

Introduction

My Personal Bali Odyssey (1974–2015)

The distractions of Western capitalism have reached critical mass. We need to pull in the reins and heal Bali's wounded, overcrowded, over-developed, over-polluted soul. It's up to the surfers. It always has been. There is no place on earth where surfers are more powerful within the overall community than Bali. We must come together and start throwing punches at the problems. Now that is a powerful dream.

Stephen Palmer, surfer

Despite its many layers of crowded confusion, its mysterious worlds within worlds, its dog-shit-spattered footpaths, clogged streets and odious drains, Bali has always had a therapeutic effect on my soul, right from the beginning when most of the above did not yet apply, to the present day, when all this and much more is sadly true.

It started like this.

In early 1974 I came home from London nursing a broken heart. Although the special girl had said she'd wait for me while I had the mandatory year's working holiday in Europe, she hadn't. Her dad, who liked me better than the other guy, fronted the cash for the flight home so that I could try to win her back, but it ended in tears when I caught her in bed with my rival. In a rage, I took a pair of scissors from the kitchen and cut into neat bits the Carnaby Street dresses I'd bought her with my last week's wages in London, then stormed out of the flat and never saw her again.

I took a job on a Sydney newspaper, but then Albert Falzon, the seriously cool filmmaker of *Morning of the Earth* and the publisher of *Tracks*—in other words, an absolute god in the surfing world to which I aspired—phoned

and asked if he could buy me lunch. At some fancy city bistro Falzon offered me the editorship of *Tracks*, then the most exciting youth publication in Australia. I was over the moon. Within a few weeks I'd quit the city job, thrown away my tie and moved into a rented house overlooking Whale Beach, just a hop, step and jump away from the magazine's office.

Then Albe dropped a clanger. Yes, he still wanted me to edit *Tracks*, but next year, not this year. He'd forgotten that in 1972 at the world surfing championships in San Diego, he'd offered the job to a *Rolling Stone* writer named John Grissim, and now Grissim was on his way to take him up on it. He'd pay me a retainer to hang around and write the odd article, but I'd have to find other work.

I was hanging gloomily around the *Tracks* office one day when 'other work' walked through the door in the form of a loud, jovial, chain-smoking fellow who was introduced to me as 'the Mexican'. David 'Mexican' Sumpter had just made a surf movie called *On Any Morning* and he wanted me to go on the road with him to promote it. He said: 'You can write a funny story and my whole life is one big funny story, so it shouldn't be too difficult.' He was delighted when I used my contacts at the newspaper I had so recently departed to get them to run a feature article titled, 'Surfie filmmaker lives on dog food and yoghurt to finance new movie.'

The Mex and I hit the road up and down the coast, with him gluing posters all over towns while I chatted up the local papers and radio stations. His personal hygiene was highly questionable, but he was a funny man with a good heart and we did good business. After the Melbourne premiere he handed me \$250 in cash and advised me to give it all to a photographer named Rennie Ellis, who was a partner in a company called Bali Easyrider Travel Service. 'You need to go to Bali,' the Mex said. 'Clear your head of all that girlie nonsense and get some perfect waves all to yourself.'

I visited Ellis at his Prahran office, thus beginning a friendship for life, and he said he could squeeze me onto a Rip Curl trip, leaving in a few days. With the return airline ticket, three weeks' bed and breakfast and a motorbike thrown in, it cost \$49 more than Mexican had paid me, but I was in.

I knew a little—very little—about Bali. In our last year of school, a surf-chick girlfriend had told me she was going there as soon as we'd finished our final exams, probably to live. I was dumbstruck. She gave me an impossibly exotic address where I could write to her: Poste Restante, Denpasar, Bali. A few years later we hooked up again in London and she told me about

the huts in the jungle next to the perfect waves, the gorgeous, friendly people and the fragrant aroma of frangipanis, satay sauce and clove cigarettes. Albe Falzon had also told me stories about the mystical aura of the place and the incredible waves that he had found on the lonely Bukit Peninsula, and Mexican Sumpter had filmed around Kuta Beach with Nat Young and Wayne Lynch, and he, too, had some wonderful tales.

