky recollections between them.

'Why did they have to be the perfect parents if they had to die?' He sobbed, and took another drink of water.

They waited until Brady turned sixteen before Mr and Mrs Wolver set their minds on taking a well-earned break. A holiday to Japan. They had hoped the trip would substitute for the honeymoon they never had. Tough times raising two strapping young boys on a single wage had them saving driblets and drabs for years. Now that Troy was married and had his own place, their dream was nearing reality. They would talk of nothing else and grew more and more excited as the three-week vacation loomed closer. Brady was thrilled for them, too. At last, they would have an opportunity to indulge in a romantic getaway without kids in tow. The bonus would be a chance to explore the history and the highlights of that mystical land.

The eldest boy, Troy, bought a house and moved out not long after he finished his apprenticeship. Brady was six years younger than Troy and almost at the end of his school days by the time his parents saved enough money for the vacation. At last, they were able to go on their dream holiday. A trip that would double as a belated honeymoon. Of course they didn't expect to go

without taking their youngest son with them. When they invited him, Brady the Badger was adamant he didn't want to go. He confidently argued that he was old enough to look after himself.

The time came at last, after years of dreaming and talking and planning. The tour package was paid for, their plane tickets arrived in the mail, and the trip of a lifetime became a reality.

Brady was a good son, smart, motivated, and self-sufficient. His parents were confident they could trust him to hold down the fort on his own. He had plenty of mates; his surfing buddies, all good kids, even the ones that gave him that awful nickname Badger. At sixteen his only motivation in life was surfing. Surfing before school, after school, and, if the surf was good, instead of school. Badger had not the slightest interest in going to Japan. He convinced his father that he did not want to go along, and assured both parents that he would be more than happy to care for himself at home.

The plane crash ripped apart the two Wolver boys. The parents were gone forever and there were no consolation prizes. Badger was left alone in a house where he could not afford to pay the rent. How long before the eviction notice? No choice but to leave school and get a job. How would that even happen? He was only sixteen, for God's sake. Why was he thinking of those things at that moment? Bloody hell! He wrestled his mind onto another set of awkwardness. His brother picked up the other end of Badger's line. Badger felt a tremor in his own voice. He listened to his big brother's sound of heartbreak while he tried without success to comfort his little brother.

Troy's attempt at consolation failed miserably, he could no longer contain his mood. The younger brother tried to turn their conversation to lighter moments they had shared in the past. The harder he tried the higher the tide of emotions overwhelmed them.

Eventually he couldn't bear continuing and politely ended the call. The smiles of his mother and father burnt into his memory and made him wonder why he could not see the rest of their faces. Crying wouldn't help, so he did the only thing he could think of to ease his pain. He went surfing.

SOUL SURFER

With all the things that had transpired throughout my relatively young life, it felt like a gazillion years had passed since I was six years old. Come to think of it, I was about that age when I learned for the first-time what punches were about and how much they hurt. *Of course* it involved my brother. He was obsessed with fighting. Our dad took him to judo lessons at a young age and I guess that's where he picked up the interest before turning it into an obsession.

As for me, my greatest obsession was water. When I was just a baby, Mum and Dad would pack the family in the car and drive to a river. It was usually on a Sunday. We would stay all morning, and occasionally, on a sunny summer day, not get home until dark. There were rock pools on a flat rock shelf where the river meandered past as lazily as the sunbathers that came to lie on the rocks and warm sand.

Some of the earliest memories were of my mother placing me gently in a small depression filled with clear cool water. I would flap around for ages and scream out loud protests whenever Mum or Dad decided it was time to go home. One really hot weekend my parents took us to the seaside. We stayed overnight

at a pseudo-auntie's house. My memory of the experience was watching waves crashing on the sand. At a mere two-foot, the waves looked huge compared to my infant frame. The action of the water hypnotised me, calling me to come in and get covered by it. Pure and simple to my young mind, it was magical.

My mother's recount of that day was a little different. She recalled an incident when she took her eyes off me for two seconds. She told me she glanced back just in time to see my bare bum disappearing under a wall of water. Launching herself off a beach towel, she ran to save me at the same time as my father. He was quicker and scooped me out of the perilous brine that was carrying me off into deeper water. When she related the story to me, she began to laugh.

