
The following memoir was written by West Australian author Sam Carmody. It was published in the Griffith Review, an Australian literary journal.

Monsters

Sam Carmody

MY OLDER BROTHER took an interest in the sea first, and, as with everything he did, I followed close behind. By the time he was ten years old, surfing and fishing and diving had become obsessions. He was devout; I was cautious. But in his gravitational pull I ended up spending many of my childhood days down the port beach in front of our house in Geraldton, on the central rural coast of Western Australia. Fishing for herring from the edge of the reef. Spearing for the skippy and sweetlip that hid in the dusty green shallows, the water warm with the Leeuwin Current that flowed south from Indonesia.

If an interest in the ocean can be hereditary then the link would be our grandmother. Freda Vines lived alone in a war-service home in the Perth coastal suburb of Marmion. On school holidays our family often made the five-hour drive south of Geraldton to stay with Freda, setting up camp in the ethereal clutter of her home. Amid the loose papers and paintings and overstuffed bookshelves were strange, exotic things. A death notification from the Royal Australian Air Force dated 5 February 1945. Spears and woomeras and boomerangs recovered from the Cape Range in the north-west of the state, which hung on a living room wall. In a cupboard of coats and boots I found a .22-calibre Lithgow rifle and, in breathless moments alone, I felt the weight of a gun in my hands.

I had grown up knowing my grandmother was a novelist, historian and a painter, and even at seven I had her pegged as an eccentric. Freda had over-large reading glasses and she wore her waist-length grey hair swept up in a gigantic beehive. She liked lipstick and heavy jewellery, but she wasn't anything like other old women I knew. I'd once overheard a distant relative whisper that my grandmother wasn't 'houseproud' in a way that suggested something truly wicked, though I didn't know what it meant. I did know Freda preferred ordering pizza to cooking dinner. She drank beer and sherry and, when we were at hand, had her grandchildren fix her strong rum and cokes.

In her old age Freda walked with a stoop and only seemed able to comfortably look someone square in the face when she sat down, and would smile when she locked eyes on you. I remember her spending long summer afternoons on those school holidays sat at the kitchen table, a drink sweating in front of her, staring out the sea-facing windows.

In Perth my brother and I continued our daily practice, indifferent to the sprawling city to the east, preferring to explore the limestone coves and beaches down the street from Freda's house. The sea there was foreign to the one we had grown up with in Geraldton. We knew it was the same Indian Ocean, of course, but the water was a darker, deeper blue, and even in the summer months it kept its chill, the inshore reefs flushed by the nutrient-rich current reaching up out of the Southern Ocean. I became more circumspect than usual on those beaches. Despite the mansions peering over the busy water and the constant hum of shark-spotter planes and rescue choppers patrolling above, and despite the visual boundary of the surf-fringed outer reefs and the island standing guard beyond them, the city beaches always felt exposed, as if a window had been left open.

Freda noticed our prepubescent seafaring and responded to it in a way that these days might be condemned as irresponsible. One day my brother and I returned from the beach, and were given a book titled *Sharks: Silent Hunters of the Deep* (Reader's Digest, 1987). I had never seen a book like it. It was a real book, a book for grown-ups, but it was ours. Beyond its innocent cover – the side-profile of a harmless grey nurse shark – were stories and images our parents would not have permitted had they known, and we kept its content secret. We were drawn to that book in a way we suspected was dangerous, always wanting to look as much as wanting to look away. *Silent Hunters of the Deep* was in some ways my first experience of addiction and, through the book's stories, my first true encounter with death. I developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of shark attacks that had taken place decades before I was born. Like the 1967 attack several hundred metres off the remote Western Australian township of Jurien Bay. How twenty-four-year-old spearfisherman Bob Bartle was separated in two by a great white shark in front of his friend Lee Warner, and how Warner, after shooting his own spear at the circling shark, had to retrieve the gun floating near Bartle's upper half to arm himself for the long swim to shore. Or the 1923 attack on thirteen-year-old Charles

Robinson, killed while bathing near the Scotch College boatshed in the Swan River. I learnt them all, and I would re-read each terrible account until I could almost recite them verbatim, revisiting them like biblical passages.