I still vividly recall the excitement as the plane broke through the clouds on descent and we saw glistening waves breaking along the coastal cliffs to the south and to either side of the runway. And then smelling that intoxicating mix I'd heard about as soon as we disembarked and hit the tarmac, followed by the craziness of the tiny terminal, and waiting forever for our surfboards to appear, and the pandemonium outside as the porters and *bemo* drivers hustled for our buck. I loved it immediately. My ex, my now-you-see-it-now-you-don't editor's job and my whole shitty year in Sydney dissolved into ancient history. This was now; this was Bali.

We sat in the back of a three-wheeled *bemo*, facing each other on benches on either side, our boards and bags stacked down the middle. I peered through the small barred window at the driver in the cabin, surrounded by garish ornaments hung from the rear-vision mirror and roof, jabbering away to his offsider in the passenger seat, one eye occasionally on the narrow sealed section of road, his hand never far away from the horn.

Our unofficial tour leader was Brian Singer, the co-founder of Rip Curl Surfboards and Wetsuits, a new company running out of Torquay, Victoria, near the famous Bells Beach. Brian had been to Bali for the first time the previous year, so he knew the ropes, and this year he'd brought along some of his employees and some of Torquay's better young surfers. When we arrived at Kodja Inn, not far from the beach on Jalan Pantai, the first thing the Torquay surfers did was unpack their boards and start waxing the decks and fastening cords to fibreglass loops on the tail that they would then attach to their legs by means of an adhesive strip.

By contrast, no unpacking of my single board was necessary. It had travelled naked, a solitary 'FRAGILE' sticker pasted to its bottom. The previous year, in my first international travels, I had surfed all over France, Spain, Portugal and Cornwall, but I had never seen a board bag or a leg rope. After we had all enjoyed a warm-up surf in the friendly beach-break waves at the end of the track, Brian Singer took me aside and suggested that since the swell appeared to be rising and we might surf the sensational new

reef-break discovery, Uluwatu, in the morning, it would be advisable for me to use a leash so that I wouldn't smash my only board on the reef.

'But I haven't got one of those thingies,' I protested.

'A rovings loop,' he supplied. 'After dinner I'll take you over the way to meet a guy who should be able to fix that for you.'

We watched the sun set over Kuta Beach, drinking the local Bintang beer purchased from a pretty girl in a sarong who seemed to glide along the sand with an ice bucket balanced on her head, then we walked up the dusty beach track to the night fish markets where we sat on benches and ate whole fish with our fingers, washing it down with more Bintang. The entire meal cost less than a dollar. Everything cost less than a dollar!

Having settled his young family for the night, Brian came across the garden to the bungalow I was sharing with Bob Pearson, a schoolteacher from Santa Cruz, California. 'Grab your board,' he said. 'We'll go see Boyum.'

On the other side of the track, perhaps 30 metres closer to the beach, we turned into a dark laneway and then right into a candle-lit courtyard, from which point we could gaze into a house where a mixed group of Western and Balinese men were sitting around a table. A muscular blond with a slightly protruding jaw got up and shone a flashlight in our direction. He smiled and said: 'Sing Ding! *Apa kabar?*'

Brian introduced me to Mike Boyum and explained my predicament. In an instant Boyum had issued some instructions in Indonesian or Balinese—I had no idea which—and two young men grabbed my board and took it away to be modified. 'Take about half an hour,' Boyum said to Brian. 'We're just having some soup. Join us?'

I was rather pointedly excluded from the conversation, which was mainly about the great Hawaiian surfer Gerry Lopez, who was either about to arrive or had just left, I can't remember, but I was handed a small, chipped bowl of murky mushroom soup that I neither needed nor wanted after our seafood binge. Noting Brian's enthusiastic slurping, I joined in and put away perhaps half before pushing it aside. It was enough.

I can remember laughing madly about nothing as we danced back to our *losmen* (bungalow) in the dark, me carrying my surfboard fitted with its sexy new leggie loop, Brian Singer loping along in front, saying, 'Jesus, what a first night!' I slept fitfully and uneasily, and at one point, fearful of waking Bob in the next bunk, I sat outside on the porch and smelled the night air, alternately counting my blessings and imagining large animals in the garden.

