

## The Interview: DC Green

*PART I: Indonesia, 2001*

*Alex Leonard: How did you start writing, DC?*

DC Green: I've always loved writing. It's one of the three loves of my life, the others being surfing and sex – and I guess lately my daughter makes four.

When I was a kid I made my own comic strips. I had a character called Radical Radical, who had a Dennis Lillee moustache, long wispy hair and a talking dog called Harold. He was a surfer who had all sorts of adventures – once he went to Uganda and met Idi Amin, he went to Japan and did all sorts of things there, he went to Heaven and he went to Hell.

Then in Year Ten I wrote this thing in class called 'Lash Clone'. Lash was a young grommet on the planet Vortex who one day heard the King was looking for a husband for his daughter Buttocks. The suitor had to surf and handle Vortex Bay, so Lash, being a cocky grommet, said, 'I'll do that.' The waves were about 750 feet high, but Lash went out there on his computerized, mega-fin blitz-board and tore them apart. Finally he did a big reo, crashed back down through the atmosphere and landed in Princess Buttocks's lap. Then when the old King died Lash became King of Vortex, got a group of shiftless, disgruntled surfers together, formed a galaxy-conquering empire and ended up becoming Emperor of the Universe for a while. In the end he got bored, took too many drugs and overdosed, lost the whole lot and got demoted all the way down and exiled to this planet called Earth, where he became a dole-bludger, met me in the Bondi CES and got me to write his biography for him. That all happened in the first Lash story. I submitted it to *Tracks*, and *Tracks* loved it and said, 'Have you got any more?' I said, 'Hell, yeah!' and did 80 more.

For a long time I was interested in writing fiction, not in becoming a surf journalist. It was only after I'd been writing *Lash Clone* for about four or five years that I started writing travel stories. I travelled overseas, to Indonesia, for the first time when I was 23, and *Tracks*, being a real garbage guts, ran all my travel stories and some of my photos.

I went with a couple of experienced Indo travellers, who took me to the Hinakos, Nias, South Sumatra, Java and Desert Point. The waves pumped wherever we went. I rode the biggest and most perfect waves of my life. Bali was almost the last place I went to, because the guys I was with were so soulful they said, 'Bali's all sold out, it's gone down the tube and is full of drunken yobbos.' By the time I reached Bali I was preaching that stuff as well. In Bali, of course, I became the biggest drunken yobbo of them all. I degenerated from a soulful, surf-obsessed traveller into an alcoholic, gonzo idiot, very quickly.

*A suitable start to a career in surf journalism?*

Well, surf journalism has always seemed to me to be a very loose field, where you can really go to extremes. Like surfing it's a larrikin thing, and there are so many different approaches to it.

It was probably Tony Edward's *Captain Goodvibes* more than anything else that made me realize that anything is possible in surfing magazines. It was so satirical, so naughty and over-the-top – with Goodvibes taking every drug under the sun, turning up at surf contests and shitting on their whole act, getting farted out of God's asshole and being super rude and obnoxious. It opened up a whole spectrum of possibility for me – I saw that whatever I wanted to write about I could write about it and magazines would publish it.

*Whose surf journalism have you admired?*

In the beginning it was Phil Jarratt's. To me Jarratt was the epitome of the naughty Australian larrikin. The story he did for *Tracks* on the first Stubbies contest was a lurid look behind the scenes of professional surfing, full of sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll and overeating, with Jarratt's memory cells scattered across the pages. In years since, a lot of people have tried to pull that sort of gonzo off again, but most have done it gratuitously, trying to get away with unrestrained reference to booze and drugs and that sort of thing without its working towards a certain theme. But incredible debauchery was what the Stubbies was all about, and Jarratt captured that brilliantly.

Now it's like there are two styles of surf journalism – an American style and an Australian style. The Australian style's much looser and more gonzo, while the American style strives towards a *watermanly*, soulful, 'what-is-the-true-meaning-of-surfing?' sort of thing. And I guess watermanliness is good to a point, but when you've got a whole magazine full of it, sometimes you want to reach for the ralph bucket. Surfing's not *just* about spiritualism and soulfulness and respecting nature and other people. It's also about naughtiness and uncouthness and recklessness.

