

Sea of Faces

The ocean connects us across vast distances, both physically and culturally. It creates a sense of shared experience that transcends borders and boundaries. The ocean has the power to bring people together. *'Sea of Faces'* depicts a shared experience, a community of ocean lovers coming together. At the same time, we are reminded of our connection to the natural world and our role in its delicate balance.

Photography by: **Hilda Bezuidenhout**

Stories by: **Adrienne Ferreira**



Iain Mcguire

*Fireman, artistic director Mad
Cow Theatre Company,
surfer*

Sea of Faces

Iain's relationship with water began at Gosford Olympic swimming pool, age seven, when his older sister pushed him into the deep end.

'She thought it was funny,' he recalls. 'It was so scary. The primal fear gripped me — I didn't equate it to a fear of dying, I just knew I had to try and get out. I did enough splashing to get to the ladder.'

Gradually, Iain taught himself to swim in 'the little pool' at Gosford, and slowly discovered the pleasure of being underwater. 'I'd spend most of my time on the bottom of the big pool because of the silence that it brought. I'd disappear under the water and I'd just turn off the noise of hundreds of squealing kids. It felt like the water gave me control over something in my life, when I didn't have much control over anything at the time.'

Later, surfing beckoned from the pages of his sister's boyfriend's Tracks magazines. 'It was like this simple alien world, where all the aliens wore woolly jumpers with holes and had sun-bleached locks and were friendly, who were always smiling because they were "Getting tubed, Man!" I just fell in love with that and wanted to become a world champion surfer.'

Over a lifetime surfing around Avoca Beach, Iain has developed a deep love and respect for the ocean. 'It's so lovely washing over you, cooling you when you're hot, or nursing you when you're lonely, or blustering you around when you're angry—you push back against it, and it pushes back against you even bigger.'

After examining his fears and learning how to swim across rips with flippers, he began the practice of deep-ocean swimming in storm swells.

'I jump into rips and see how far they take me. People think it's lunacy, but I feel completely relaxed. I know the water patterns and the movements in the ocean. You come to know the different states of water—from silky to muddy, fast, or slow, or grippy—and I feel completely at peace out there in all the mayhem. Nature has always been an enormous healer for me.'

Iain is the Founder of Mad Cow Theatre Company, helping young people on the Central Coast build confidence through drama and mentoring. He has also spent the last thirty-six years as a professional firefighter and rescue officer.

'This other relationship with water wasn't a conscious thing in the beginning, but it helped educate me further. There's a beautiful science behind firefighting. It's about volumes of water, literage, and pressure controlled by breaking the water up into misted spray patterns, which increases the surface area of the water to quell heated rooms. To knock down a lot of fire with very little water—that's an art. As a firefighter, you're controlling what water does under pressure. 'It's like the ocean. Water is getting pressurised on sand bars or rock reef systems, causing waves to break in particular ways. Then, when it drains away, it moves in particular directions we call rips. I love using the rips to get around the ocean. But I have to follow a basic law of nature: to survive, never panic.'

Jack Williams

*(Diva D-Lish), dancer,
singer, model, drag artist*



Although Jack grew up inland, swimming was always a big part of family life. Their first encounter with water was at public pools.

‘We lived in a few different places,’ Jack explains. ‘Liverpool, Mount Druitt, Campbelltown and Dubbo. My brothers and I were always in swimming lessons and at the top of our swimming carnivals. My brothers were really athletic, and I guess I was good at it—it’s the long limbs, long strokes—but I just wanted to get out of the pool as quickly as possible!’

‘It’s funny, because on one level I’m actually petrified of water. There’s that initial fear about being submerged, because it’s really quite a vulnerable state. You can’t control what happens underwater.’

Jack is a 23-year-old dancer, singer, model and teacher, with a passion for performance. A queer, non-binary artist, they regularly perform circus and aerial acts, and also culturally, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environments. Jack teaches contemporary indigenous dance in Redfern and mentors young dancers of the Aboriginal Performance Group.

‘Spiritually, I have always been surrounded by water. I’m Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and one hand the thing that connects us all—Wiradjuri,

Kamilaroi, Noongar, Torres Strait and Palm Islands—is water. From each point of Australia, all over the map, the thing that connects the tribes and all the islands is water. Even though the Wiradjuri nation in New South Wales is inland, they’re known as the Three Rivers Tribe, because they’re bordered by the Wambool (Macquarie River), the Kalari (Lachlan River) and the Murrumbidjeri (Murrumbidgee River).