I wasn't right for days thanks to the mushroom soup, but we surfed Uluwatu the next morning, my new leash kept my board from danger, I caught a few waves that tested me, and between sessions I had time to ponder what this adventure would mean to my life.

Like so many people in those days, I had experienced a psychedelic mushroom trip upon arrival, but I had few negatives to report, other than that I would have preferred to know what I was getting myself into. Although I had messed around with LSD prior to this, tripping on psilocybin was not to become part of my long-term Bali experience. On the other hand, sharing my first night in Bali with Brian Singer and Mike Boyum profoundly influenced my perceptions, not about Bali itself but about *bules* (Westerners) in Bali and the freedoms and opportunities this island seemed to offer. I had just turned twenty-three and this was such a cool new world. I couldn't believe how so many things—getting ditched by my girl, meeting Albe, getting the editor's job, not getting the editor's job, meeting the Mex, meeting Rennie—had fallen into place and allowed me to be here, at this point in time. Of course I knew virtually nothing about Bali's incredible history prior to my arrival, nor even the much shorter history of the *bule*. All I knew was that for me the planets had suddenly aligned.

Brian Singer, who is still my friend, would go on, with partner Doug Warbrick, to become a multimillionaire surf-industry mogul. Mike Boyum would become lifestyle instructor to surfing's superstars while bungling dope deals for the Brotherhood of Eternal Love and other drug cartels, before dying mysteriously in the Philippines in his early forties. Practically everyone I met on that first trip was doing something interesting, on one side of the law or the other.

On my third day in Bali in 1974, someone advised me to cycle across the cow paddock to a place called Arena Bungalows to see Dick Hoole, who could organise a fake student pass for me so that I could buy airline tickets at a discount. I did as I was told and went to visit Dick, whom I'd met once or twice on the Gold Coast. A genial guy who loved a chat, Dick distractedly told me to come in when I arrived at his door. I was somewhat shocked to find him stretched out on the floor of his room stuffing Thai marijuana sticks into the hollowed-out balsawood stringer of his surfboard. 'Won't be a sec,' he said. 'There's a thermos of tea on the porch, help yourself.'

At the time, Dick was a struggling surf photographer who needed to subsidise his lifestyle in whatever ways he could. Back then we were all into

that, even Brian Singer. During that Bali trip, Brian and I and a couple of other Torquay lads travelled overland to Yogyakarta, Java—a horrendous bus and train journey in those days—to buy batik print shirts to smuggle back into Australia. I had no idea, and barely made my money back on the hideous shirts I bought, but if it was good enough for the boss of Rip Curl, it was good enough for me.

In 1975, now the editor of *Tracks* at last, I came back to Bali with my new girlfriend, hung out with Miki Dora, Gerry Lopez, Rory Russell and other star surfers of the day, had coffees and cakes at the cool new joint at Bemo Corner called Made's Warung, got stoned at full-moon parties at the abandoned Kayu Aya Hotel (later the Oberoi) at the far end of the road, got to know the Windro family at Uluwatu, sat in the cave out of the noonday heat with Aussie mates Fly and Hocky, drank Foster's beer with the rising tide of ocker tourists at places like Norm's Bar, and pigged out on the buffet breakfast at the new Bali Hyatt in Sanur.

In 1977 I came back with another new girlfriend, now my wife, and as we hiked along the track past Windro's village, heading for another day of perfect Uluwatu surf, the village kids began to chorus: 'Phillip's got new darling, Phillip's got new darling ...' That was when I knew I'd made it. Despite some embarrassment, I felt a surge of pride, a kind of belonging. I felt like I was a Bali guy, an old hand, a Bukit pioneer. I was deluded of course, but I was also enchanted by the sense of belonging, no matter how fleeting, and that has never left me.

