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Taking the drop – Surfing Memoirs, Blogging and Identity

Abstract:

Surfing evokes images of sun-bronzed stoners with little more going on in their heads than the search for the next wave. Oceans of saltwater drown out any other thoughts. However, the number of memoirs and books describing surfing as a spiritual journey, using the surfing lifestyle as a metaphor for a greater search for meaning, belie these stereotypes. As a blogger, I've long struggled with the urge to reveal too much of my real identity online, preferring to hide behind Ambrose Pierce-like observations. A recent conversion to the surfing world has led me on a journey of a very different kind, one which has informed a change in my writing and identity. Previously stifled by academia's rigidity, I have found surfing has encouraged my creativity and allowed me to explore the idea of identity in my writing more than ever before. These changes in my online and real life writing are the focus of this paper, as well as providing an overview of the emergence of the surfing memoir and books about the spiritual nature of surfing.

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Writing—surfing—spirituality—memoir—blogging

Surfing is out of this world. You can't imagine the thrill of the shooting the curl. It positively surpasses every living emotion I've ever had (*Gidget*, 1959).

Surfing is seen by its proponents as far more than a sport or pastime; it is a lifestyle. Surfers use their own language to describe the sensation of riding waves, a feat which requires considerable athletic ability and balance. The search for waves becomes an almost spiritual quest, and has been described as such in surfing memoirs released since the late 1950s. These memoirs and the changes in my writing since embracing the surfing lifestyle are the focus of this paper.

The History of Surfing in Words

I could not help concluding this man felt the most supreme pleasure while he was driven on so smoothly by the sea (Cook, 1777).

The ancient art of surfing was first written about by Europeans in the late 17th century, as explorers such as Captain Cook, his successor Lt James King and the American Jackson Crane described the elegant athleticism of the Polynesian watermen they encountered in Tahiti and Hawaii (Kampion, 2003 / Marcus, 2001). Intrigued by their activities, Cook and others recorded their impressions, describing what they came to know as "he'e nalu" (wave-sliding):

The ... diversion is only intended as an amusement, not a trial of skill, and in a gentle swell that sets on must I conceive be very pleasant, at least they seem to feel a great pleasure in the motion which this Exercise gives. (Lieutenant James King, commander of the *Discovery*, 1779, recorded in the ship's log, Marcus, 2001).

The colonisation of Hawaii by Europeans brought about many changes, the foremost of which was the advancement of Christianity in place of traditional Hawaiian beliefs. With Christianity came control; the Calvinists banned surfing and centuries of tradition were suppressed under what was regarded as more appropriate clothing (Lueras, 1984). Houston and Finney write in *Surfing: A History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport*:

For surfing, the abolition of the traditional religion signalled the end of surfing's sacred aspects. With surf chants, board construction rites, sports gods and other sacred elements removed, the once ornate sport of surfing was stripped of much of its cultural plumage (1996).

Still, the sport captured the imagination of writers and travellers alike, and they in turn recorded their observations: 'The more daring riders knelt and even stood on their surf-boards, waving their arms and uttering exultant cries' (Bird, 1876); and, 'Where but the moment before was only the wide desolation and invincible roar, is now a man, erect, full-statured, not struggling frantically in that wild movement ... calm and superb, poised on the giddy summit' (London, 1907).

The reaction to this spectacle was one of 'surprise and awe'. As Ford and Brown note 'the reaction of surfing's first European observers suggest a resonance with certain

evolving sensibilities and images of the sea already present or nascent within the Western imaginary' (Introduction, 2005). It is worth noting that these observations were made from the shore; while London and Mark Twain (1872) attempted to surf, the majority of accounts were by those merely watching, not participating. At the same time, the spiritual elements of surfing were cast aside by religious zealots. The surfing memoir was a long way off.

Surfing as a pastime continued to grow in popularity, assisted by the efforts of surfing legends like Duke Kahanamoku, a Waikiki beachboy who travelled to mainland USA and Australia in 1914 – 15 to demonstrate the ancient art to great acclaim (Kampion, 2003, p. 17). From these beginnings a groundswell of enthusiasm developed. This enthusiasm was quickly adopted by the mainstream and eventually commercialised, becoming an \$8 billion dollar global industry (Weidler, 2002, p.5), disseminated via words, iconography and popular culture.