Silent Hunters of the Deep had pictures, too, but there was no *Finding Nemo*-style anthropomorphism. I remember the photograph of a South Australian diver lying flat out on the deck of a boat, his right leg gone, blood fanning out from the stump across the timber boards like the jet stream from a rocket. There were photographs taken in ambulances and operating theatres, gloved hands holding torn limbs under surgical lamps. Shredded tissue over spoiled hospital linen.

And every birthday or Christmas we would be gifted a new book about sharks, each one surpassing the one before it for the visceral hit it provided. One book contained a section of glossed pages preceded by a warning, so graphic were the colonial photographs within. I can only imagine Freda in a bookstore, flicking through pages, the grim amusement as she ensured they contained the adequate gore.

My brother and I took the books home to Geraldton and dutifully studied each one, over and over, imbibing the tales and photographs and the zoological information that would never be forgotten. Like how a fully motivated, two-tonne adult great white shark could reach speeds of over thirty kilometres an hour, covering the final twenty metres between itself and its target in less than two seconds. And how, water depth permitting, their preferred attack trajectory was vertical, striking from underneath the eyeline of its prey.

I soon had trouble putting my head underwater. I would never go in the backyard pool on my own. My only memory of vacation swimming lessons was the five-metre white pointer that stalked the deep end of the Geraldton aquatic centre.

Even now, when I am in the sea, I find myself circled by the repeated visions of an attack in progress. The huge shifting of ocean and then the sudden heaviness on my legs. I see the tumbling red clouds in the water around me. I have surfed for two decades and though I have never once seen a shark, I am never without them. The ocean I live with is an ocean of monsters, vivid, fully formed. I am almost resigned to it now. I suspect this is how it always will be.

I don't write of this to show how my grandmother gave me a mental illness. It is clear that is, by some definition, what has happened. I wanted to propose a question: why? Why did she cast monsters into an ocean that I loved, an ocean she loved? What was the lesson or the instruction?

Because that is what a monster is. An instruction. The Latin root of monster, *monēre*, means not only to warn but also to remind and advise. To instruct.

The following extract is the opening of Chloe Hooper's 2018 expository text *The Arsonist: A mind on fire*.

The Detectives

Picture a fairytale's engraving. Straight black trees stretching in perfect symmetry to their vanishing point, the ground covered in thick white snow. Woods are dangerous places in such stories, things are not as they seem. Here too, in this timber plantation, menace lingers. The blackened trees smoulder. Smoke creeps around the charcoal trunks and charred leaves. The snow, stain pale grey, is ash. Place your foot unwisely and it might slip through and burn. These woods are cordoned off with crime scene tape and guarded by uniformed police officers.

At the intersection of two nondescript roads, Detective Sergeant Adam Henry sits in his car taking in a puzzle. On one side of the Glendonald Road, the timber plantation is untouched: pristine *Pinus radiata*, all sown at the same time, growing in immaculate green lines. On the other side, near where the road forms a T with a track named Jellef's outlet, stand rows of *Eucalyptus globulus*, the common blue gum cultivated the world over to make printer paper. All torched as far as the eye can see. On Saturday 7 February 2009, around 1:30pm, a fire started somewhere near here and now, late on Sunday afternoon, it is still burning several kilometres away.

Detective Henry has a new baby, his first, a week out of hospital. The night before, he had been called back from paternity leave for a 6am meeting. Everyone in the Victoria Police Arson and Explosive Squad was called back. The past several days had been implausibly hot, with Saturday the endgame – mid forties – culminating in a killer hundred-kmh northerly wind. That afternoon and throughout the night, firestorms ravaged areas to the state's north, north-west, north-east, south-east and south-west. Henry was sent two hours east of Melbourne to supervise the investigation of this fire that started four kilometres away from the town of Churchill (pop. 4000). An investigation named for obvious reasons, Operation Winston.

