

BRYCE

BY

MARA WOLFORD

I met Bryce Ellis when I was 16. He came through Santa Cruz Surf Shop to sign autographs with fellow pro surfer Willy Morris. As the official blonde surf rat chick team rider, Cory the boss gave me his credit card and told me to take them out for sushi afterwards. He moved into my place the following week.

My folks were thrilled: After years spent hanging with the toughest characters in town, most of whom are now either dead or in jail, I'd brought home a gentleman: thoughtful, well-spoken and polite. Just one more pro surfer, they thought, but this one had his head on straight.

At 16, I hadn't travelled much, and I had a hell of a time getting my head around what I know now to be his relatively tame Aussie accent.

We worked through the language barriers, and to this day I speak with Bryce's Aussie vocabulary in my seppo accent.

I had started uni at 14, and was several years ahead in school, so my parents agreed to let me bail out a while and travel with him, knowing it was another form of education. Bryce was top 16 on the ASP, and during those years the Tour hit pretty much every far-flung corner of the universe. That's where we went, and it was often quite dramatic.

The first stop was the North Shore. First trip to Hawaii, straight out of Santa Cruz, I found all of it very much to my liking: Sunset was right up my alley and I loved me a 7'6".

Haleiwa was the first event, and that went well. If I recall, the Sunset contest was in fact mobile, and at the last minute was moved to Waimea Bay. Guys rode short boards then. A 7'6" was a gun at Sunset or Pipe. Only old guys and Bay freaks had rhino chargers.

It took me a few years in retrospect to understand the ramifications of this, but Bryce had never ridden a board over 7'10". Bryce was one of the best tube-riders of the time, and one of the most complete competitors overall, but he wasn't a charger.

And now he faced maxing-out Bay without the proper equipment or experience. It was a very tense morning and I didn't understand exactly why, but knew better than to ask.

Without discussing it with me, he pulled himself from the event. Holy hell, in retrospect, the nerve it took to do that: the common sense and frankness with one's self.

I can't fathom his inner conversations that morning watching the Bay on daybreak, ear glued to the storm box. He was on great money to be there and surf... but be there and choose to not paddle out?

Then being the proud, reasonable, noble human being that he is, he took me to the beach to watch the contest.

Lordy O Lordy, the flak he received that day, and then I better understood the ramifications of his decision. We watched Ross Clarke-Jones's heat from the beach, the heat Bryce should have been in. The swell was peaking, with sets closing the Bay. Ross was on a 7'6" or 7'10" or something ridiculous, and took a clean-up set that washed him into the shore break, and up on the beach nearly unconscious.

Bryce knew he had made the right decision at that moment. Rossy swore he'd quit smoking at that moment, but never did, he just went on to charge harder and harder.

Each one of us has our own path.

Bryce would never live that decision down. Folks would say the silliest things for years afterwards, often implicating me, my surfing choices and comparing the two, which isn't really comparable because I never made a cent getting drilled. One North Shore winter, when we stayed in a house right on The Bay, the friend we were staying with woke me at dawn to come surf Pinballs jacking to baby Bay, so that when Bryce woke up, the first thing he would see was me out in the lineup. I did, and had fun, but now I understand what our friend's motivations were.

There were articles, years of heckling and jokes, and a definitive bowing-out of the League of Titans. However, with what I know now, Bryce did exactly as he should have. He followed his own judgement under the circumstances and it was based upon logic and experience or lack thereof. There is nothing stronger or more elegant than a man who doesn't bow to the crowd.

GUB

BY

GRA MURDOCH

Another raucous night kicks off at Anglesea pub. People are ordering counteries, there's that happy summer hum, but it's ever so slightly hushed because Snowy's made an appearance.

Snowy, one of the slightly older local crew. First public outing after his beloved horse died on the beach earlier that week. We'd seen it, bloated and half buried at the base of the cliff on the way around to Grinders. There's an awkward aura around him because people don't know what to say.

I can't remember if Snowy's anywhere near the server's condiments selection when it happens – when the blond head rises up in our peripheral vision and the voice booms above the din, across the pub: "OI! SNOWY! PASS THE DEAD 'ORSE WILL YA?"

That'd be Gub.

Gub. Pusher of buttons. Tearer down of the walls of discretion. Lover of attention. Funny bastard. Anglesea superclubbie with a foot firmly in the ratbag surfer camp. Beholden to neither party. Doesn't drink or smoke. Loose.

Gub. The extrovert's extrovert. Sulphur Crested Cockatoo made human. Pathologically annoying to whoever he wants to push. Relentless.

Has his little brother in tears, hear Gub sing "Stanleeeeeeee, the-fetta-cheese-cock" on an endless loop: Stanley's protests only stir Gub to more operatic heights.

Gub. Master of oneupmanship. We're both accompanying some Geelong friends to their Year 12 formal. "Man, I never know what to say when they're all dressed up and they expect you to say something, hey," he tells me as we pull up in the driveway of the girl I'm accompanying.

Naomi's a great pal of mine, there's no romance, but nonetheless Gub's sown the seed of self-doubt. We wait in the living room as Nay makes her entrance. Boom, he's out of the gate: "Oh wow, you look absolutely stunning! Incredible! God you're like a model! Unbelievable!" Naomi blushes, loving the force of Gub's utterly convincing avalanche of compliments, and nothing I mutter matters, I'm a shot duck.

Gub. Captain Confidence. I'm scavenging a lift back to Melbourne late on a Sunday arvo. Gub's

like, "Mate, I really shouldn't take ya. My bug's got no brakes, no handbrake even. No guarantees something bad won't happen." We take off and by the time we reach the mad mile that leads out to Point Addis we've missed rear-ending two cars only by taking to the dirt verge and running up the inside.

On the car floor is a sign, made out of wood, for use in city traffic: it's a T shape – handle like a pong paddle – with the face about 30 cm wide by 10cm deep. The sign's inscribed carefully, lovingly, in texta and neat biro cross-hatch. It reads "GET FUCKED".

We tear up to Melbourne, reach my folks' place: Cyclone Gub bowls in, pumping handshakes and cheek kisses and compliments and over-the-top-niceness and loveliness with Mum and Dad. I've never seen Dad – usually a wary judge of character – won over so quickly. After Gub bails, Dad's all "That's the kind of polite young man we need more of". And Mum, she's flushed, she's buzzing like someone's just given her a dozen red roses. Like I'm now their number-two son. I ponder telling them about the *Get Fucked* sign.

Gub. Smart surfer. The pack's out the back at Johanna, chasing that peak that looks great at the start, but hits a gutter. And there's Gub in the shorey on his own, where it looks shit, but hang on, actually, that's a sick one, and there's another, how's that one? Yeah Gub.

Christ, on the tele. Gub? On *Hey Hey It's Saturday's* "Red Faces" segment. He's got a banana and a broomstick. He's peeling the banana and telling the studio audience he's building a saxophone. He jams the 'nana on the end of the stick, the music comes up and he's pretending to play *Tequila*. Ba ba baba ba ba, ba ba baba BAP. He gets gonged off, mercifully. It's as close as I've ever seen to Gub affected by nerves.

Twenty years later I see Gub down the Anglesea boat ramp, checking the junket bowl lefthander of our youth. He's unchanged, he's got a grom with him, whether it's his I'm not sure. "Remember this day," Gub advises the kid. "You wanna shake this man's hand. He's one of Anglesea's big-wave legends." The kid rolls his eyes, knows it's another of Gub's jokes. We all know it's another of Gub's jokes, and it's nice to be included in the fun.