Probably the best in the American style is Nick Carroll. When he was younger Nick wrote funnier, naughtier things. These days he does more of that solemn, methodically researched stuff. It's not gonzo and he doesn't reveal much about himself in it. It's more like, 'This is the body of my work, I am a former Australian champion, I've been the editor of *Tracks*, I've been the editor of *Surfing*, so you *must* respect the might of my words!' And he is very good at it. He does a much better job than any of the American writers, and he can still put some Australian irreverence in as well.

I also like some of Dave Parmenter's stuff – he's much more critical of the status quo than anyone else writing for the American magazines and he's a good writer as well. But other American writers, it's hard to separate their styles. Many seem to be massive ego-maniacs, the concept of self-deprecation completely unknown to them. They can't take the piss out of themselves and are always trying to create images of themselves that are all gold with no shades of grey – 'I am wonderful, I'm a fantastic surfer, a fantastic lover, a hardcore traveller.' I enjoy reading more when the author's voice is a little subversive or slides in and out or can take the piss out of itself or even expose really bad sides of itself – and that's why the Aussie writers are the best. Guys like Tim Baker and Derek Rielly consistently make me envious. And the South African, Craig Jarvis, has taken personal revelations in his writing to a level that makes even me cringe.

*Do you still read much?*

Not nearly as much as I used to. When I was at school I used to read voraciously and for the first few years after I'd finished high school I was determined to read all the great works of Western Literature and diligently apply myself to things I wasn't really into. I'm an addict, so when I read a book I have to finish it – I have to lie down and consume the whole thing. But now that I have kids and have to work, that's a luxury I can't really afford. If I have the time, though, I love nothing better than to curl up with a good book. But I get all these free surfing magazines sent to me, and I always end up reading them just because they're there. I think, 'Might as well have a look through and see what's happening.' Usually I get mad when I read them and think, 'Fuck! There's so little of value in this!' There's lots of poorly written drivel out there.

*How do you feel when your pieces are edited?*

I hate getting edited. I hate it when people change my words around. I hate it when they add spelling mistakes. When they *add* spelling mistakes! And sometimes I'll do some really nice sort of poetic thing to tie things up and they'll straighten it all out, just brutally. If you really work on them you can almost make poems out of your stories, where you get certain sounds and rhythms happening, which you can only appreciate if you read it aloud. So when an editor mutilates it I want to scream at him, 'There was a reason it was like that, you moron! If there are too many words, send it back to me and I'll chop them down my way.' It's something I'm really bad about because I like writing and what I write so much. And because I've been doing what I do since 1983, I'm more senior than most editors now. Some of the editors were reading my stuff in *Tracks* back when they were grommets in the 1980s. So it's almost as though I'm a respected elder statesman whose judgement isn't to be questioned, with a reputation for ranting and raving.

*Did you ever want to become an editor?*

No. I'd like to be editor for a month, but that's it. I think the day-to-day responsibilities of an editor would be too much for me. It's more fun being a contributor. You get to travel, for one thing. Tim and Derek at *Australia's Surfing Life* used to say to me, 'It's great you're a contributor, because we can send you on all these trips and we don't have to write any articles.' And I used to think, 'Great, you can send me on all those trips and you guys can stay up there on the shit-hole Gold Coast! Perfect balance.'

*What else have you done in life?*

I've done heaps of things, I suppose. I ran a publishing business for over seven years – published tourism newspapers of all things, we ran coach tours and did all sorts of crazy things. They were horrendous, because everything, the caravan parks and so forth, had to be described in such positive, glowing ways – when in fact you knew they were crappy tourist traps. I had nine people working for me at one stage. It was one of those things that just evolve according to their own sort of logic and become... Well, it was actually fun, but it was also far removed from what I wanted to do, because all I was doing was managing, no writing. The only time I got to write was when I went on holiday and did a Tube Quest for *Surfing Life* every year.

*What were those Tube Quests like?*

They were good, a lot of fun. All these amazing things were happening and I was telling myself, 'Just write about it! Just write about it!' I got to write about having a fight with the photographer Sean Davey, about Cactus locals, and I wrote what I thought was a pretty moving piece – a tribute to my mum when I found out she had died when I was in France – I incorporated that into a story about French nuclear testing. I really like incorporating personal elements into stories – like the birth of my daughter and things like that. Not gratuitously, but so they fit in with the theme of the story. So you learn a little bit about the author. Of course, you have to be very honest, and sometimes you might look like a fool...

