

## PETER

B Y

BEN DOUGLAS

**Above the sea**, on the edge of a cliff, a wooden bench keeps a lonely vigil.

It sits in a hollow of coastal heath, the gnarled and stunted trees around it offering no protection. The bench was once young, its grains finely traced, its surface smooth to touch. Its bright wood had been polished to a warm gloss, as if it held the sunlight that had helped make it grow. No longer.

Below the bench curves Storm Bay, the sands of Roaring Beach at its edge. Humpbacked swells march through the Southern Ocean to spend their strength on this Tasmanian shore.

The bench has been tormented by the rain and wind and salt mist, tortured by heat and cold. Its wood has turned the grey of boulders, of driftwood, of a cold sea.

Stones from the beach below, smoothed by countless movements of swell and sand, lie within the wood of the bench in wombs so cunningly wrought that they once held them in an unbroken embrace. Time and the elements have reshaped the wood so that the stones now rattle in the wind.

The hands that placed this bench and that shaped it are those of Peter Adams, a sculptor, a carpenter and an ecologist.

He is the far side of 60. The hairs fringing the dome of his skull are foam white, and the years have etched the leather of his face. His knees are bad. His back stiffens and aches from endless hours hunched over workbenches. Yet his hands, large and calloused, are still nimble and strong, as the hands of a carpenter and artist must be. His large frame has not yet turned soft, and his eyes, green and clear, suggest the agile mind behind them.

Peter came to Roaring Beach 20 odd years ago. The 46 years before that had taken him from Detroit to Harvard, from the Carolinas to Korea. To Alaska, and finally to Tasmania.

In 1992, Peter drove a 1959 Bedford bus from Hobart down the Tasman Peninsula to Roaring Beach. The word PEACE earnest and proud on its brow, the bus limped and slid along the rutted dirt road into the scrub.

In a clearing above the cliffs, Peter pulled the handbrake. He had found his place.

Within days, local surfers told the blow-in they

could see the bus from the water, so a coat of green paint made the bus part of the landscape, an approach Peter would take into the building of his home.

The core of Windgrove was a square platform off the side of the bus. Over almost a decade, walls rose about this heart space. Above it, a roof. Beside it, other rooms. Every piece of wood, every nail, touched by Peter's hands.

Windgrove now is a glory, a beautiful space that breathes and glows, that complements the land around it rather than attempts to conquer it. Low slung, strong but somehow light, the hue of the trees around it.

In October 2002, Peter walked down from Windgrove to Roaring Beach and paddled into the surf. He'd decided to do it each day for three weeks. The three weeks passed, then three months. A year. Another. Then another. Peter was in the sea each day for three years, three months, three weeks and three days. A thousand and twelve consecutive days.

The multitude of conditions – indeed, of experiences – over such a span is beyond anyone's knowing but Peter's.

He tells of the thousandth day, when five whales stood spread across the bay in seeming salute. Of the day a penguin nestled against the instep of his foot. Of the day he shared a wave with a blue balloon. Of the days when the swell was so mighty and avaricious that he risked being plucked from shore. Of the day when the ocean was such an unfit place for a human that he could but splash foaming brine over his head in respect and gratitude. In awe.

Peter no longer goes into the sea each day. He has his sculpting. He must tend to Windgrove, and to the thousands of trees he has planted around it. He is an elder of a community of many, all of whom share a connection to their land, to the earth itself, which is the land of us all.

Peter's life is one of celebrating and protecting this sea-clad planet.

He is part of it, like the stone in the bench. Like the bench on the cliff. Like the cliff above the sea.

As we all are.

## SKINNY

B Y

MARA WOLFORD

**I was 13 and sitting on the cliff** at the Point, watching the surfers, dying to join them. A group of boys my age rode their cruisers up to me, goofing around and talking nonsense.

Skinny introduced himself, along with Lansing and Bags. I told them how badly I wanted to surf. Skinny said he'd find a board and Bags had a wetsuit I could use. Skinny was rambunctious, obnoxious, too loud, too skinny, with a head that was too big, and funny as hell. I knew I'd found a friend.

I met them the following afternoon, they geared me up. It took me a lot longer to get out the back, not that they were offering any advice. The heckling, fun-making, encouraging and constant criticism started then, and has never really ended.

Within a year, I would head off to the contests with Skinny and the boys. We would load into Doc Scott's funky van and head down the coast with all the boys that would become Mav's. Skinny was ringleader. Eyebrows were shaved off, haircuts were maimed. Shaving cream and toothpaste in inappropriate places was the price paid for being first to fall asleep at night.

Skinny and I started university together. This freed our days up to surf more. We rode our bikes back and forth across town and surfed everywhere. We scheduled our classes for midday and evening. We pushed our limits out at bigger and bigger Steamer Lane.

When we hit 16 or 17, we headed to the North Shore. Skinny was a natural at Sunset, and his jovial, goof-ball character made even the fiercest locals accept him.

One evening of sheer 6-8ft Sunset perfection, he pulled into a macker on the inside and came up screaming. I was sitting on the shoulder and paddled straight in to him. There was blood trickling from his ear, and he kept repeating he couldn't see straight, everything was upside down. I didn't know what was wrong, but somehow we managed to negotiate the shorebreak and get him in. I did the same thing at Maile Point a month or so later. At least I knew what it was by then.

Around age 19, Skinny met a girl. She was delicate, polite, intelligent and beautiful. We were sitting on the broken-down couch nestled

in the rocks at The Lane one day, and he said, "Anoushka's a keeper, huh". She was capable of dealing with the inherent risks Skinny was taking, as he pushed his limits further each year, with calm and aplomb.

Intelligently, they didn't get married until their late 20s and didn't start a family until their early 30s, unlike many of our friends, who started families straight out of adolescence, a recipe for chaos and mayhem.

Skinny and Anoushka found jobs in the surf industry and stuck with them, working, loving and living in synthesis.

Our town started changing. The cocaine that had always poured around town changed to crack, then to meth. After university, I decided I couldn't beat 'em, didn't want to join them anymore, and feared watching my community go down before my eyes, helpless in the face of self-destruction. I bailed out to France, where life was gentler.

Skinny and Anoushka came and stayed with me for a while in Biarritz after he'd lost his best friend to a drug overdose. Meth ravaged our generation of surfers. It was an ugly time. Skinny held strong in the eye of the storm, helping where he could, publicly criticising what was not acceptable. He took the reins at Mav's in the face of this lost generation.

No-one loves home more. Skinny doesn't like to stray from the hearth longer than it takes to score monsters elsewhere, then he rushes right back. Having come of age, he's now becoming politically active. I'm suspecting he'll be mayor one day.

I went back home a year ago. It was season opening day at the Lane: the first big north swell of the winter. I met Skinny in the parking lot and we jumped off the rock together, as we've done for three decades. Reaching the peak, in his goofy, vociferous manner, he announces a two-person heat, judged by peers, with a ridiculous point-system, including bonus points for scaring long-boarders off their boards and an instant win for getting pitched over the head of the adversary without touching them.

I won the heat. Of course I did.

He wasn't going to let me lose.