



LOUIE

B Y

MARA WOLFORD



JOHN

B Y

BEN DOUGLAS

When I was with my ASP pro boyfriend on the North Shore, he applied certain rules. I was allowed to party with the guys if he knew where I was and who I was with. He also told me to stay far away from the Hawaiians, and he gave me a specific list of names that I wasn't allowed to befriend or consort with, that it was just a potential source of problems that he didn't need there.

This was in the decade that followed the *Bustin' Down the Door* era: Aussies and Mainlanders were best keeping a low profile on Oahu. Maybe there was also a bit of homebody paranoia involved, but I was too young to question his judgement, and followed his instructions.

A few years after I broke up with him, I jump in a beater with RCJ and Doug Silva, headed towards Haleiwa. We drive up to a ramshackle house behind the beach and out rocks Louie Ferreira, with his gear ready to go. His name was on that forbidden list. He throws his board on the roof, gear in the trunk, smashes himself into the back seat with me and we speed off to Mokuiea.

This cat is huge and lanky and smiley and gummy: all loose and cruisy. I like him immediately. Big eyes and a smile that takes over his face. Where was the problem exactly with this man? Is this what a Big Bad Hawaiian looks like? He ain't no gangsta, I know this in the first 30 seconds. He speaks clearly and doesn't pull the Island pidgin-shit, which is so bloody tiresome. He's complete within himself and full of joy. The guys yammer bullshit on the drive, I sit quietly and listen, chortling to myself: the three of them make quite a team.

We get to Mokuiea and it's more solid than I've ever surfed it. I tell Louie this and he says don't worry, stick with him. The four of us make it out the pass to find a limited crew. We pretty much all know each other, and everybody gets bombs.

Matt Archibold snaps his leggy and the board starts out in the rip towards Kaena. Being the Good Samaritan, I start after it. Louie calls me back, "You can't paddle out there, baby!" "Why?" "Sharks here don't like you folks out there." We all watch the board drift to the horizon and Matt swims in.

On the ride home, he starts talking Hawaiian story and it's compelling. I want to listen to this guy a lot more. He has a few boards to shape, so I

accompany him, cleaning up the shaping room and screening behind him. He teaches me everything he knows about shaping, heavy water, bouncing molecules and I listen to the story of his life.

When he was a child growing up in Makaha, his grandfather had been a noble and respected man in the community. He had eight children. Those children did not resist the ha'ole's curses, and fell to drugs, prostitution, pimping, gambling and alcohol. On Christmas Day, when Louie was six or seven and playing outside with his cousins, shots rang out from the house. Grandfather had executed every one of his children and their spouses before he killed himself in their shame.

The orphans were dispatched, and Louie ended up begging in the streets of Waikiki, surfing out at Queens and Ala Mos, working board rentals or any other task a child could handle. He slept on the beach at night. Sometimes Rabbit Kekai took him home. Buttons picked him up, took him in and raised Louie the best that he could with limited facilities. Louie went to school a bit, but it was never easy: the waves were always too good.

Night after night we hit that shaping room and the stories would fly. Ohana, ancestors, mana, the old man who swam from Haleiwa to Puena every day for 60 years to talk with the sharks; the three-wave hold-down at the Bay, with the turtle that came to him, spoke to him and chanted Hawaiian songs to him until he came to again and made it to the surface, barely alive. The best way to understand the magical, twisted, perverted entity unto itself that is Hawaii is to listen to a Hawaiian talk about his existence for weeks and months.

I had trouble imagining the era of surfing that he was describing to me: Loose and free and unpopulated. He surfed the early pro events, disbelieving he got to see the world just by surfing.

Regardless of the horrific set-backs he had known in his life, Louie was profoundly happy. I finally just moved into the house, it was easier with all the time spent there late at night, in that shaping room. This guy was going to be one of my best friends, anyway.

He took me with him to surf Haleiwa, Lanis, Jockos, Sunset. Never had a more odd or more suitable team been formed: Two street-wretches

who stuck together. He introduced me to his friends, most of whom had been on that initial list, and I discovered them to be some of the warmest, most humane folks I've met.

We don't have big hearts where I'm from, we have exclusive hearts. We don't let you in just like that. Louie and his gang saw it differently: he lived at the epicentre of the surfing world, his job was to welcome all who came and who conducted themselves with dignity and respect for others, as a true Hawaiian would. He would set the example, and allow you in if you were up to muster.

Louie's aloha was overwhelming. One year I'd come back with a boyfriend, a hellman in his realm: a French Himalayan climber and extreme snowboarder, one of the first BASE-jumpers, but a shy and unassuming person. Louie took him in immediately. Jerome was a bit scared of the water, but Louie told him to grab on to his leash and hold on, towing this little dude out through the lineup to six-foot Puena Pt and pushing him into his first wave, solid double-overhead. Jerome rode in on the face the entire way to the inside. Louie got the next one and towed him back out again. I got the third one, because I needed to confirm what I had just seen. Louie's girlfriend, a charming dolphin-trainer from Florida, got the fourth bomb. Aloha.

Louie was always smart enough to know that change is good. When he was offered a management position at a big art gallery in Las Vegas he jumped and he split. A man who's not afraid to leave his zone of comfort is just that much more honorable. Plus, Louie always really, really liked dancey-girls. He would drag me to all the strip clubs of Waikiki with him. I was perfect bait. The girls would come after me, imagining I swung both ways, much to their deception, and end up with him. He left for years to the world headquarters of dancey-girls and went off the radar.

One rainy night, I stopped in to Hale'iwa Joe's for a Mai Tai and there he was, all 6'4" of him, looking like he did when he was 35, and then 40 and now 50. Some Hawaiians have this Dorian Gray effect about them: he's one of them and it's pretty magical.

We plunked down on bar-stools for the night and took up exactly where we had left off.

We were on our way home from a quick bolt up to Saltwater when we passed him.

We were in a post-surf daze, high on endorphins and bonhomie. Riffo driving, me shotgun, both talking shit. The sight of him shut us both up.

He was half an hour from Coolongolook, on the eastern side of the freeway, heading north.

He was walking.

Riffo pulled the van on to the verge of the highway and stopped. We got out, grabbing a 12-litre plastic jug of water. We jogged up behind him, and Riffo g'dayed.

He was a small bloke, bent and shrunken beneath a heavy rucksack on to which he'd tied a number of shopping bags. His cheeks were grey stubbled, skin creased and chapped by weather and sun. His hat and clothes were faded, his boots worn. His eyes were clear but distant, deep set in a web of squinted wrinkles.

He said his name was John. He was a walker. Said he'd been on the road for more than 20 years, from Melbourne up to Queensland and back in a long, repeating loop. When it started getting too cold down south, he'd head north. When it got too hot up north, he'd head back south.

He had spots he knew to camp, safe places, quiet, close by the road and further afield. We offered him water, but he demurred. Said he knew where to find it when he needed it.

He spoke slowly, his voice soft and quiet. He didn't seem surprised that we'd stopped to talk to him, and he wasn't unfriendly. But I got the impression that he wasn't wanting for lack of company. He just wanted to keep on going.

We left John heading his way, and we headed ours. We talked about him for a long while afterwards, hypothesising on the reasons behind his pedestrian odyssey, the tragedies or calamities that first set his boots on the road. Whether he was to be envied or pitied. If he was mad, or a fool, or a genius. If he was walking away from turmoil, or walking towards peace. But those were just words, and we can't know the truth.

Eventually we stopped talking about John, and for a long time we didn't speak at all. We sat in that van, driving home to our homes and wives and jobs, to the securities and frailties of our own lives.