Through the smoke and in the added haze of the sleep deprived, he drove with a colleague along the M1 to the Latrobe Valley. On the radio, the death toll was rising – fifty people, then a hundred. Whole towns, it was reported, had burned to the ground. Officers hit the first road block and hour out of the city. Dense forest of the Bunyip State Park was on fire, and the traffic police ushered them past onto a ghost freeway. For the next hour they might have been the only car on the usually manic road.

The extract below is from David Lynch and Kristine McKenna's hybrid text called *Room to Dream*. Published in 2018, this interpretive text switches between chapters of biography and autobiography. David Lynch is a renowned television and movie director who makes mostly surreal texts.

American Pastoral

It's nice of my brother to say I was a born leader, but I was just a regular kid. I had good friends, I didn't think about whether or not I was popular and never felt like I was different.

You could say that my grandfather on my mother's side, Grandfather Sundholm, was a working-class guy. He had fantastic tools down in his basement woodshop and he had these exquisitely made wooden chests, all inset locking systems and stuff like that. Apparently, the relatives on that side of the family were expert cabinetmakers and they built a lot of cabinets in stores on Fifth Avenue. I went to visit those grandparents on the train with my mom when I was a little baby. I remember it was winter and my grandfather would stroller me around, and apparently I talked a lot. I'd talk to the guy who ran the newsstand in Prospect Park, and I think I would whistle too. I was a happy baby.

We moved to Sandpoint Idaho, right after I was born, and the only thing I remember about Sandpoint is sitting in this mud puddle with little Dicky Smith. It was like a hole under a tree they filled with water from the hose, and I remember squeezing mud in that puddle and it was heaven. The most important part of my childhood took place in Boise, but I also loved Spokane, Washington, which is where we lived after Sandpoint. Spokane had the most incredible blue skies. There must've been an air force base nearby, because these giant planes would fly across the open sky, and they went real slow because they were propeller planes. I always loved making things, and the first things I made were wooden guns that I made in Spokane. I'd carve them and cut them with saws and they were pretty crude. I loved to draw, too.

I had a friend named Bobby in Spokane who lived in a house at the end of the block, and there was an apartment building down there, too. So, it's winter, and I go down there in my little snowsuit, and let's say I was in nursery school. I am in a little snowsuit and my friend Bobby is in a snowsuit and we're going around and it's freezing cold. This apartment building is set back from the street and we see that it has a corridor that goes down to these doors, and the door to one of the apartments is open. So, we go in there and we're in an apartment and no one's home. Somehow, we get this idea and we start making snowballs and start putting them in the drawers of this desk. We put snowballs in all the bureau drawers – any drawers we could find, we'd make a hard snowball and put one in there. We made some big snowballs, about two feet across, and set them on the bed, and put some snowballs in other rooms. Then we got the towels out of the bathroom and laid them in the street, like flags. Cars would come and they'd slow down, then the driver would say, "Screw it," and they'd drive right over these towels. We say a couple of cars go over the towels, and we're in our snowsuits rolling more snowballs. We finish up and go home. I'm in the dining room when the phone rings, but I don't think anything of it. In those days the phone hardly ever rang, but still, I'm not panicked when the phone rings. My mother might've answered, but then my father took it, and the way he's talking, I'm starting to get a feeling. I think my dear dad had to pay quite a lot of money for damages. Why did we do it? Go figure...

The following extract is from Dave Egger's interpretation of the experiences of the Zeitoun family during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The text is written in diary entry format.

FRIDAY AUGUST 26 2005

On moonless nights the men and boys of Jableh, a dusty fishing town on the coast of Syria, would gather their lanterns and set out in their quietest boats. Five or six small craft, two or three fishermen in each. A mile out, they would arrange their boats in a circle on the black sea, drop their nets, and, holding their lanterns over the water, they would approximate the moon.

The fish, sardines, would begin gathering soon after, a slow mass of silver rising from below. The fish were attracted to plankton, and the plankton were attracted to the light. They would begin to circle, a chain linked loosely, and over the next hour their numbers would grow. The black gaps between silver links would close until the fishermen could see, below, a solid mass of silver spinning.