*You can also be very dishonest, can't you?*

Oh, sure. Sometimes nothing happens, so it's better to make something up. It's interesting to combine fact and fiction. Sometimes, reality just doesn't work in a story. But honesty is best. I've often made myself out to be a real bastard. If you write about yourself in a positive way, it's almost horrible for other people to read. You've got to be prepared to put the bad stuff in as well. Especially since in my writing I try to take the piss out of everyone, pick up on funny things about them, their interesting peccadilloes or weirdo habits... If you're going to take the piss out of other people then you have to take the piss out of yourself as well, even more than anyone else. So then you get the balance right.

*What motivates you to write?*

Travel, definitely. You can cram more experiences and emotions and other fun things into a week of travel than you can into months and months of staying at home. Just being on the road, having interesting experiences, getting pitched into real-life gonzo adventures, meeting interesting people and having good conversations with people. You're always thinking 'Wow, this would make a fantastic story!' The actual writing process itself involves trying to come up with fresh angles to approach saying things from, because the ways in which any one story can be told are infinite. You can pull it apart, start at the middle, the end; there's bits you can leave out and bits you can add in; there's different voices you can use – a child's voice or an Indonesian local's voice or a shaper's – and trying to think the way that person thinks is really fascinating, like going on a journey.

*Like that novel of yours you told me about.*

Yes, 90,000 words from a female perspective. I came up with a timeline for this woman and was thinking about it and going over it for weeks and week before I started writing anything. The character had to be consistent to be believable, and so I couldn't just go and start writing, because then I reach a certain point and think, 'Oh, these actions don't sound like the actions of this character.' I wanted to get inside and really flesh her out, even become her myself. It was like I was almost menstruating every 28 days, it was so vivid.

So I went to Bali, which has all these wonderful women, and I didn't go out, because my predatory male thing of going out and looking for a root was so opposed to what she was that I couldn't do it, I would have offended myself. She dominated me – she was a lot smarter, more assertive and on it than I am – and she took over my head. It was an amazing experience, quite unpleasant as well, because there were unpleasant elements to her personality. She was going through a lot of changes – in fact, she was dying of cancer and only had a week to live. It got to a point where I was really worried I was going to develop cancer myself, by visualising it. One night I

went down to Kuta Beach and I was almost crying and I clenched my fists and called out, 'I'm a *man!* I am *not* a woman! I do not have cancer!' Just getting a bit of reality back before my personality was consumed and I started growing breasts...

*A bit different to Lash Clone.*

A balance to Lash. Lash was such a sexist, misogynist character – he was a satire as well of males like that, it was all a piss-take and I was constantly aware that he was like that, it wasn't like I was endorsing his attitudes – but I thought this would be a nice balance. I like the idea of going to one extreme in my life and then the other.

I know if it comes out it'll make a lot of people mad. I think a lot of feminists will get mad, because there are topics in there men aren't supposed to write about or understand. So I'll have to be in a good, strong position to defend myself from. I want people to read it and think, 'There's no way a man could have written this!' I don't know if I'll succeed at it. I'm too close to it to be able to tell. I think I've done a pretty good job. I think it's the best I've ever done, even though I haven't finished it.

*Who do you think will read it? What kind of reader are you writing it for?*

Well, it's a bit cynical in some ways, because there's a big genre that's emerged in the last few years and that's Mills and Boon but with naughty bits, Mills and Boon that doesn't stop at the bedroom door. And maybe 10%–15% of my book is hardcore sex. It's full of explicit sex action, and sex sells. It'll have the naked chick on the cover as well. Almost every character in it is on some sort of drug. So in that regard it's a modernish sort of book, and it's cynical, but it's also a romance – which no one would ever have thought I would write. There's even a weird science fiction sub-plot. It's almost everything people would think I wouldn't write about, and almost entirely the opposite of my surf journalism and Lash Clone. Even Lash was only cartoon-like sex – he'd mention his 'purple-helmeted moot mallet' and stuff like that – and sex was only a means to a bit of humour, so Lash would always be gloating about what a Sam George, what a magnificent sexual fiend he was, and you soon got to realize he was a real fuckwit who had an image of himself that no one else shared. I really enjoyed playing around with that two-voice stuff, where the authorial first-person voice is really strong and competent, but slowly you realise there's another truth, that the first-person voice is not saying everything, and other voices are creeping in and undermining it. There's lots of that in my book – the author's making all these competent-sounding assertions about things and you realise later, 'Fuck, that didn't even happen! Who's she kidding?' She's kidding herself, kidding the readers... And slowly the layers get peeled off her like the layers of an onion.