Since those halcyon days I've ridden many perfect waves and nearly choked on the brown effluent-filled water of the monsoon surf, tried to start an English-language magazine in Bali, produced, with Rennie Ellis, a guide for travelling in Bali with kids (publisher reneged, too soon), covered royal cremations and US presidential visits as a journalist, holed up in bungalows and villas and written books, taught my kids to love Bali, taught my grandkids to love Bali, leased some land, lost it, fallen out of love with Bali, fallen back in, seen friends prosper in Bali and others fail and die. As much as we love to travel to new places, as much as we lament change, as all old people do, my wife and I feel that we are joined at the hip to Bali, and we will come here until we can no longer, for whichever reason.

So this is not a dispassionate account of Bali's recent and not-so-recent history. The first part, dealing with Bali before my time, a mysterious and frequently scary place where black magic and head-lobbing accompanied

the rise of an extraordinarily rich and enriching culture, is a history drawn from the many excellent resources available and credited at the end of the book, but also it is drawn from a sense of connectivity, that the Bali found by the first *bule* intruders who washed onto the Bukit reefs from a shipwreck in the sixteenth century and were offered food, shelter and women, was not so different from the Bali that became the world's first centre of cultural tourism in the early part of the twentieth century, largely on the back of a bare-breasted marketing campaign, if you will forgive the anatomical impossibility of that metaphor.

The second part closely parallels my personal experience of Bali's development from the 1970s to the present, but it is a much broader canvas than that. I've always been intrigued by the idea that just a few years before the international airport opened and the modern tourist boom began, Bali's village streets were awash with the blood of their own, for the third time in little more than half a century, and who could count how many times previously, in the millennium it took for Bali's warring rajas to develop some semblance of unity. I wanted to know more about those years of living dangerously that immediately preceded the mythology of the *Morning of the Earth*—the surf movie rather than Nehru's original 1950 'morning of the world' description—and fortunately I was able to find people who would talk about those sad and difficult times.

From 1970 on, like so many other long-term Bali tragics, I knew the names of the players—some of them were friends, some still are—and I knew at least part of many of the stories. Books and magazine articles had been written, but I had never seen a thorough depiction of this vital era in Bali's history, a period during which the karmic balance of this Hindu island has been tested by unprecedented growth, fuelled by inconceivable greed.

I decided to write a Bali book that joined the dots, from the Portuguese and Dutch sailors who fell upon her shores and never wanted to leave, through the slave trading and opium years of Mads Lange to the colonial era when fey Europeans and Americans like Walter Spies and Colin McPhee discovered, nurtured and exported the culture, to the barren early years of independence that followed Japanese occupation and yet another bloody war, and the eventual discovery of this 'peaceful paradise' by baby-boomer hippies and escapees from the war in Vietnam.

I wanted to tell all the stories—or as many as the protagonists would allow—and place them in a historical context that would perhaps make all of

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us who were around for part of this realise how lucky we were, and for those who weren't but now love Bali, realise what went before, and what went right and what went wrong, and maybe consider more carefully their roles in what comes next.

This book has no agenda other than that. I genuinely love Bali and have for some forty-plus years with no hope of change. Good and bad shit has happened here and it is all part of the story. For me it has possibly been the most adventurous part of a fairly adventurous life (so far), and my purpose in this book is to document the grand journey of how we, in our lifetimes, helped make Bali what it is, for better or worse, and how those who came before us weren't always so fucking smart either.

In 1936 Charlie Chaplin declared: 'Bali is ruined.' He was only half wrong. But there is always hope. Bali exudes that.



Chapter 1 *Kali Yuga: Being*

If we hate our brothers and sisters we are lost in Kali Yuga. If we can love all of our brothers and sisters, we have already begun to move into Kertha Yuga. We have already won The War against Terrorism.

Asana Viebeke L

Saturday 12 October 2002

Wayan Agus Parwita, twenty-three, a recent graduate of Bali Polytechnic's diploma course in tourism and hotel management, had a spring in his step as he walked the short distance from his sparse rented room behind a tourist *losmen* on a *gang* (lane) off Poppies Lane II, to the Coral Reef restaurant to begin his afternoon shift at 3 pm.