When Jack moved to the Central Coast, they started to form a different relationship with water.

‘I lived in Kariong for a little while, right next to Somersby Falls. I’ve been involved in many university projects that were filmed there, and sometimes, to destress from a really long day of dancing, that’s where I’d go to just chill out.’

‘The Central Coast has some of the most beautiful beaches, like Norah Head, where this photo was taken. I live at Long Jetty now, five minutes down the road from Toowoan Bay and Shelly beach. When I was in Kariong, we’d go to Umina Beach all the time with a lot of our cultural tutors.’

‘Moving up to the Coast has allowed me to embrace the water on a whole new level. I’m not as afraid of it anymore.’



Adrienne Ferreira

*Founder of Bravewords,
author, educator*

Sea of Faces

The water, the landscape and coastal towns are all themes Adrienne is exploring as she develops her new novel, set in the idyllic seaside village of Avoca Beach.

‘It’s a trouble-in-paradise story. How do you think everything’s going to be great when you live in a place that’s beautiful, but once you arrive, you have to contend with more than just the long hot summer days at the beach. How do you fit in? How do you make a living?’

The connection to place also fascinates Adrienne.

‘What interests me is how you find a sense of belonging when you live on the coast. A lot of it is to do with how you feel in a pair of swimmers on the beach. What’s your relationship with your body? What about the sun—do you tan, or do you think it’s trying to kill you?’

Adrienne fell in love with the Coast, when she and her husband, Rob, were living in Sydney and looking for a seaside destination for their honeymoon.

‘We wanted to go somewhere for a few months and just write. We had friends on the Central Coast, so we came up to Copacabana to visit and it was so beautiful, the ocean, and lagoons and the bush. We wondered if we could actually move here. So, we got a six-month lease and after two weeks we knew it was where we wanted to be.’

Now, with twin boys at university and a husband who is well established in the acting and writing worlds, Adrienne has a new

zest for storytelling. The relationship with water has been something she’s been grappling with in her new novel, but also in everyday life.

‘How comfortable are you, being exposed—to the elements, and to other people’s opinions? Because if you’re not part of the surf club culture, you have to find your own way to identify with the community.’

‘I love seeing the fishermen out on the rocks, the clubbies in their boats, the dog-walkers, and the surfers, and the artists, all these little tribes engaging with the landscape in different ways.’

Now Adrienne runs Bravewords, where she facilitates writing workshops and provides guidance to other writers on the Central Coast.

‘One of the best things I ever did was join a writing group. It really helped me to enjoy writing again, by sharing the process with others. That kind of support is crucial for sustaining a creative practice. I saw that there was an appetite for local storytelling, and so I created Bravewords.’

Adrienne’s next novel promises to entice, the ocean becoming an important character as she continues to explore stories about life on the water.

‘It’s fascinating from a storytelling perspective. The seaside village has its own unique dynamic. It sounds like paradise, but it’s far more complex than that.’

Danielle Habib

*Social justice advocate,
primary prevention of
domestic and family
violence, cross-cultural
explorer, Egyptian/Australian*



Danielle moved to the Central Coast when two years old. Raised at Norah Head, she was lulled to sleep each night by the sound of the waves.

‘It was hard to go to sleep, because I grew up in domestic and family violence,’ Danielle remembers. ‘So, I’d count the flash from the lighthouse — fourteen seconds one turn, fourteen-and-a-half seconds the next turn — while listening to the waves. It was comforting. I feel like the water is a part of me, hearing it so much as a child.’

Danielle puts her love of the beach down to being Egyptian-Australian. Both cultures relish being outdoors and basking in the sun.

‘My love of the sun and hot days draws me to the water. I can feel the heat and the sand in my toes; I can smell the salt, lick it off my lips; I’ve got the cool of the water—it’s a combination of all these sensory experiences, as well as the feeling of giving in to something powerful and gentle and beautiful.’

Now 48, Danielle is a primary prevention of domestic and family abuse specialist. She teaches Community Services at TAFE NSW, and she’s been active in organisations such as White

Ribbon, the Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee and the Central Coast Women’s Health Centre. She has sat on Wyong Council’s multicultural advisory committee and volunteers to assist migrants and refugees in settling into the community.