Abdulrahman Zeitoun was only thirteen when he began fishing for sardines this way, a method called *lampara*, borrowed from the Italians. He had waited years to join the men and the teenagers on the night boats, and he'd spent those years asking questions. Why only on moonless nights? Because, his brother Ahmad said, on moon-filled nights the plankton would be visible everywhere, speak out all over the sea, and the sardines could see and eat the glowing organisms with ease. But with a moon the men could make their own, and could bring the sardines to the surface in stunning concentrations. You have to see it, Ahmad told his little brother. You've never seen anything like this.

And when Abdulrahman first witnessed the sardines circling in the black he could not believe the sight, the beauty of the undulating silver orbs below the white-and-gold lantern light. He said nothing, and the other fishermen were careful to be quiet, too, paddling without motors, lest they scare away the catch. They would whisper over the sea, telling jokes and talking about women and girls as they watched the fish rise and spin beneath them. A few hours later, once the sardines were ready, tens of thousands of them glistening in the refracted light, the fishermen would cinch the net and haul them in.

They would motor back to the shore and bring the sardines back to the fish broker in the market before dawn. He would pay the men and boys, and would sell the fish all over western Syria – Lattakia, Baniyas, Damascus. The fishermen would split the money, with Abdulrahman and Ahmad bringing their share home. Their father passed away the year before and their mother was of fragile health and mind, so all the funds they earned went toward the welfare of the house they shared with ten siblings.

Abdulrahman and Ahmad didn't care much about the money, though. They would have done it for free.

Thirty-four years later and thousands of miles west, Abdulrahman Zeitoun was in bed on a Friday morning, slowly leaving the moonless Jableh night, a tattered memory of it caught in the morning dream. He was in his home in New Orleans and beside him he could hear his wife Kathy breathing, her exhalations not unlike the shushing of water against the hull of a wooden boat. Otherwise the house was silent. He knew it was near six o'clock, and the peace would not last. The morning light usually woke the kids once it reached their second-story windows. One of the four would open his or her eyes, and from there the movements were brisk, the house quickly growing loud. With one child awake, it was impossible to keep the other three in bed.

Kathy woke to a thump upstairs, coming from one of the kids' rooms. She listened closely, praying silently for rest. Each morning there was a delicate period, between six and six thirty, when there was a chance, however remote, that they could steal another ten or fifteen minutes of sleep. But now there was another thump, and the dog barked, another thump followed. What was happening in this house? Kathy looked to her husband. He was staring at the ceiling. The day had roared to life.

The phone began ringing, today as always, before their feet hit the floor. Kathy and Zeitoun – most people called him by his last name because they couldn't pronounce his first – ran a company, Zeitoun A. Painting Contractor LLC, and every day their crews, their clients, everyone with a phone and their number, seemed to think once it struck six-

thirty it was appropriate to call. And they called. Usually there were so many calls at the stroke of six-thirty that the overlap would send half of them straight to voicemail.

Kathy took the first one, from a client across town, while Zeitoun shuffled into the shower. Fridays were always busy, but this one promised madness, given the rough weather on the way. There had been rumblings all week about a tropical storm crossing the Florida Keys, a chance it might head north. Though this kind of possibility presented itself every August and didn't raise eyebrows for most, Kathy and Zeitoun's more cautious clients and friends often made preparations. Throughout the morning the callers would want to know if Zeitoun could board up their windows and doors, if he would be clearing his equipment off his property before the winds came. Workers would want to know if they'd be expected to come in that day or the next.

The following memoir is from Chris Gethard's memoir *A Bad Idea I'm About To Do*, published in 2012. Gethard is a comedian and author known for his podcast *Beautiful Anonymous*.

My Father Is Not the Kindly Moustachioed Man He Seems

I'm obsessed with basketball. I'll drop anything to watch an NBA game. I'll watch summer league games. I'll even watch the Wizards play the Timberwolves.

I also love playing basketball, even though I'm not very good at it. Luckily, I've joined a team of comedians who are just as enthusiastic and equally bad. What we lack in skill we make up for in dirty play and hilarious taunts. We're not the best, but we're gritty. We're part of a league that donates the dues teams play to charity.