It was a warm afternoon but the intense humidity of the approaching wet season had not yet fully kicked in, and, considering he was deep in the concrete jungle of modern Kuta and could not see much of the sky, Wayan only imagined that the day looked bright and full of promise. Although it wasn't really what he'd studied for, he liked his job at the Coral Reef, which was why he'd been there for almost a year now, since he'd been given a major role in preparing the place for its grand opening, and now oversaw the whole front-of-house operation. A year back he'd merely been filling in time waiting for his results, but he'd come to like the team at the Coral Reef, he had a good relationship with his Japanese boss and he was learning a lot.

Wayan was also looking forward to the family reunions and religious celebrations of *Galungan*, coming up in just a couple of weeks. Although the family compound was only half an hour away in the village of Cepaka, just inland from the beaches of Canggu, working long shifts at the Coral Reef meant he didn't get to see his parents and younger brother, Made, as often as he liked. And frankly, the tiny rented room, hemmed in by noisy

nightclubs, didn't have a lot of appeal. Tonight, however, there was a private function at the Coral Reef—a Japanese wedding—and chances were he'd finish early, grab some sleep and be able to head home to Cepaka first thing in the morning.

When he got to the restaurant and started laying tables, his work-mate, Kadek, had an even better idea. 'There's a *wayang kulit* puppet show at Pererenan late tonight. Why don't we ride down there after work?' Cepaka was no more than a five-minute motorbike ride from Pererenan. Wayan could sleep in his own bed. It was agreed.

The wedding party arrived from the Ritz-Carlton Hotel on time and the guests were rowdy and ready to move out to somewhere more exciting by 10 pm. At 10.30 pm the restaurant was empty, the last of the guests weaving in the direction of the Sari Club, a couple of hundred metres up the lane. Although he'd never been inside it, Wayan knew it was way too early for that place, but you couldn't give a drunken Japanese any advice, he knew that, too. He and Kadek rallied their troops and had the place ready for lockup by 10.45 pm. He contemplated going back to his room and grabbing a few things, but what the hell, he'd be back in Kuta the next afternoon.

The two young Balinese men walked to their motorcycles parked in the small bay around the back, revved their engines and took off northbound for Pererenan. As he negotiated the bike around the Saturday-night revelers on busy Jalan Legian, Wayan thought what a lucky break the Japanese wedding had been. Normally, he wouldn't be finishing up and walking home past the Sari until well after 11 pm.

It was just after 11.05 pm when Wayan and Kadek pulled up alongside each other at the traffic lights at Lio Square, Kerobokan. At this rate, they'd easily be in Pererenan for the start of the show at 11.30 pm. Suddenly, Wayan heard a loud bang, like a clap of thunder. (His helmet was one of the things he hadn't gone back to the room to collect. Kadek, who was wearing one, apparently hadn't heard.) 'Thunder,' shouted Wayan. 'We'd better go fast or we'll get wet!' They looked up at the sky and saw nothing but stars. Wayan shrugged at his friend, the light changed to green and they roared into the night.



On the Sayan Ridge, high above the Ayung River, approximately 30 kilometres from Kuta as the crow flies, Richard Flax accepted a glass of red

wine from a waiter and stepped outside the sumptuous villa onto the terrace, where guests had gathered for an after-dinner cigarette. Despite the billowing cloud of second-hand smoke—this was Bali, you could never escape it—it was a spectacularly beautiful night, a three-quarter moon and a sky full of stars illuminating the cascading rice fields that stepped down to the river.

Although Flax and his wife, Judy, and their two children still chose to live in Legian, where their spacious and stylish compound had now been thoroughly hemmed in on all sides by concrete-box development, they loved to get away an hour or so from the coastal strip, to the places in Bali where you could still breathe, and stare into a dark night and remember what the light of fireflies was like, all those years ago.

An urbane, balding man in his fifties, Flax was a Londoner who had once worked at Christie's, but since 1975 Bali had been his home. He was a man of action and, although he had a propensity for calling a spade a shovel, he was widely respected for his ability to build businesses and cut through red tape to help people in trouble. For many expats he had become the island's 'Mr Fix-it', the go-to guy when a friend with no health insurance had come off a bike and needed the kind of attention the local hospitals could not provide.