Surfing a wave of success

Surf culture was commercialised in the 1950s and '60s and delivered to an eager public via movies and music. The Beach Boys played manufactured pop in matching Hawaiian shirts and everyone drove a Woody to the local surf break, where the boys surfed and the girls watched from the beach. Movies like *Beach Party* (1963) and *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965) perpetuated a clean-cut yet rebellious youthful pastime with little to no acknowledgement of its Polynesian roots and spiritual history.

Surfing Safari

In the movies, surfing is presented as a lot of standing upright on a board the size of an aircraft carrier; Annette Funicello waves to Frankie Avalon from a Californian beach and laughs and the whole time the characters remain, for the most part, bone dry and perfectly groomed. In the movies, surfers travel the world with apparently no means of income, finding secret surf spots in exotic locations and gliding their way across the silver screen to the sounds of The Sandals (*The Endless Summer*, 1966), Tamam Shud (*Morning of the Earth*, 1972) or Jack Johnson (*A Brokedown Melody*, 2004), depending on the era. In the movies, it only takes one lesson of surfing given by an exasperated Lori Petty on a beach to stand up and ride a surfboard all the way to shore. This was in *Point Break* (1991), a film which not only brought modern surfing back into the mainstream but also managed to reinstall long-dormant stereotypes in the minds of the non-surfing public. In the movies, girls in skimpy bikinis paddle out and surf all day without getting burned or apparently losing their swimsuits in wipeouts (*Blue Crush*, 2002).

The first time I went surfing I stood up for three seconds.

In real life, trying to get a 9-foot surfboard out to an acceptable spot to even attempt *lying* on the board takes more energy than I'd usually expend in a week at work. Too

far forward on the board means a face-plant into the foam, too far back and the board gets the privilege of a wave, but you don't. Point the board in the wrong direction and suddenly you know what a ride in a washing machine might feel like. Despite the board being something the width and length of your average footpath, I'd say trying to stand up on a surfboard is akin to standing up on a footpath made of jelly during an earthquake.

A *big* earthquake.

Surfing would have to be the hardest physical activity I've ever undertaken, mostly because I haven't given birth to quads or taken part in a truck pull.

The number of factors that have to work in conjunction for the ride to eventuate means it might not happen again for a few sets of waves, especially since it seems to be some sort of cosmic miracle in the first place" (Hawryluk, 2006).

It may well be, according to the originators of the sport. In Hawaii, surfing is known as *he'e nalu*: 'he'e here referring to

the sliding, gliding movement across the *nalu*, the churning ocean or waves. But *nalu* has a deeper, more primal meaning that is common and essential to all human life, for *nalu* also refers to the fluid from which each human being emerges to join the family of *kanaka* – man (Anderson, 2005).

The number of memoirs and books describing surfing as a spiritual journey and using the surfing lifestyle as a metaphor for a greater search for meaning defy the generic stereotypes perpetuated by the media and cinema.

In films, surfing has always been presented as a chiefly male-dominated domain, where defying authority and the search for waves were the primary concerns. Nowhere was this more evident than in the films and TV shows centred on a character called Gidget. The original novel *Gidget, The Little Girl with the Big Ideas* (1957) represents early-model surfing memoirs; a breezy bildungsroman written by the father of a female surfer from California named Kathy Kohner.

The great Kahoona showed me the first time how to get on my knees, to push the shoulders up and slide the body back-to spring to your feet quickly, putting them a foot apart and under you in one motion. That's quite tricky. But then, surf-riding is not playing Monopoly, and the more I got the knack of it, the more I was crazy about it and the more I was crazy about it, the harder I worked at it.

The televisual depiction of Gidget was far removed from this headstrong girl surfer, and spurned a popular TV series and film wherein a real-life novice surfer was turned into a squeaky parody. Gidget's surfing prowess was largely ignored in favour of depicting a boy-crazy girl with pigtails and a cheeky grin. Had the producers of the *Gidget* films and TV series stayed true to Frederick Kohner's vision of his daughters'

surf exploits, the stories of women like Dr Sarah Gerhardt, the first woman to surf Mavericks and the subject of *One Winter Story* (2006) may not be the exception rather than the rule. Instead, the commodification of surfing narratives was delivered to audiences in sanitised Technicolor and via cheesy harmonies. Surf culture proliferated; clothing, magazines, language, films and eventually television shows capitalised on the popularity of the surfing lifestyle. Surfers were presented as drop-outs of society; a tribe of lazy hipsters even as they were exploited at every opportunity. As Booth notes ‘consumer capitalism created the social space in which surfing developed as an acceptable hedonistic pastime in California’ (p. 191, 1995).

