

We wore the sun on our backs that day. That day we risked our lives thirteen times.

She was a different sun back then, to the one I know now. She wasn't harsh or bitter, and enjoyed the adventures I took her on. I wish I hadn't taken her so for granted. I wish I had thanked her every now and then for bringing me the lovely days she had.

But my old friend the sun played with us happily on this day, back when my best friend was a boy. Back when a day lasted forever. Back when I was allowed to run topless with the boys, our chests flat and matching. Back when WHAM! was my favourite band and ghetto blasters were so cool I ached to have one of my very own.

Our hearts thumped in our ears as we ran, mimicking the sound of our feet as they beat upon the wet sand. Slap slap, slap slap, slap slap. We could have run forever, Billy and I, our gangly bodies on the cusp of the big change which we wouldn't see coming. It would happen so fast and change our friendship forever.

The wind was thick with salt as it whipped at our brows and flicked the hair across our faces. We could taste the ocean on our tongues and opened our mouths wide, breakfast on the go.

Billy sprinted on ahead of me. His long legs easily double the stride of mine. We both wore matching baby blue Stubbie shorts and nothing else. His were lined with a dark blue rim all the way around, mine with red. They made a zipping noise as they clipped each other between the legs, like when you zip the tent up really fast. Just like that.

My legs going double time, threatened to buckle underneath me and I tried not to face plant. One foot at a time.

Billy flipped around jogging backwards, and allowed me to catch up, just enough that we were in ear shot of each other, but not so much that I was in the lead.

'Hurry up Emmy, you're running like a girl today!' He yelled, laughing.

A rogue wave sucked at Billy's feet, in attempt to dislodge his grip, then in failure, gushed back out to sea, leaving him disoriented in its wake. I took the opportunity to gain some ground on him. I was certainly no girl.

'At least I don't run like a moron!' I shouted back as loud as I could, hoping the wind wouldn't steal my words.

I knew then, that he had heard me, for he flapped his arms like an angry goose and kicked his long legs out from side to side. He looked very silly.

As I closed the gap between us my lungs finally registered the extra effort I'd exerted to catch up. I hiccupped between breaths and laughter and although he knew I was coming I jumped onto his back, clutching with stringy arms and legs.

WHUMP! Our bodies slamming together made the same sound as our feet slapping the sand had made, only louder. Nothing, bar paper cuts and gravel rash, hurts when you're a kid.

'I caught a mental starfish!' I yelled, practically straight down Billy's robust eardrum. Nothing, bar fire engines and lawn mowers, are ever too loud when you're a kid.

And with that, Billy 'mental-starfished' straight into the ocean, and threw himself at the first oncoming wave. I hadn't been ready and had gone under mid-laugh.

The wave tossed me like a sausage rolling around a fry pan and dumped me unceremoniously upon the beach. I coughed and choked and waited for my breath to find me.

Billy stalked up from behind with a long rope of seaweed draped over his head from ear to ear.

'Oooh how do I look?' he said with a girly voice, not that his immature voice was so different from mine. 'Do I look pretty?' And he flicked his seaweed hair from side to side.

'You look like a dick,' I said, mad that he had made me almost drown. 'I almost drowned,' I added dramatically, raising my hand to my throat while forcing a cough. As much as the salt water had left me with a burning sensation it didn't warrant the dramatic touches I added to the scene. I was perfectly fine, if a little stunned.

Billy crouched down next to me, and I was surprised to see the true concern in his face. 'Sorry,' he said 'you ok?'

I didn't think he'd really be sorry. A sensation similar to shame washed over my cheeks but passed almost as fast as it came.

My friend, the sitting duck was too much to resist and I quietly lowered my hands into the ocean cupping them full of water. SPLASH! Right in his face.

'Gotcha, Moron!' I said delightedly, and was up and running and being chased and splashed by my bestest friend in the whole wide world. It was a rush.

As the rocky cliff-face loomed closer we slowed our sprint to a gallop, striding side by side. There was no need to race, the day stretched out ahead of us, as long as a single lifetime.

I stopped abruptly to pick up a lonely stick and sand bunched up in my toes assisting with my full and sudden halt.

'I think we should leave some clues,' I said to Billy who had come to a stop a few metres ahead of me and stood with hands on hips, fingers pointing toward his bum, like a pregnant lady.

I had already drawn one arrow and was on to the next by the time Billy contributed.

'Yeah and put our names too, so they know it's us,' he said.

We were leaving a message for our search party. If anything should happen to us, they would know where to find us.

Inspired by our hero MacGyver we left our trail - it's what he would have done, if he were a ten-year old kid. Of course, in our little heads we knew nothing of tragedy and fear and leaving trails for loved ones to find us.