Flax and Judy circulated amongst friends on the terrace, each watching the other's alcohol consumption—they had the drive home to face and didn't want to be organising their own medivac. Flax swirled his glass and was about to respond to something ludicrous that a leading photojournalist had just said, when his ears pressure-popped, like they do as a plane descends when you have a head cold. Forgetting his counterpoint, he asked the journalist: 'Did you feel that?'

The guests fell silent and looked at each other, slightly puzzled, then glanced around reassuringly at the serenity of their surroundings, before slowly resuming their conversations. And then the phones started ringing, purring, buzzing. Flax dug into his pocket to answer his. It was a diplomatic contact in Denpasar, dead drunk.

'I fucking told you man, your security is shit!'

Flax knew immediately that the caller was referring to a heated conversation they'd had recently over an article in the *Jakarta Post* that had claimed Bali had no security problems, but he said: 'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Where the fuck are you? Bombs going off all over the place. We just had an explosion here in Renon ...'

The line went dead. Flax looked up and saw people cursing into their phones all over the terrace. He knew enough about emergency procedures to realise that mobile communications networks had been shut down. Whatever this was, it was big. No one spoke much; they just gathered their bags and their children and started to move off into the night, anxious to get to the sanctuary of their homes.



Charter-boat skipper Tony 'Doris' Eltherington had had a huge Friday night, celebrating some Mexican sailor's birthday. Six boats had rafted up together in the Benoa yacht harbour and it had gone on all night. He didn't want to go anywhere, but the new girlfriend twisted his arm and they drove into the Kuta Markets for dinner. Afterwards he sat morose in the passenger seat while his girlfriend drove the obligatory Saturday-night lap around the hotspots.

They parked illegally and briefly caught up with some friends, drinking beers at a roadside bar. It was on at the Sari Club later, the friends were saying, everyone would be there. Doris knew that was true; half the surfers in town were at the opening of the Mambo store just down the road, and the Sari would be their afterparty. So that would be another reason to avoid it. Doris drained his Bintang and coaxed his girlfriend back into the car. They edged their way through the traffic and headed for Benoa.

Doris had barely closed his eyes when a massive impact to the side of the boat knocked him out of bed. Fucking Daniel! he thought. Mad Pommie bastard couldn't anchor properly and he'd whacked them again, and this time there had to be some damage.

The veteran surf explorer and skipper wrapped a sarong around his waist and stormed up on deck, his girlfriend following. *Holy fucking hell!* He mouthed the curse in silent disbelief as he surveyed the bright-red sky above Kuta, just 4 kilometres away across the mangroves. His girlfriend clutched his arm and buried her face in his shoulder.

'My God, what is it?'

Doris bent low and plucked a cigarette and lighter from one of his on-deck stashes. He lit it and inhaled deeply. 'It's Hiroshima, babe, that's what it fucking is.'



Rag trader Alison Chester was having a ball, as women do when they have a rare hens' night out. She was finishing up a long dinner with a small group of girlfriends at the home of her Australian friend, Natalia, wife of Bali's sharpest young entrepreneur, Made 'Kadek' Wiranatha, owner of a string of nightclubs and hotels, including Double Six on the beach at Seminyak and The Bounty, along Poppies Lane II from the Sari Club. Kadek had threatened to show up to join them for a late drink, after he'd done the rounds of his establishments, but as the girls had joked, like that was going to happen!

Suddenly, the Batu Belig mansion shuddered with the force of a distant explosion. Mouths fell open around the table. Everyone sobered up instantly. Natalia said: 'It sounds like the Pertamina's blown up.' There was a Pertamina gas station on the main road at Kerobokan, not far away. They went outside to scan the night sky, but saw nothing unusual.

Natalia's mobile rang. It was Kadek. He didn't say where he was. There had been an explosion in Kuta ... The phone went dead.

Alison suddenly turned white as a sheet. Her daughters, Rachel and Emma, had gone off to a huge party in Kuta, the opening of a surf shop or something. Everyone was going. She borrowed the house phone to call them.

'Mobiles are dead,' one of the women called out. She nodded and started to dial Rachel's home number. Someone there might know. Anxiety was rising through her body. She couldn't remember Rachel's home number.

