



Source: Chris McGreal, '[Sharon narrowly survives attempt to oust him as Likud leader](#)', *The Guardian online*, 27/09/05.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [animals](#), [death](#), [water](#)

Writer/s: [Craig Doolan](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

He reached down his back with his left hand, grabbed the cord and pulled until the zipper was at the top. He fastened the Velcro strip and bent down to pick up his board. 'Stay,' he said to the dog looking up at him from its nest among the folds of his towel and board cover.

It was large enough surf after a year's absence. In the days leading up to this day he had tried to think of a meaningful way to commemorate the first anniversary of his father's death. He'd wanted something more than just to have finally relinquished the self-defeating hermetic routine he'd adopted—hitting the bong, then the beach, then the bong again, until it was only the bong—in the months that followed the funeral. He'd wanted something momentous, but would settle for the lifting of a crushing and relentless grief.

His father's words still came back at the least expected time, which was all of the time. 'Don't follow the other dickheads. You know this beach better than them. This is not the easiest place to go out, but it's the best to get out on a big day'. And then the backhander, the poker-faced afterthought that always followed and was meant to bring the doubts inside the boy to the surface, and to challenge him to confront them, to make sure he learned the lesson for himself. 'If you know what you're doing'.

His father had been killed in a freak accident returning from his final fishing trip in the far north, in the Gulf region. He recalled how he had sat at the funeral in a daze as his dad's northern mate Ken, whom the boy knew only in legend, gave the eulogy. Ken was almost finished before it dawned on the boy that the man this stranger had been talking about was in fact his father, and that he'd missed it all.

He took a deep breath. Then, ignoring the lacerations on his feet and studying the oncoming waves as he moved, he threaded his way out along the reef leading from the point at the western end of the beach, just enough of it exposed when the tide was right to make a pathway past the shore break.

He picked a path towards the spot where the reef bent away to the right, leaving a patch of clean, deep water at his feet. He gripped the rock hard with curled toes, leaned forward to meet the thump of the incoming wave, and waited.

As it hit, he turned his head to shield his eyes from the spray, hunched his shoulder against the wind, and turned back to face the ocean as the pressure against his knees slackened and the water started to suck back out. After this one, the next would be the biggest of the set. He

could ride out on the back of it and be at the lip of the next and smaller wave before it broke against the reef.

Reading the water just like he'd been taught, he was preparing to make the leap when he heard the high whining behind him. The dog was out on the reef, not ten metres behind him, advancing further as the water receded. 'Get back!' he shouted. It hesitated, anxious, barking at him in a high pitch. 'Get back!' he yelled again through gritted teeth, 'GO!'

The big wave thumped him and laid him out flat on the rocks. The dog, seeing the water rising, beat a hasty retreat to the beach. As the water sucked away it dragged him over the reef. He scrambled to his feet, now cut and bleeding, pulled the board back to him by its leg rope, grabbed the board by its sides, and leapt.

He landed in less than a foot of water on the edge of the reef where he'd just been standing, scraping his knees and the tops of his feet. But the next wave was already coming. He had no time to think about pain.

He struck out, paddling hard into it up until the last second before it began to break. Then, rising onto his back knee, he pushed all of his weight down through his arms to the nose of the board, duck diving under the breaking water as the lip smacked the back of his head.

Emerging on the other side, he again paddled hard until he was out past where the waves were breaking, into the temporary calm. He raised himself to a sitting position, coughed salt water, cleared his throat, and spat. 'Fuckin' dog.'

He'd had it three months and still had no name for it. His mates were disgusted. 'How can you have a dog that long and not have a name for it?' 'How about Bozo?' Their indignant anger gave way to laughter as the suggestions started pouring in, all of them aimed at him; most of them obscene, none of them helpful.

The memory made him laugh, and this was one of the things he loved about the ocean. Not only its physical power, which must always be respected and feared; but also its power as a leveller, a medium to make you stop worrying about things you couldn't do anything about. To let things wash over you, and find their own place. It was as if, for all the hard work and panic it put you through, it repaid you by solving your landlocked problems as you sat there afterwards in its calm.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Craig Doolan.*