*What led you to begin it?*

I'd always thought it was an interesting concept: if you've only got a week left to live, what do you do? If you're happy with your life you don't do anything – you live your last week just as you lived the week before. It's the idea that we've all got goals we want to achieve before we die and suddenly having a week left to live means you've got to cram everything into a week – all the radical experiences, jumping out of aeroplanes, having threesomes, doing this, doing that! But when you get right into it they're all fleeting, superficial things you eventually get over, and then you finally come to terms with the fact that you're dying, you've got so many days left. And one of the really important things is peeling back all these layers of yourself, breaking down all these walls you've built up around yourself and doing away with this façade you've been presenting to the world, till finally you discover what you really are and the things that really matter to you.

*Why didn't you finish it? It sounds like you could have done something special.*

I was in Bali working on it and still had a week left before I got on a boat to do an on-location issue of *Surfing Life*. But I was working so dementedly on it – up every morning and straight into it, banging away on my computer, going all day long – that I fucked up my shoulder. 'Fuck,' I thought, 'I'm going to have to stop writing!' I wouldn't have been able to write anything on the boat if I'd kept going. So I stopped for a week, my shoulder recovered and I got on the boat and was able to get all the stories done. Then I went back to Australia after two-and-a-half months in Indonesia to find all these jobs and bills and my life there waiting for me. I plunged into all that and just never got back into my novel.

I'd forgot the intimate details and lost the ability to weave it all together. Also, the character was so weird and so different to me that I couldn't just slide in and out of her. I could slowly build her up around me and turn myself into her, but it took me a long time to turn myself back into DC Green afterwards. I know that to finish it off I have to go off again somewhere, go back to Bali and remove all externalities, all the stuff of my life, and just submerge myself in that world again. Maybe I could do it in a few bursts. But some of it is really heavy, and when I get into it I get depressed.

And now my surf journalism career has really picked up! After I wrote my book I got really motivated and thought, 'Fuck, I can write!' But at the same time people realised I was available all the time, and I started getting more and more work, enough for me to work as a surf journalist full-time. And now I'm reluctant to back off and vanish to do this book, which I might not be able to find a publisher for and which quite possibly won't sell at all. I'm afraid I'll have people ringing me up and giving me good jobs and trips and then going, 'Ah, bloody DC! If he doesn't want that...' I'd get kicked back down the pecking order, after so many years of crawling up to the top of it. I'd be worried about sacrificing that, and I'd also be worried about money, because my mother was a single parent and always drilled into me, 'We don't have much money, we've got to be really careful with money!' And now I am really careful with money, and one of my great fears is that I won't have enough. Especially now that I'm a dad, I think, 'What if I fuck up and end up not having a job and can't afford to pay my mortgage or feed and clothe my daughter?' It seems to me to be such a bad thing that I just keep working, being unable to refuse any assignment no matter how much I don't want to do it, knowing I'm not going to do a good job because my heart's not in it. But I just think, 'Fuck, I've got to do it, and anyway if I do a few fucked things like this, then hopefully they'll give me some good trips as well.'

I guess surf journalism is the comfort zone for me. For 17-18 years I've been writing for surf magazines and so now no matter how I play around with it it's still comfortable. Even if I do something B-grade, I know editors are still going to run it. But you have to step outside that comfort zone... I'm motivating myself to do it more now, talking to you, that's for sure! I'm pointing out what a softcock I'm being about it, and whenever I do that... That's how I goad myself into surfing big waves and stuff like that - I tell myself, 'Fuck, you softcock! You'll be in a retirement home and you'll be regretting the fact that you didn't come out today. Sure it might drown you, but imagine if you make one of those insane waves!' So I boot myself up the arse and get out there and have a go. Or if I'm doing a story and I think, 'Fuck, there's a famous surfer over there! But they're so intimidating-looking and they probably don't even know who I am and are probably going to tell me to fuck off and blah blah blah' - then this little voice in my head starts saying, 'You softcock! Call yourself an adventurous gonzo journalist and you're skulking here in the corner too scared to go up! Who cares if they tell you to fuck off? It'll be a good story if they tell you to fuck off.' And once that voice gets going it goads me into all sorts of shit. I hate that voice, but at the same time it's good, it's healthy and effective, it makes me face my fears, and that's how I grow. That's how we all grow. If we just do the things we know, the things that are easy for us, if we don't step outside the comfort zone, then we don't grow - we don't grow as writers, as surfers, as human beings...