'I have to go,' she whispered to Natalia. 'I'm sorry.'

She was sobbing as she drove to the security gate. The guard leaned into the window and whispered: 'Big bomb, *ibu*.' He shook his head sadly.

Alison felt herself collapse into the driver's seat. She forced herself out of the car and staggered back into Natalia's house. Miraculously, she remembered Emma's home number. Rachel answered.

'Yes, Mum,' she said. 'We're both here. We're okay.'



The Sari Club was just starting to warm up when Melbourne gaming attendants Shelley Campbell, twenty-six, Amber O'Donnell, twenty-seven, and Belinda Allen, twenty-three, strolled in just before 11 pm. The 'old hand' of the trio, having visited Bali a few times now, Shelley was in control of the evening. She took a quick look around the half-full club and told Belinda they were heading across the street to Paddy's Pub. Shelley had heard from a

friend that AFL stars Mick Martyn and Jason McCartney had just arrived in town and were drinking in one place or the other. She had met the handsome McCartney before and was determined to find the footballers. Amber had her own plans.

On their way out of the Sari, Belinda had to make a toilet stop. Slightly impatient with her friend, Shelley paced up and down outside the cubicles. An explosion shook the building and flung Shelley and another girl against a concrete wall. The Sari Club continued to shake.

‘What the fuck was that?’ said the second girl.

‘It must be an earthquake,’ Shelley whispered, choking with concrete dust.

As they lay on the bathroom floor, trying to pick themselves up, a second blast blew out a concrete wall, releasing a searing hot wind. From the rubble, Shelley could make out flames behind it; they stood out in the chaotic darkness. A girl staggered out of a cubicle. It wasn’t Belinda. Shelley craned her neck around. She could make out Belinda’s distinctive white sandals beneath a pile of rubble. She wasn’t moving.

Summoning all her strength, Shelley crawled across the floor and tried to lift the toilet door off her friend. She couldn’t do it. She started screaming Belinda’s name and was still screaming when two young men shook her and told her: ‘You have to get out.’



Teammates Mick Martyn and Jason McCartney had arrived in Bali that afternoon for an end-of-season holiday, enjoyed a few beers by the pool at the Hard Rock Hotel, grabbed some dinner and headed for Paddy’s to start the serious end of the party program. They had been at the bar for two rounds when a small Javanese man walked through the pub and stopped at the DJ stand, not far from the end of the bar the footballers were using. He paused momentarily, then reached across his chest and pulled a lever to ignite the vest bomb he was wearing.

The impact knocked McCartney to the ground and when he tried to open his eyes he had no sight. Next to him on the ground, Martyn was quicker to pick himself up, but the first thing he saw was a fireball hurtling towards him. With fire burning most of his upper body, he had no time to

notice that McCartney was also on fire. By the time he had his own situation under control, McCartney lay seriously burnt, his eyelids fused together.

Somehow, Martyn pulled his friend's burning shirt off him and got him to his feet. They started to move towards the exit but became separated in the chaos. Martyn found McCartney stumbling on the road outside Paddy's.

'Jas, it's me. We've gotta get out of here.'

'How do I look, mate?'

'You've got a few burns.' McCartney had started to swell from internal burns and Martyn feared for his life. 'Mate, I've got to get you back to the hotel.'

McCartney nodded. Inside a minute Martyn, a big, forceful man, had commandeered a motorbike and driver for McCartney. 'Hang on, Jas, you'll be right,' he reassured his mate. And to the driver: 'Hard Rock Hotel. Now!'

Mick Martyn felt his head spinning. He looked around in the weird fiery light for someone to drive him to the hotel. The party was over and it had only just begun.



In his apartment at the Aromas complex off Jalan Legian, surf-industry pioneer Stephen Palmer was cleaning his teeth before going to bed. His girlfriend, Hanni, was already asleep and he was ready to join her. His hand gripped the toothpaste tube and involuntarily sprayed the bathroom mirror white as an explosion suddenly rocked the apartment. Windows smashed and the building shuddered. Palmer felt like he'd been punched in the solar plexus.