The sun was properly up now and she bounced on the back of the ocean looking for us, excited to participate in the days activities, whatever they might be. Although we felt her presence greet us with a warm hug, we barely noticed her entrance.

Before we knew it, the cliff shot up in front of us like a giant red castle. I hadn't even remembered walking that last stretch of beach, we'd been so engrossed in leaving our trail, half of it already washed away by the sea.

Orange clay and smooth sandstone rock blended into each other seamlessly. We ran our hands along the bumpy horizontal lines and watched our fingers fall dramatically in and out of crevasses like a concert pianist playing chopsticks.

'Over here!' Billy said, his voice ending in a muffled echo as he crawled into a shallow cave.

'Watch out for Anacondas,' I said as I followed him in and mimicked his knee-hug-crouch sitting position. There was just enough room for the two of us, scrunched up in a bundle together. Our arms touching unselfconsciously and warm against each other.

We sat there together for a whole minute pondering the insy-wincy cave we had discovered.

'That's twice we've risked our lives today,' Billy said thoughtfully and with quite a lot of pride in his voice. 'Once when you almost drowned and twice when I almost got eaten by the Anaconda'.

'Oh yeah!' I said, impressed with our survival instincts. It was shaping up to be a really great day.

'There might be cave drawings in here you know.' I said this with authority in my voice. 'I bet a cave man used to sleep here once,' and I patted the ground next to my bum. Now I was really astonished, I was sitting in a cave mans house. Amazing.

'Here's one!' Billy's eyes popped out of his head. 'It looks like a tiger!'

'Wow' I said, leaning over him to trace the outline of the scratched rock with my fingers, desperate to see Billy's tiger.

'He looks happy,' I said 'I bet they had tigers as pets in the olden days'.

'Yeah they did,' Billy said matter of fact. 'Tigers are pretty easy to tame if you know how'. The confidence in his voice suggested that he indeed knew how to tame tigers. 'I'll teach you one time. We can practice on fluffy'.

'Really? Thanks Billy!' I was grateful for him to teach me. Tiger taming skills would really add to my bag of tricks. I wondered if his technique would work on brothers as well as tigers.

'Better go before this guy comes home looking for breakfast,' Billy said tapping his knuckles across the scratches on the rocky wall.

'Rooarrow' I growled suddenly, doing my best impression of a large cat. I swiped at the sides of Billy's head with my claws.

Billy's whole body shuddered and tensed into a ball. 'You're not a tiger!' Billy said reassuring himself as he said it, his eyes wide with surprise. I laughed and growled again. The second time was really good. I really sounded like a tiger that time.

'Come on,' Billy said springing out of the cave with ease 'that's three times now!'

'Wait for me!' I yelled, exiting the cave a little more carefully than he did.

Billy was already hugging the red castle walls, shuffling his feet carefully along the balance beam of a ledge that lead from the beach and out onto the rocks that fed the ocean.

'Four times!' I shouted joyfully in the direction of my buddy.

He was already halfway across. It was starting to get dangerous for him now. The fall from the ledge measured the length of his body at least and the rocks below growled at Billy's feet, daring him to slip. The furry little caterpillars he wore as eyebrows crinkled, creased and twitched with concentration.

I eased my way across the first part of the ledge gracefully, confident that any fall from this point would still be cushioned by sand. About halfway I twisted around and shuffled along like a clown on a tightrope, feet pointing in opposite directions. The ground dropped further away from the ledge and the rocks snapped at me with their teeth, another chance for a spot of brunch.

'No snack for you today rocks,' I whispered quietly, relieved when the ledge widened and water lapped below.

Billy stood with his back to me on the edge of the rocky outcrop surveying the view. I walked towards him like an amateur firewalker. Flinching every so often under a sharp rock.

'Wow!' He said, 'look how far we've come!' He pointed into the distance. The horizon was blurry with a salty mist but you could almost see the point on the other end of the beach. Almost.

A few specks of people sprinkled the length of the beach here and there but mostly we had the place all to ourselves. Not that we would have noticed if we'd been forced to share.

'So that's four times now Billy,' I said. I knew he hadn't heard me on the ledge so I repeated myself for his sake.

He stirred his fingers around in a small rock pool. 'I think the ledge counts as two,' he said and looked back the way we'd come. 'Yep. It's twice the risk. For sure.'

'Yeah,' I agreed seriously 'it's not for the faith-hearted'. I was proud to throw around my newly acquired big word, and I could see Billy was just as impressed.

'So that's six then,' Billy said poking at a small rock pool anemone. His math was off but I preferred even numbers to odd numbers anyway.