‘I used to work at the coalface, but now I work in prevention, speaking with young people about what healthy relationships look like. I support young people in trauma who are growing up in domestic violence; I try to change their view of what they’ve seen so that they can change the trajectory of their lives.’

‘A lot of the work can be quite heavy, and when I spend time in the ocean and I put my head underwater, it takes me back to that lulling. I snorkel a lot. My head and my ears are under, and all the rest of the world fades away. I’m at one with the water, investigating the sand and the shells and the fish. It’s really peaceful. The water clears everything and I’m ready with the energy to tackle my next day. I love the work and everything that I do, but for me, the beach is my self-care and I love it.’

Every day, Danielle supports others who are going through difficult and painful experiences. She helps by holding a space for them, by offering hope and a pathway for change. Then she goes to the sea and the sea holds her, and she can release it all.



Yvonne Lovett

*Central Coast Women in
the Waves, surf
champion and coach*

Sea of Faces

Water is integral to Yvonne's Identity. From a young age, she formed a deep relationship with the ocean through her love of surfing, where she found strength and solace in the waves.

'Empowerment was something I always wanted,' she says. 'I didn't have a voice as a child. I had no self-esteem or self-worth. I had surfing—that was the only thing that connected me to life. When I stood up on the board, I felt like I was somebody. I felt special.'

'Because I was a girl, surfing at a time when girl's didn't surf, people would look at me and go, 'Wow.' There was a respect for me in the water. And it was a safe supportive, nurturing space. From a higher level, it's like mother earth and the water holding me, like being in the womb of the mother. I became addicted to surfing at a young age.'

Raised in a strict religious family, Yvonne struggled to find her sense of self within her church environment, where the lives of women and girls were limited and controlled. Becoming a mother at thirty-four was a turning point.

'I had twins, a boy and a girl. It was during that time that I started my personal and spiritual journey. I was having difficulty with my

parenting. I wanted to connect fully with my children, to show them how to live in freedom and not fear. I wanted to be a role model for them, but I was in tears all the time and I had a lot of anger from my own childhood. Yet, in the water, when I was riding a wave, I'd get that complete connection with life—there was no room for all those problems. It was like I was living two parallel lives, and my wow moments always came through surfing and nature.'

Yvonne is the creator of WOW Wave Of Wisdom, a not-for-profit community organization that helps people build healthy balanced relationships. What began as a program of female empowerment through surfing has broadened to include men, women and whole communities. Through workshops and activities, Yvonne encourages people to have fun, connect with others, and share their unique wisdom to create positive change.

'Life has natural support system. It feels like a wave to me. I use the wave as a metaphor because it's where we access that point of balance within ourselves and we connect to the greater universe. We don't have to be religious to feel it—we just need to connect with ourselves, to find out who we really are.'

Achol Lual

*Year nine student, South
Sudanese/Egyptian/Australian,
ocean lover*



Fifteen-year-old Achol was born on the Central Coast and spent a lot of her childhood at the beach. Her extended family could often be found at Toowoong bay on weekends and holidays, where Achol would spend the day under an umbrella, sharing hot chips with her cousins to warm up after a swim. For three years she did Nippers with Toowoong Bay SLSC, earning her surf lifesaving certificate alongside her mum.

‘When I was younger, going to the beach felt like something we always did and I didn’t really like it,’ Achol reflects. ‘But in the past few years, I’ve started to have more of a connection with the water. I like snorkelling and doing laps in the ocean. I get excited, trying to look for stingrays and fish. I’m scared of sharks, so I go swimming with Mum to the cans.’

These markers, tethered in the calm waters of Cabbage Tree Harbour at Norah Head, are Achol’s goal. She swims out and does a sand grab—dives down deep and brings up a handful of sand to show that she’s been to the bottom—then she swims back to shore.

‘I like collecting shells and I always pick up rubbish. Take thee for the sea!’

A busy year nine student at McKillop Catholic College, Achol relaxes by listening to music, reading, and drawing. In homebase learning during the Covid lockdown, she began a morning meditation, and recently she’s started the practice of getting up early to walk her Border Collie to the lake for sunrise.

‘When I sit by the rocks at the lake with my dog, Sia, I watch the sun peek through the clouds and slowly rise above them. It is usually pretty cold in the mornings so I always wear a jumper. When it’s windy, there tends to be a strong stinky smell of seaweed. The beach is fun and energetic, but the lake is different, calm and serene. I watch fish jump and the water lapping against the shore. This is where I come to clear my head.’