## *PART II: Australia, 2007*

*What sort of writing have you been doing in the last five or so years?*

I still write semi-regularly for surf mags in Oz, the US and Europe, but since I've become a full-time father, extensive gonzo travelling isn't an easy option anymore. Taking the hackneyed ex-surf journo path to working for a surf company didn't appeal either, as I'm rather fond of my soul and would prefer to live in Ulladulla, where I grew up. So instead, I've become a children's book author!

I've just had two books published. The first is *Stinky Squad*. Oztrailer has mysteriously turned into a nation of brain-eating zombies, run by an evil Prime Minister named Howard John. George Boof wants to bomb the entire country back to the Stone Age. The world's only hope? A team of loser teens with revolting superpowers like acid vomit and super-sticky pimple pus: Stinky Squad! I loved writing this book. On the one hand, *Stinky Squad* is a 50,000-word, rip-snorting read for reluctant grom readers packed with cliff-hangers, ultra-violence, mega-grossness, laughs and mysteries galore. But it's also important that stories have a bit of deep and meaningful stuff, and so on the other hand

Stinky Squad is a biting critique of John Howard's Australia, satirising everything from detention centres to our toadying relationship with America.

The second book is *Three Little Surfer Pigs*. Curly, Grunt and Bruce are the naughtiest pigs in Fairyland. No beach is safe from these pranking porkers. Everything changes the day the pigs spy a beautiful and mysterious hog. Can the brat brothers beat her surfing challenge? Are they up for... PIG WEDNESDAY?? This bently rhyming picture book of the classic fairy tale features gorgeous hand-painted art by Simon McLean, who's done lots of surf magazine art, and design by Graeme Murdoch, *ASL's* guru design guy. Ten per cent of all proceeds from *Three Little Surfer Pigs* will be donated to CanTeen, the Australian organisation for young people living with cancer. I love this book too: it's twisted, funny and chock full of surf stuff: exactly the sort of book I would have loved when I was a grommet.

Heh, sorry to answer your question with the biggest double-plug since thongs were invented...

*What drew you to writing for children?*

Certainly not the money! I think I've found an even better method of slow bankruptcy than writing for surf magazines! Seriously, I really enjoy writing fiction and making people laugh. I find using my imagination is a lot easier and way more fun than writing non-fiction. Plus I don't get in trouble off grumpy surf companies or pro surfers any more. As with the Harry Potter books and Shrek movies, I think a good children's story will resonate with readers of all ages. And writing for kids tends to cut all the crap out of my writing. Kids don't give a rat's anus about overblown imagery, excessive adjectives and convoluted sentence structures that scream, 'See what a brilliant writer I am!' Grommets just want a rocking good yarn that will seize their interest and not let go, and that's what I try to deliver.

*What do you think of the surf writing that's been appearing in the last five years?*

It ranges from the sublime to the ridiculous. Unfortunately, surfing has become so corporate and advertising-driven that hardly anything offensive gets written any more, let alone published. Most magazine stories are tied in to advertising: like surfboard buyer tests featuring board labels that just happen to advertise in that issue. Also, there doesn't seem to be much new journalistic talent. The best writers today were also the best writers ten years ago and most of the best writing is in books rather than magazines.

*Would you mind saying a bit about your own problems with alcohol back in the day?*

When I was travelling through Europe on an Operation Tubequest mission for *ASL* in 1995 I learned that my mother had died back in Oz and it was too late to return to her funeral. So I did the typical Aussie male grieving thing: I went on a bender. A BIG bender. My liver was already a bit dodgy after a bout of glandular fever and Indo malaria, and after a week on the turps, the big booze filter swelled up like a pregnant football, causing constant pain as it pressed against my ribs. I also began to turn yellow. A doctor told me I'd be dead within six months if I didn't stop drinking. So I stopped drinking.