As the surfing lifestyle grew in popularity, surfing memoirs were emerging, beginning with the kind of gung-ho celebration of the ‘most supreme pleasure’ in *You Should Have Been Here an Hour Ago: The Stoked Side of Surfing or How to Hang Ten Through life and Stay Happy* (Edwards, 1967). Edwards’ book hints at the kind of surfing philosophy that would come to define the surfing memoir when he reminisces about his days as a teen surfer:

a life devoted to surfing was not exactly a misspent youth. Remember, youth spent in pool halls can only make a hustler of you. There is no way to hustle anyone on a surfboard. I add that little comment as the underlying moral of this book. You may quote me.

But still the stereotypes persisted.

Surfing Stereotypes

Equipment needed to begin surfing: a low IQ, and no sense of direction (Johnny Fain in *Surfer Magazine*, 1970).

Surfing evokes images of sun-bronzed stoners with little more going on in their heads than the search for the next wave. Oceans of saltwater drown out any other thoughts. Years after Annette and Frankie danced on beaches to bright happy tunes, *Puberty Blues* (Carey and Lette, 1979) demonstrated the changing face of surfing, at least on an aesthetic level: the Woodys became panel vans and the music and surfers had a harder edge, but the same basic principles applied. The girls sat on the beach minding and folding towels while their boyfriends hid out the back, soaking up sun and salt away from the pressures of society on land. Cunningham says that ‘*Puberty Blues* struck a chord with teenage audiences when it was released because its depictions of the surfing subculture, and of ritual experimentations with sex and drugs, were refreshingly frank’ (2004).

The frankness of *Puberty Blues* mirrors the disaffected honesty endemic in the surfing memoir; a celebration of what is called ‘stoke’—the pure joy of surfing. In ‘Surf Physics’, Distinguished Emeritus Professor Ronald Edge provides a detailed description of the mechanics of boardriding, and includes an illustrative photograph of a female surfer Josette Lagardere ‘with large component of velocity parallel to wave

front' (2001, p.5) in between various equations explaining exactly how a wave is caught and ridden. His article concludes however with a description of something less definable, evoking the spirit of the surfing memoir:

Students may enjoy learning about some of the basic physical concepts involved in surfing. But it is the ride—being caught up and hurled shoreward in what Jack London called a 'wrestle with the sea'—that lures humans back to the beach time and again. There is no other feeling like standing up on a surfboard and guiding it in a jumping, sliding rush across glassy water: speed, thrills, and fun. You'll know. You'll feel it. Surfers have an apt term for it: it's called *stoke* (p.6).

Every surfer is seeking stoke, and every surfing memoir is an attempt to capture in words a feeling that defies description.

In my own writing, I have attempted to express 'the elusive mystique of surfing' (Ziolkowski, 2007) that draws millions to the ocean, despite the very real risks of serious injury (Stranger, 1999, Nathanson, 2002). As a blogger, I've long struggled with the urge to reveal too much of my real identity online, preferring to hide behind Ambrose Bierce-like observations of life.

Surfing changed that.

Sunday, 6.42 a.m.

I am waiting on a Sunday morning to be picked up to go surfing. It is raining. Ordinarily, the rain puts people off from doing things outdoors, but when you're going to be immersed in water anyway it doesn't seem to matter. My usual policy about getting up early is *no*. I don't like getting up early; I'd rather stay up late.

For me getting up early requires the involvement of an international flight. Then I'd get up early. The opportunity to soak up another culture will get me out of bed as early as you please.

There are no international flights to be taken from Rockhampton airport. There is only the vague promise of surfing in the pre-dawn cool of a rain-swept beach (Hawryluk, 2006).

In place of sardonic witticisms, we see the emergence of an entirely different voice; that of the burgeoning soul surfer.

Keep doing what you're doing. You've got longboards: you're a soul surfer (Ross, Surfrider Foundation member).

Tom Blake first posited the ideology of a soul surfer in 1967 in an essay called *Voice of the Wave*, which was the starting point for surfers to begin investigating Eastern

philosophy and meditation. Now, the term soul surfer is one who eschews the commercial and competitive elements of the sport, preferring to focus on the stoke above all. The voice of the soul surfer is found in surfing memoirs as diverse as Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872), Lesley Choyce's *Driving Minnie's Piano: Memoirs of the Surfing Life in Nova Scotia* (2006) and *Surfing Rabbi: A Kabbalistic Search for Soul* (Shifren, 2001). Surfers know this voice; they can read stoke between the lines on the page.