The kind-hearted nature of this endeavour only makes my behaviour during games that much less excusable.

Case in point: the third week of the season we played out rivals. They're a bunch of Jewish guys who run set plays and are known for smothering the defense. They're antisocial and cocky. We consider them our archenemies. One of them even plays in a protective facemask. They're just the worst. They get my anger up. And that's a problem.

I'm unable to tell you what it feels like to be "a little" mad. My emotions work as if controlled by a light switch. I'm either fine or I'm out of control. I once spilled a container of thumbtacks and got as angry at myself as I did when I screwed up my relationship with my high school sweetheart. If I'm under the impression there are cookies in my cupboard, then realise that there are in fact none, there's a high probability I'll be as sad as I was at my grandfather's funeral.

In other words, my reactions aren't in proportion to the things I'm reacting to. It's something I've been working on with a lovely psychologist for the past few years.

But on the court that day, all my hard work went out the window.

Even in a charity basketball league, there are rules and those rules should be enforced. So I'm sorry, but if there's supposed to be a thirty-second shot clock and the ref doesn't seem to care, I'm going to enlighten him.

I was riding the bench with my friend Gavin, perhaps the nicest person I know.

"This is fucking bullshit," I seethed to him. "I've gotta say something."

"I don't know man," he said. "Is it really worth it?"

I jumped off the bench and threw my hands wildly in the air.

"SHOT CLOCK," I screamed. "REF! WHAT ABOUT THE SHOT CLOCK!"

The ref ignored me.

"Why won't you pay attention to the FUCKING SHOT CLOCK? I shouted."

"Dude," Gavin said. He shook his head, imploring me to calm down.

I started at him with steely resolve before turning back in the ref's direction.

"Why do we even HAVE a fucking SHOT CLOCK?"

The ref blew his whistle.

I'm the only player in the history of our charity sports league to be given a technical foul while on the bench.

My closest friends are all people who have learned to laugh at me during these types of situations. Otherwise, it would probably be impossible for them to tolerate my semi-frequent out-bursts of completely uncalled-for emotion. They've figured out how to roll with these particular punches but have often wondered aloud where my anger comes from, and are generally shocked at my answer. Especially if they've met my parents.

For her part, my mother actually has no need to express outward anger, because she is very smart and skilfully passive aggressive. My mother is Catholic, and that means she is a legitimate master of guilt inducement. I don't remember her ever yelling at me when I was growing up, but I do recall being on the business end of a few choice statements quite often:

"I thought I raised you better than that."

"I didn't realise that I was so terrible."

And worst of all: "I just didn't know you were that kind of person."

Usually, a heartbreaker of a line that would be more than enough to put me in my place as a kid. But even when it didn't, she never resorted to screaming or yelling. She'd simply say, "Okay...I'll just tell your father about this when he gets home."

Most people who meet my dad immediately like him. "He just seems like a nice guy," they'll say. "A nice guy with a moustache." In addition to the moustache, his defining characteristics are that he's big (six foot two), slightly out of his element in social situations (but in an endearing way that's accompanied by a goofy grin), and a national expert on water treatment. When we go on vacation his first order of business is to taste the tap water.

"Man, the pH is all off," he'll say shaking his head. "I should go talk to these guys." You can't not love a guy who makes it his personal crusade to travel around the America giving the locals slightly better drinking water.

My father's other interests include gardening, baking and my mom. He's like the big quiet friend everyone wants in life. I don't feel cheesy saying I'm lucky he's my dad.

But like a suburban town that's home to a serial killer, or a likeable athlete who runs a dog fighting ring, my father has a dark side.

"Not *your* dad!" people say when I tell them that my anger is inherited from him.

Then I recount the tale that has been passed down through my family for thirty years – the tale of a wronged man out for justice. A tale of vengeance. A tale of my father.

August 1980, I was three months old. My brother was the tender age of two, and he was a bad sleeper. For my mom, this meant long sleepless nights that really took a toll on her. My father has always been incredibly protective of my mother and seeing her exhausted and at the end of her rope made him even more so than usual.