'Ewe! It's got my finger!' He pulled his finger out from the grip of the anemone and thrust it at my face. 'Ewe goobies!' he shouted.

I screamed then, just like the girl I was trying hard not to be, and hit his hand away. 'Dickface!'

Billy doubled over with laughter and once I'd gotten over my embarrassment I joined him.

'Are we going to Shark Island today?' I asked, suddenly serious.

Billy surveyed the small stretch of churning water that lay between us and the grouping of rocks we called Shark Island.

'It's deep today' he said, awe-struck.

It was a tiny swim to Shark Island. Maybe only four or five of your best freestyle arm strokes. It was a brave swim though. The water was deep and tidal here, and swirled about menacingly. Not forgetting the kid eating sharks that we imagined circled the murky depths below.

'If we go together we might confuse the sharks,' Billy said hopefully.

'Okay' I agreed, 'how many risk points then?'

Billy pondered my question, he was making some careful calculations.

'Three risk points' he finally surmised.

'Ready then?' I offered Billy my hand, and we shuffled forward carefully. Twenty little tippy toes dangling off the edge.

'One, two, three!' And we jumped.

I was a much better swimmer than Billy. It was the one thing I could beat him in. Most of the time I would slow my pace so as only to win by a little. But when the sharks were snapping I was lightning fast and by the time Billy had reached the Shark Island shore, I was already halfway up the rocks on the other side.

Billy and I spent the rest of the day lolling about Shark Island. We thrilled ourselves with impressive dive bombs off the rocks, seeing who could jump the highest, the farthest, the straightest, the funniest. And of course we almost got eaten by sharks at least three times each.

We soaked in the sun-warmed rock pools like two old men at a health spa, bickering about which MacGyver moment was the best. And we danced like the solid gold dancers to music we could hear only in our heads.

It was the best day of our lives and by the time we got back to the Bach the sky was turning red and we had risked our lives thirteen times in total.

I remember dawdling down that last stretch of beach, with my best friend Billy. The Bach, perched quietly on the lip of the sand dunes, waited patiently for us. It wasn't dark but the porch light was already on and glowing like an orange homing beacon.

I could see my Dad from the beach. He was struggling to put up a tent. One side would go up while the other would fall down. This memory though is simply a background image to Billy's storytelling and I listened to him proudly as he recounted our day's adventures. He blew up all the good bits to make us seem like bold and noble heroes, and we practiced the telling of our tales until they were worthy of our campfire audience.

And so here I sit ten years later, in our little cave-mans cave. It's barely big enough for one person now but I squeeze in regardless and think of Billy's tiger. The markings are still there and it really does look like a tiger. I can see that now. I swallow hard and promise myself I won't cry. I'm afraid if I start I might just weep forever.

I run my fingers down the crevasses of the rock wall like a concert pianist playing chopsticks.

The ledge we used to walk along is obsolete now. I can easily climb onto the rocks from the beach. 'Two risk points,' I whisper in a barely audible voice, even to my own ears.

The view from the point is breathtakingly beautiful. Even on such an overcast day. We hadn't noticed the beauty of this place as children. We'd only had eyes for each other.

'I'm gonna miss you Billy,' I say as my words steal my breath.

And I'm not even surprised when little Billy takes my hand. He looks beautiful in his baby blue Stubbies and tousled summer hair. My heart just about shatters in my chest looking at him.

'When did you turn into such a girl?' He asks.

'I'm not a girl' I answer, although I'm obviously more than a girl, a woman now.

We stand on the edge of the Shark Island drop off. Twenty little toes dangling off the edge.

'I'll always be here Emmy, at our place. We like it here,' Billy states, matter of fact.

'We sure do,' I reply. 'It's the best'.

'Are we going in today Em?' He asks, 'it's three risk points'.

'Sure,' I say 'and if we go together we'll confuse the sharks'.

We look at each other and smile and I hope it won't be for the last time.

The sun struggles to pierce the clouds and I wonder if she knows we're here together without her. I take Billy's hand.

'One, two, three!' We jump.

I make it across in less than three arm strokes and the sharks don't even scare me this time.

Billy is gone now. He jumped with me to some other place and so I sit in one of our spa pools and cry.

As I wish for Billy's ghost, I spot his parting gift. A little tiger figurine looks up at me from the bottom of the rock pool. I laugh as I pick it up, happy that he remembers.

The sun finally breaks through the clouds and the rest of my life stretches out ahead of me as long as single day with Billy. And I doubt with certainty, that life could ever get any better than the day we risked our lives thirteen times. I'm going to miss my best friend Billy, I'm going to miss him forever.

