



WILD THINGS

Islands, Isolation and Insights

This too will pass: Finding solace in hope, nature and the passage of time.

In the small gap between terrifying bushfires and the Corona lockdown, we snuck in a long weekend on the NSW south coast. It was supposed to be a celebration of the flames receding, a chance to enjoy this beautiful part of the world and support local businesses doing it tough. One morning adventure called—my mum, husband and I and the three kids jumped in the car and drove to Broulee Island. We didn't know at the time that this lovely but rather normal day out was really a luxury, a taste of freedom, and that it would quickly feel like it had happened years rather than months earlier.

We strolled down to the beach connecting the 'island' to Broulee itself, carrying bags of towels and snacks, snorkels and buckets. Four of us waded into the water, masks on foreheads, snorkels dangling like broken plumbing. "I saw seahorses here once", I told the kids. "They were swimming just in front of my face."

"The males raise the babies", my ten year old said. "At school we watched a video of babies bursting out of their dad's pouch."

And so the conversation began. The swim (and the chat) lasted half an hour, ending suddenly when I remembered the beach's name—it was Shark Beach—and mentioned it aloud.

We saw neither sharks nor seahorses. The water was murky, with ash and charred leaves forming tidelines of fire. The view down the beach was obscured by smoke, but little else had changed in my decades of visiting Broulee.

Swimming over, we set off for the short stroll around the peninsula. We

stuck to the track, skirting rocky platforms stretching into the sea. Waves broke at their edges, splashing and spraying. We wandered down to investigate rock pools, prod sea snails and search for crabs.

The track led inland and we wound our way around patches of scratchy tea tree, pointing out plaques attached to rocks and a cemetery of shipwreck graves. We talked about how goods were once transported to Sydney by boats guided by lighthouses and sometimes sunk in

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storms. Grandma told local tales from World War Two: of crews of strange men having fires on the beach at night; of how this island echoed with the sounds of submarines charging their batteries. The stories showed how remote this area was not that long ago.

"Why is this called an island when it's not?" asked eight-year-old Pippa. Grandma explained that when her kids were young (a very long time ago indeed...), the island was separated from the mainland by water, although you could still swim across. Then a sandbar connected them, growing higher and higher. Dunes developed and plants grew, slowing erosion and

making the connection solid. It's now been 35 years since they were separate.

"I'm sure it will be an island again one day", she said.

Two days later we returned to Sydney. Two months later and our family is all at home, all day, every day.

The sanity saver is that we can still go outside, into nature, at this point at least. The bush around my house is busy with people exercising, striding along tracks and swimming in the bays. Out there it's the same as usual. Birds flock without restriction, the mud squelches underfoot and splatters up legs, the sea sparkles and lizards make panicked dashes after hours of sedentary sunning.

It's only for humans that life has changed: we're the ones who are suffering, scared and anxious, bored and sick. The world's other inhabitants are enjoying the breathing space—less destruction of nature, cleaner air, and fewer people disturbing the peace.

This crisis will pass, just like everything does. And we can rejoin the world again, together, and choose what to do.

We can rejoice in each other, appreciate our solidarity, what we share and have overcome. Learn to look after each other and our shared humanity.

Extend this out to our fragile, beautiful world. Finally remember we are part of it, intertwined with it: we rely on it for our health, safety, comfort and our lives. And realise afresh it's not just us: the survival of everything relies on this amazing, miraculous planet.

Maybe then we will treat it as what it is: the thing we must look after before all else. That's my hope at least.