When he had gathered his senses, he went outside to survey the damage, his first thought being that a gas bottle had exploded at the *warung* (eatery) next door. But down at street level everyone was shouting and pointing south, in the direction of Kuta. Palmer looked towards the line of screaming signs and jerry-built shopfronts that was Jalan Legian and saw what looked like a miniature nuclear explosion, a mushroom cloud rising up from the buildings and spreading.

Palmer went back inside to focus himself. Hanni was up, he told her everything was okay, they were safe. The mushroom cloud was rising from a place very near one of his Surfer Girl shops, and the horrible thought

occurred to him that perhaps his generator had blown up. He had a 200-litre drum of diesel out the back. Holy shit! He could be the cause of this. Quickly putting on some shoes and telling Hanni he would be back soon, Stephen Palmer ran out and started making his way towards the disaster.

As he walked in the direction of the light, with every step Palmer became more concerned. Bruised and bloodied people were rushing towards him as fast as their shock and injuries would allow. Soon he could see that beyond the onrush of survivors, there was a wall of flame. He turned back to Aromas, grabbed his bicycle from the basement and pedalled frantically down to the beach, then south along the beach road and up Poppies Lane I, hoping to approach the disaster, whatever it was, from the southern side.

Its windows had been blown out, its roof shifted a metre, but Surfer Girl was still there. Palmer parked his bike inside and hurried towards the eye of the storm. He recalls:

It was like a football riot, masses of people trying to get away. Straw thatched roofs were going up in flames all over, so I decided to get back to the shop where we had a maintenance team working that night. We got buckets and went down the street putting out the small fires that were breaking out everywhere. You did what you could, but there was fear and confusion everywhere.



The immediate effects of the terrorist attacks on two Kuta nightspots and the symbolic bombing outside the United States Consulate in Renon were devastating and paralysing. Understandably, in the long hours of night that immediately followed, with communications systems shut down and shocked tourists wandering the narrow, corpse-strewn lanes and alleys in search of loved ones, the overwhelming sentiment felt by everyone whose life had been touched by the horror—and in Bali, that black night, anyone who had a heart was touched, if not heartbroken, by what had occurred—was this: how could this happen to Bali? How could this happen to our Bali, where only good things are meant to happen, where people are beautiful and peaceful and kind? How? Why?

By Saturday night in the United States, Sunday morning in Europe, the news cycle had caught up. A year, a month and a day since the horror

of 9/11, the cable networks chorused, the evil forces of Islamic extremism had punished the innocents again. More than 200 dead, they were saying, in an act of such savage brutality that it had left the peaceful Balinese Hindus dumbstruck and emotionally shattered. Never before, earnest on-the-spot reporters in sweaty flak jackets told their viewers, had this island paradise been subjected to such horrors. The world could only look on in sorrow, the reporters chorused, and wonder, why Bali?

'Bali's darkest hour' quickly became a tagline for all kinds of media coverage, and in public relations terms it certainly was. No cheap airline tickets or beer-included, all-you-can-eat buffet special deals were going to quickly bring back the tourist dollars and heal the financial wounds, and for many who lost family or friends, paradise, too, had been forever lost.

But the reality was that in historical terms, 'Bali's darkest hour' was barely even a twilight. Just four years before the opening of Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport ushered in the jet era of tourism in 1969, as many as 100,000 Balinese had been slaughtered in the towns and villages as part of the bloody transition from Indonesia's first dictator to its second.

Twenty years before that, thousands more Balinese had killed or been killed in the vicious guerilla warfare that was the struggle for independence from the Dutch. Forty years before that, the raja of Badung had led a thousand of his followers in ritual and bloody suicide to protest the Dutch invasion of South Bali. For a hundred years before that, Balinese tribesmen had slaughtered the Dutch whenever they attempted to cross the central mountains. For a thousand years before that, the Balinese kingdoms had settled their differences, however petty, with hefty doses of black magic and liberal use of the *kris* sword.

As shocked and saddened as they were by the events of 12 October 2002, the Balinese had a strategy in place for dealing with such bloodletting. It was called acceptance, and it led to survival.

They knew this way of being, it was within their culture, whereas the expatriates who had claimed their land had much to learn.