Late last year I got an email from a guy down South a little ways who had read my blog, asking where we surfed here. I answered him with the details and asked where he'd gotten my email address from. He replied about scouting around where I work for a local contact and chancing on the address and made this comment: 'When you read someone talking about waves in a certain way you know if they are authentic or not' (Penning, 2007). High praise indeed. Evidence of this authenticity can be found in the kinds of description found within the pages of my blog.

Sunday morning 6 a.m.

6am always sounds earlier than it is. Lately 6am has been light and the wind non-existent. After the recent rain, the temperature has kicked up a notch and the humidity has started creeping across the day like a lazy caterpillar, stretching out along bodies and pressing its little feet on hairlines and the small of your back. This is how humidity gathers see; bubbles of perspiration congregating in flocks together. Safety in numbers.

This morning we were in the water before 7, having collected a gaggle of boards and boardriders and driven in two cars to the backroads of nowhere in particular. The usual routine is to drive up to the back of a local resort, flick on the 4WD and drive along a sandy track, unload boards and bottles of water and everything else and then trudge down another sandy track to where the beach is.

We must be very, very keen to do this week in and week out.

Being as all that effort culminated in smaller waves with perfect lines, we stayed in the water for hours. Surfing involves a lot of waiting. Waiting isn't all that bad really; it's just on the cusp of summer, the water is a reasonable temperature and an amazing azure that shimmers like Elizabeth Taylor's jewellery collection; it's quiet and there's plenty of time to think. Or to not think. Today there was enough waiting time to do both (Hawryluk, 2006).

The breadth of writing about surfing is testament to the sport's ongoing popularity, with sociological (Butts, S 2001) and scientific research (Butt, 2004), vying for space among the requisite how-to guides (Guisado, 2002, McLaren, 1997, Werner, 1996) and surfing novels (Capp, 2003, Winton, 2008). The emerging genre of surfing memoirs belongs in the subset of specialist memoirs, within the field of sports memoirs but still quite separate to it. Surfing memoirs focus less on the acquisition of trophies and earnings in the monetary sense and more on the spiritual search for that ill-defined but all-important stoke. The popularity of surfing memoirs also indicates a reawakening of the original spiritual ethos of the surfing lifestyle, banned by Calvinists and lost amongst the glossy veneer of the 1950s surf movie. Surfing icons

such as Gerry Lopez (2008) and Miki Dora (2008) have been immortalised in biographies and memoirs, as have lesser known surfers and writers like Thad Ziolkowski (2002) and Allan C Weisbecker (2002, 2007).

In Ben Marcus' *Surfing and the Meaning of Life* (2006), *The Surfer Spirit* (Anderson, 2005) and *Walking on Water* (Jones, 2006), distributed by Gospel Light books, the concept of surfing as a source of spirituality and inspiration is situated alongside a smattering of surfing quotes, native Hawaiian beliefs and Christianity. The glossy coffee table book *The Surfer Spirit* (2005) offers readers little more than neat aphorisms and photographs of submerged surfers and rainbows on deserted beaches, but remains a celebration of stoke, of surfing, of a lifestyle choice that is borne out of a desire to ride energy.

As Daniel Duane writes in *Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast* (1996):

The climber never quite penetrates the mountain, the hiker remains trapped in the visual prison, but the surfer physically penetrates the heart of the ocean's energy—and this is in *no sense* sentimentality—stands wet in its substance, pushed by its drive inside the kinetic vortex. Even riding a river, one rides a medium itself moved by gravity, likewise with a sailboard or on skis. Until someone figures out how to ride sound or light, surfing will remain the only way to ride energy.

First

The day *after* the first day I surfed is one I'll remember for a long time. All I felt was pain. I was bruised from head to toe; I was waterlogged and found out that sinuses run very deep and can produce water up to three days after an inadvertent snort of saltwater. My hips, knees, legs and ribs were battered, despite the thick coating of Comfort Food Fat I was then carrying. I discovered muscles I never knew I had, and they all announced their existence to me in a collective groan that said "no more".

Despite this, I was enjoying myself. Sitting out the back on a board in total silence just listening to waves and birds and not thinking about *anything* really became one of the best ways for me to de-stress. Surfing became a far better form of escapism than another episode of Seinfeld.

My head was full of the detritus of life; deadlines, bills, information, and the main benefit of surfing was that it all seemed to come together when I stopped trying so hard, when I stopped thinking about it so much and just did it.