My parents had recently moved into the first home they owned on Franklin Avenue in West Orange, New Jersey. IT was nothing fancy. There was no front lawn, so the modest house sat right up against the road. The cracked driveway led to a cramped backyard. The interior was the same: small and cosy, an admitted fixer-upper. Up the street was Colgate Park. For generations, it had been a meeting ground for teenage kids – specifically, the type who like to cause trouble.

My father became obsessed with launching into home improvement projects. This is how he's been with every home he's owned since. It pains him to hire anyone to do something he can do with his own hands.

That's probably why the door was such a big deal.

The first alteration he made to the house on Franklin Avenue was to install a shiny, white aluminium door. After all, this was the brand-new entrance to his brand-new home.

Perhaps that helps explain the vigilante death spree my father embarked upon.

A few nights after the door was proudly hung on its hinges, my parents were awakened at two in the morning by a terrifying crash. My brother woke from a rare night of sound sleep and screamed. I was up and crying as well. My father then downstairs to discover that someone had kicked in his brand-new door. The first personal touch he put on his house had been destroyed.

The next morning he got up and removed the battered door from its hinges. He took a hammer and went through the arduous process of flattening it into as much of its original shape as possible and rehung it. But it was no longer pristine.

That night, the door was kicked in again. The results were the same: his months-old baby screaming in fear. The baby's two-year-old brother crying in confusion. The babies' frazzled mother awake all night.

This happened every night for the next four nights.

Maybe you can only push a man so far before he pushes back. Maybe something changes in his disposition once he has kids, something that makes him more prone to commit protective aggression and violence. Or maybe it's that my father was only twenty-one when the Charles Bronson movie *Death Wish* came out and put into his head the idea that vigilante violence is a valid answer to life's problems. I'm not sure. What I am sure of is that my father snapped.

His first step towards retaliation was to build what can only be described as a lair. Good old "wouldn't hurt a fly" Dad took a bunch of couch cushions and blankets and arranged them in a heap on the front porch. From the outside, it looked like a pile of garbage that was set on the porch to eventually be thrown out. Dad had decided to sit up all night, covered in these cushions and blankets. Camouflaging himself, he waited for the teenage hooligans who had been causing him so much trouble. After five terrorising nights there was no reason to think they weren't coming back. They didn't realise they had gone from predator to prey.

Of course, that night they no-showed.

"This is making things worse," my mother gently told him. "You can't fly off the handle like this."

The next night, he slept in his bed, embarrassed about his extreme behaviour. Needless to say, that night the teenage punks returned and kicked in the door.

Now my dad felt like a fool, convinced that the teenagers were purposely toying with him. His anger returned and intensified. Insane or not, he told my mother he would be spending that night back in his rage nest, waiting for his change to exact swift vengeance on his family's tormentors.

At about 2:30am, my dad was woken from a light sleep by the laughter of approaching youths. He heard one of them walking up the steps. One step, two steps, three steps.

Then, a crash.

Before the kid could rear back his foot to kick in the door, my father erupted from his pile of bedding, bellowing a primal, rage-filled, Braveheart battle scream. Immediately, the kids all screamed back in shock and terror.

In many ways, my father is not unlike a panda bear. First impressions of a panda are that it's nice, quiet and adorable. My dad is the same way. But an angry panda bear is still a bear. Cute or not, it will tear you apart instantly.

The kids, about four or five of them, spun around and took off. But instead of being content with his terrifying ambush, my father flew after them, landed on the sidewalk and screamed yet again. The kids left him in the dust initially. But what they couldn't have known was that my dad played football in high school. And his nickname was "the Dump Truck."

If a dump truck was sitting still, and someone asked you to outrun it once it started up, you could probably do so for the first hundred yards or so. It's big and clunky and takes a while to get going. But just give it a minute to gather some steam, and then see what happens.

These kids were being chased by a human, momentum-gathering dump truck. And that dump truck was being driven by an angry panda bear.

The kids made a left and cut through the gravel parking lot of Colgate Park, but to their surprise the Dump Truck was gaining on them. They sprinted towards the baseball field in full panic. My father could see them out in the open; they were like helpless gazelle loose on the plains. Sensing their fear, he sped up.