Amid chuckling, she said, 'When your father picked you out of the water you were coughing a fair amount of salt water out of your mouth and nose and gurgling. You had a great big grin all over your dial. We were worried sick until we saw you smiling.' She laughed again.

Four years later, Dad took up a job offer on the central coast of New South Wales and our family moved to within a couple of miles from the beach. I suppose most kids would be unsettled by a move away from familiar friends and territory. For me, it was the greatest thing they could've done. At age nine I was hanging at the beach every chance I got. One day, when an older bloke let me borrow his board to try my hand at surfing, I was stoked. It was a Gordon and Smith 9'6" with three redwood stringers, as heavy as a bus. Without pausing to let him tell me twice, I grabbed the thing and dragged it over the sand into the water. When I lay on it, it was so wide my arms barely reached over the rails. Somehow, I managed to get out past the ankle snapping breakers into the take-off zone.

When a set of waves came through, I found it difficult to turn the giant board around to face the beach. Swirling my feet and paddling madly with my hands, I barely managed to turn the thing halfway. My frantic effort positioned the board just enough for the third wave to knock the nose around and point it toward the shore. The fourth wave was about to break on me. With barely enough time for a couple of feeble paddles, the board started moving under the energy of the wave. Yeeha! I was on it.

Quickly jumping to my feet, I assumed a stance that I thought imitated the older guys. I had been watching their surfing styles for weeks and weeks and pined for the day I would be able to ride the wild surf just like them.

While Andy Warhol claimed that we all get our fifteen minutes of fame, I guessed my quarter of an hour was over in about five seconds. I was fired up to be on my feet the very first time I had ever ridden a surfboard. All I wanted to do then was look at the crowd and show them I had mastered the art of surfing on my first try. When it came down the wave, the nose of the board drove headlong through the surface which stopped its forward momentum dead in its tracks. I got hurled over the nose like projectile vomit and speared into the shallows. With barely a split second to spare I flung my arms out in front of me to block the fall. I plummeted through two feet of water. My hands took the brunt of impact on the sandy bottom and my nose followed suit.

Spitting, momentarily blinded, and disoriented, I made a grab for the surfboard. It rolled upside down as the wave kept pushing the board toward shore. In desperation I tried to regain my feet and pick up the board when it cracked into the back of my head.

The surfboard's owner came rushing over and grabbed his prize possession, checking to see I hadn't damaged it. His next

action was only an afterthought when he pulled me up out of a drowning position. The graze on top of my nose started bleeding at the same time the egg on the back of my head started swelling. He grabbed my arm and hurled me bodily into shallower water before rechecking for any damage I might have done to his board. Appearing satisfied everything was hunky dory, he strode over to help me to my feet.

‘You’re fuckin’ hopeless, mate. You’d be better off flying a kite.’ He thought his smart comment was funny, but it cut me to the quick.

‘At least I got to my feet first time on a surfboard,’ I snarled at him, and added, ‘You’ve been surfing for ages, and I’ve seen you take bigger wipeouts than me.’

After a pregnant pause, his glare changed and lightened. He laughed a big hearty guffaw.

‘Hey! Don’t get shirty with me, man, I was taking the piss out of you because you were showing off. You did get to your feet pretty good, and for a minute there I thought you were gonna take the drop.’ He huffed. ‘But then...’ Another huff. ‘You looked up to see who was watching you, you frigging poser. You gotta realise, man, surfing is a soul thing, it’s not for nobody else but you. You don’t surf to show off, kiddo, you surf to soothe your soul.’ He smiled. ‘Plus, my board’s too big for you. You ought to go and use Ben’s board, it’s that smaller green one over there.’ He threw a thumb over his shoulder. ‘Ask him, I’m sure he’ll be cool enough to let yah try it out.’

This guy wasn’t a guru or a teacher, not even close. He wasn’t even one of the better surfers on our beach in those days, but he sure did teach me a valuable, lifelong lesson that day. I summoned the courage to do what he suggested. As he said, Ben was happy to loan me his shorter board. On paddling out over the little shore

break, I became absorbed by the water, felt the tickling wind, and eyed the waves and the sun and the sky with a new reverence. The older guy's words rang in my head. I would never want to be called a poser. I guessed this was what the serious board riders at our beach referred to as 'soul surfing'. I was hooked.