For someone in my line of work this was an entirely new experience. Kind of the point of moving to a new state really. I thought I moved North for work, but surfing became part of a new state of mind. Sitting out the back in all kinds of weather; even

in the rain at times, brought me such a feeling of release it's actually hard to describe without sounding like Bodhi (Hawryluk, 2007).

Bodhi, a zen-like surfer who also happens to rob banks in the cult surfing film *Point Break*, espouses his wisdom about surfing to a fresh-faced undercover FBI agent, saying; “[Surfing]’s a state of mind. It’s that place where you lose yourself and you find yourself” (1991).

Surfing began to permeate my world, affecting my writing in other ways too; at a writers’ workshop in Blackall, some 900 kilometres from the nearest ocean, I wrote a poem about riding waves on an ocean I couldn’t even see, let alone get to.

Out the Back

before awakening a tension shoots across my heart
 an expectation of the day ahead
 struggling across a rip into the newly born sun
 through a spincycle followed by a rinse
 the ocean is a washing machine this morning
 where I am the lost sock in the laundromat of life
 duckdive eskimo roll leg pulled taut by a rope
 stunning in its severity

jellyfish brush against hands clutching layers of plywood glass and resin
 grab this triple-decker sandwich
 set upon the stringer and paddle harder
 between bronzed boys on short boards
 my vessel is a b-double in a sea of sedans

arrive at last out the back to a calm green ocean
 silence surrounds me
 sit up satisfied sweating salt and
 realise I am still dreaming (Hawryluk, 2007)

The act of surfing and the memoirs celebrating it have introduced me to a new way of thinking about writing; a pared down minimalism is reflecting in my words like sun off a glassy swell. Reflection is also becoming a key element in the voice I’m adopting; there’s a sense of being aware of what’s behind me even as I’m being propelled forwards. It’s a little like paddling for a wave and taking the drop; a combination of what Emeritus Professor Edge might describe as ‘hydrodynamics, wave propagation, kinematics, and dynamics’ (2001, p. 1).

Three Years Later

When I first started surfing, I___ and her husband and son shoved a pink board in my hands, showed me how to attach a legrope and then pointed in the general direction of

the ocean. *It's that way* they said, being as I am quite short-sighted. So I grabbed the board and followed them into the water. Wave after wave pounded me; the board conked me in the head, the hips, the knees and on more than one memorable occasion, right in the chest. It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life; certainly the hardest sport I've ever played; and I've played water polo and softball. There's a lot of underwater violence going on in water polo, as well as what you see on top, and a softball isn't bloody soft at all.

That first day in the surf, I got slammed: I ended up out the back somehow then got pummelled by an oncoming wave I didn't know what to do with. I paddled and floundered and rode waves lying sideways on the board, and for what was probably three seconds but felt like three minutes I stood up and promptly felt the board fly out from under me. I got up, rubbed my salty stinging eyes and said 'right; let's do that again.' The others were off surfing their own waves: I stayed in the whitewash and battled it out, charging into foam, trying to stay balanced, getting the feel of the board and the waves. I_____ has always commented that she has never seen *anyone* as determined to surf as I was the first couple of days I went out.

Surfing left me exhausted, burnt, bruised, waterlogged and extremely satisfied. I'd always wanted to surf, and I was determined to use the opportunity while I had it. And I did: I went early in the morning: I went late in the afternoon. More than once I left the water just as night fell; tired and sodden but excited because I'd ridden a wave (Hawryluk, 2008).

Out the back

It's a funny thing, sitting out the back of waves, waiting for the good sets to come. Getting into chilly water on a windy day doesn't sound like something that would be good for the soul, but it can be, and never is this more the case than when you're out there, waiting and silent. The only sounds are pounding waves, the occasional grunt or shiver of fellow surfers and the howling wind. It's a truly solitary moment; you're alone, but it never feels lonely.

Once I sat out the back and watched a late afternoon squall come across from town. It hit the beach with a kind of gentle fury and flat hard rain bounced off our foreheads. It made things a little hard to see. That's the beauty of sitting out the back alone; it's a good chance to nut things out that seem so huge and uncontrollable on land—the rain or the mist of waves passing by washes away worries like an oil spill on a rain-slicked street.