But the kids had an advantage. They had spent a lot more time in the park at night than my dad had. What they knew, and he didn't, was that each night the park's caretakers strung a chain across the end of the parking lot. In the dark the knee-high chain was basically invisible, and my father ran straight into it; the big man sprawling into the ground face first.

It had recently rained, so when my father hit the ground he slid, face-first and chest-down, ten feet out into the grass. There was a lot of mud on the field that night and when he stood up, he was covered head to toe in thick brown sludge. The kids, who must have been sure their freedom was at hand, could only stare dumbfounded as my father rose – not missing a stride – his eyes and teeth now the only parts of him visible beneath the mud – and continued his pursuit.

Colgate Park's outfield goes uphill and is bordered by a large concrete wall. My father realised that in their panic, the kids were boxing themselves against the wall. One by one they hit it, turned around, and saw he was still coming. When he got to them, they huddled next to each other, backs pinned against the concrete. They were terrified, and had every right to be. My father, covered in mud, was grinning like a lunatic and laughing with glee. His terrifying words didn't match this joyous mood.

He wheezed from the run while making eye contact with each of the kids.

"I'M GONNA COME BACK HERE TOMORROW NIGHT," he finally bellowed, "AND START CAVING SKULLS IN WITH A PIPE."

He then howled with laughter. He repeated the same sentence for three straight minutes, his hysterical laughter interrupted only by his rants and ravings about killing teenagers with a pipe.

When the cops arrived my father was initially pleased to see them, until they drew their guns on him. It didn't dawn on him that they might not be as concerned with the disciplining of scared teenagers as they were with securing the mud-covered mad man joyously shouting about committing murder with a pipe.

My old man quickly realised the severity of the situation and wisely calmed down. He explained what had been happening – the property damage, his two young sons and recovering wife, the multiple incidents of night-time vandalism.

The cops didn't need to hear much. They told my dad to head home and turned their attention to the troublemakers.

The next morning there was a knock on our door. It was one of the punks from the night before. His father was with him, and the kid was holding a brand-new door. He apologised profusely, unable to mask the fear that my father, even when not covered in mud, produced deep within his soul.

I've never personally seen my father as mad as that story recounts. But I've often felt that mad myself. I suppose you could say that it's the part of his legacy that lives on in me. I'm not physically intimidating like my dad. I didn't stand a chance of playing high school football. I don't share my dad's interest in tap water, either, and since I have a woeful inability to grow facial hair, his moustache shall unfortunately die with him as well. But his anger – his mud-on-the-face, murder-in-the-eyes anger – is something that will live on in our bloodline forever.

My desire to tell embarrassing stories about our loved ones, meanwhile, is something I inherited from my mom. She's also the one who taught me that in some cases these stories can continue to grow well after the events that

inspired them. Especially since it's best to leave out certain sensitive details until enough time has passed and everyone can look back and laugh about them.

For this story, that length of time was twenty-nine years.

It wasn't until Christmas Eve of 2009 when, during a special holiday retelling of the story by my mother, she added a line none of us had heard before.

"I was scared he was going to get arrested," she said, "*and that's why I called the cops on him.*"

My father froze, a decades old anger roaring back to life in his eyes.

"You did what?" he asked. "You're the one who called the cops on me?"

"I thought you were gonna murder somebody," she calmly said. "And I'm sorry, but I didn't feel like raising two kids on my own."

Then we opened our presents, like I imagine normal families do.

The following opinion piece was written by Australian journalist and literary critic Mel Campbell. It was published online for The Guardian Australia on the 19th of March 2019.

Avocad-NO: why does everyone hate the Shepard avocado?

The Shepard avocado is consistently smashed online – and hatred of the green menace intensifies as Hass avocados go out of season.

Over the weekend, as the internet vented fierce joy at watching a teenage boy crack an egg on an Australian senator's noggin, an even more hardboiled take emerged: "Please stop wasting eggs throw Shepard avocados."

If one thing really animates Australians, it's avocados. And as the thick, knobbly skinned Hass variety ends its season in February and the slimmer, smoother Shepard avocado appears in shops, aggrieved social media comments begin their season as well.

On 27 February, industry body Australian Avocados proudly announced the start of Shepard season on Instagram. A fierce debate ensued in the comments, where some users greeted the news with crying faces, poo emojis and sentiments such as "Noooo bring back Hass" and "Worst 6 weeks of the year".

On Twitter, Tracey Kendall grieved: "The heart-breaking moment when Shepard avocados start to replace Hass." For Liz Thomas, "Shepard Avocados are not Avocados. They are a pool of tears [loudly crying emoji]", while Sortius concluded, "Shepard avocados are the worst avocados".

My friend and colleague Matilda Dixon-Smith tweeted a cri de coeur. Matilda's coffee had gone cold while she was texting her boyfriend to complain about Shepard season, "and seriously is there anything those green menaces can do right it's almost not even worth having an avo at all!?????!!!!?????!!!!!"

Perhaps such an extreme use of punctuation marks offers a clue that more than a decade of aggressive "Ave an Avo" marketing has come home to ripen. Australians now consider avocados so essential that we take for granted the supply chain needed to keep them in supermarkets and cafes all year round.

More than 80% of locally grown avocados are Hass; Shepards account for only 10%-15%. But thanks to the differences in growing seasons between Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia, if you want fresh Australian avocado from February to April, it'll be a Shepard. This year's Queensland floods delayed the start of Shepard season but, in bad news for haters, about 14 million kilograms of them are expected to hit shelves this year.

Why is there such antipathy for this green-skinned Shepchild? For a start, Shepards have firmer flesh, compared with the creamy texture people expect from Hass avocados. In a nation of smashed-avo lovers, being trickier to smash is a critical failure.

But the penalty for spreadability is that the Hass is fragile. It bruises easily, and is perfectly ripe for only a short window, after which it quickly becomes disgustingly black and stringy. Tossing a Hass in a salad can smear and smooch it, and once cut it needs to be stored carefully to stop the flesh oxidising.

Perhaps some people find Shepards "hard" and "rubbery" because the Hass's purple-black skin offers a clearer signal it's ready to eat. The evergreen Shepard risks being prepared too early, when it's not fully ripe.

But the Shepard rewards patience. Once cut it stays green, keeps better in the fridge and looks nicer in guacamole, salads and sandwiches. Its firmness also makes it better for cooking in pastas, or as crumbed "chips".

"That's the beauty of greenskin avocados, they don't rot like Hass," points out Blue Sky Produce, a grower based in Mareeba in Queensland, in an Instagram photo of avocado toast: "Made from reject bin Shepard avos that if you saw them you would give them to your dog ... This guacamole was made 3 days ago, still bright green!"

Retailers, who are currently sourcing their avocados from north and central Queensland, have an obvious incentive to support both Hass and Shepard. Warwick Hope, Woolworths' merchandise manager, fruit, would not be drawn on the debate: "Locally grown Shepard avocados are really popular with our customers and [they] tell us they love the rich buttery nut flavour of Shepard avocados."

Coles spokesman Craig Little added something interesting. "While they don't [sell] as much as the Hass variety, their sales are growing at a much faster rate," he told Guardian Australia, pointing out that Shepard feedback has been largely positive from customers "who enjoy the texture and the taste".

I've been trolling the online haters by posting images of Shepard avocados with such incendiary captions as "Mmmm, Shepard avocados! The best avocados!" and "Mmmm, Shepard avocado ... why people don't like this is beyond me".

Nobody took the bait. This makes me wonder if Shepard hatred is a genuine taste issue, like the genetic dislike for coriander, or more of a social media meme – like taking sides on whether it's a potato cake or potato scallop.

Much as everyone knows smashed avo is not truly indexed to the home loan rate, Shepard hate is an extremely low-stakes bigotry. It's often those little things in life that can be the most powerfully satisfying ... or disappointing. Still, that's a lot of pressure to put on one fruit. No wonder it smashes.