Things that seem limitless and daunting in real life can be looked at in miniature - as mere moments in a lifespan that stretches on endlessly, because we don't really know where or when it will end. Life is measured out in moments after all; good, bad, worse. I've sat out the back laughing, fuming, crying, worrying; all in between cleansing cold waves. The matter at hand takes precedence and all your worries are

gone in the moment you start paddling. The secret to surfing is I think that it all works when you stop thinking so hard and let yourself just feel your way. Going on instinct. Being quite the over-thinker, it's a nice change to be able to just let go. I know; I sound like I'm channelling Bodhi again. But he makes a very good point.

This afternoon I got into the water after a month-long absence. I'm feeling that absence in my back and shoulders now, as well as in the fine scratches and cuts I got from playing gardener yesterday. You wouldn't think that cold water would alleviate any of that, but it does: being in the water again shrinks all my worries into bite-sized pieces, so I swallowed them, along with about a gallon of salt water and a couple of chunks of warming dark chocolate afterwards.

Hopefully none of it will come up later (Hawryluk, 2008).

I've got the beginnings of my own surfing memoir here; within these lines describing waiting and watching for waves, and in the elusive definition of the sensation of stoke. In *That Oceanic Feeling*, Australian writer Fiona Capp returns to surfing after a long absence. She describes going to a surf museum in Torquay and seeing a brochure which invites visitors to 'Come and discover why everyone is a surfer deep inside' (2003, p.30). Capp writes that the brochure '[captures] the atavistic allure of the activity, the seductive power of the idea of surfing, even for those who would never dream of surfing themselves' (2003, p.30).

Dawn

My surfing supplies box contains the following: three chunks of warm water wax, two sets of straps; one red and short, the other black and long. You can get those around three boards, bags and all. Two types of sunscreen, a sleek sharp black fin, no longer needed, insect repellent; roll on *and* spray, a pencil case made of neoprene holding small change for soft-drink and food at surf comps. Seven tubes of bronze zinc, half empty, sand caked lids screwed on sideways. A couple of conical shells and a tide chart.

The summer holidays of my childhood were spent at the beach. Being landlocked by suburbs meant a trip to the beach took the better part of a day, an exhausting enterprise we all could do without. The South Coast for six weeks became our best chance to experience life by the sea. Even there, the rented beach house was a block away from a lake, not-quite-ironically called Swan, safe and contained and fun for young and old. But there were no waves. The surf beach was a drive away and far more dangerous and from the hot tar carpark you could see specks on the horizon, small bodies bobbing up and down behind the breaking waves. When they came in, sun-bronzed and weary, they'd scurry along to their cars, boards under their arms and shorts exposing a border between tan and white skin that looked strangely inviting. I'd try to catch their gaze and smile their way, as if the fact I'd seen *Big Wednesday* meant we shared a common bond.

The sky at 6am is grey blue clean. The grass on the verge is still wet and my thongs slip slightly as I push forwards upwards, a 9'2 board under one arm and a beach bag

under the other. The towel around my neck makes shooing flies awkward. I toss my head back and huff at a stinging March fly attached to my shoulder. The big green board is so wide my fingers only just reach the curved edge at the end of my overstretched arm. I flipflop my way down an empty street, birds quiet, dogs dozing away their Saturday morning. Palm trees flicker quietly behind me trudging my way to Irene's house, just four doors down on the left.

The Troopie and the ute are parked in the driveway. *They haven't left yet* I think and notice the house is suspiciously quiet. My watch says 6.10; I'm not late for a ride to the surf break. Without a 4WD of my own I need to be on time and unobtrusive to ensure I maintain my place in their car. The front door is closed so I hesitate then knock anyway. My board sits patiently on the grass while I wait for signs of life. Irene's head appears at the door, sleepy-eyed and squinting out at the approaching sun.

It's too windy, she says she shuffles out the door a bit. *Sorry*, she says, like she's responsible somehow. I gesture at my surfboard; on land, away from surf, it's just a really long table without legs. She tells me the wind came up overnight, ruining our plans for an early morning surf. Paul has already been up at the point, willing it to drop off. I say goodbye and apologise for waking her, grab my board, bag and towel and make the return trip home in silence (Hawryluk, 2008).

Kampion (2003) says the search for what he calls 'the wild' is crucial to understanding what motivates surfers; 'the wild ... infuses surf culture ... makes it such a rich world of men and women who seek daily commerce with a morphing landscape of possibilities, of possible rewards and punishments, of long efforts made for fleeting gains' (p. 125) Surfing and writing appear to share similar ideologies; perhaps this is why I've found adopting one has benefited the other so much.

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