

The Toilet Block Crew by Bernadette Davis

Pulling into the car space Lou checks out who else is parked at the toilet block.

Her daughter's in a hurry, the surf is good and she is already out of the car and lifting the back of the station wagon and fishing her wetsuit out of the wet bucket. Lou leaves her daughter pulling on her damp wetsuit and walks the short path beside the toilet block to check the surf. The paths decomposed granite surface is cluttered with bikes and grommets of all sizes.

"Hey Lou, are you coming out?" Calls a teenage blonde looking like a salt encrusted liquorice stick in her full length steamer.

"Yep, it looks pretty good." Lou replies, but is in no hurry to rush into the cold winter water. Her daughter's tolerance to the cold has a good half hour on hers so Lou can take a little time before heading out to the waves.

Most people wouldn't think that a toilet block would be a place that you would choose to hangout but for this small south coast surfing community it is a constant meeting place.

At day break you can see the first of the surf checks happening, it's usually the tradies on their way to work. God help the poor owner builders if the swell is on. Then the tribe of local school kids talk it up before they get on the school bus. "Did you see it yesterday?" "Man I got hammered." They're always telling you they got "barreled" or it was "6ft" and you missed it.

Throughout the day the odd car pulls up and their wishful thinkers get out to see if it's 'workin,' but on the weekends there is a steady stream of locals catching up and making the most of what ever Mother Ocean offers.

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“See you out there Mum” her daughter calls out as she does the surfers run down the beach.

Lou takes a seat on the weathered graffiti marked bench seat, she studies the goods and chattels strewn around the cold winter sand in front of her. Dark coloured backpacks with zippers undone spill out their contents of wax combs, socks, trackies and undies. The local plant species struggle under bike wheels and board bags while steam rises off the hair of those just out of the water as the sun warms their heads.

Lifting her head Lou squints into the morning sun, a nice left with a white board and rider flies across it kicking spray into the foaming lip as it goes.

Receiving the inspiration needed, Lou makes her way past the bikes again and heads to her car. Ben and his son Dean have just pulled into the space beside her. “Morning Lou, it looks alright out there.” Announces Ben with conviction.

“Yep, I just hope the Southerly hangs off.” She replies and starts to turn her steamer in the right way.

The friendly banter between the surfers continues as they peel away their clothes and pull on their neoprene coatings. For some it must look odd how relaxed the toilet block crew are about shedding their clothes beside the road and giving the odd friendly wave to the passing locals while they are in their undies. But that’s just how surfing is, you see it everywhere.

Finishing off her dressing routine she pulls her hair up into a pony tail, adds some bronze zinc to her face and then ditches her shoes and makes the dash to the water across the

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freezing sand. Lou has been promising to buy herself some booties for ages but just never seems to get around to it. It's not the water temperature that bothers her it's the winter sand temperature. It feels like walking across broken glass.

Reaching the waters edge she takes her time to walk up the beach a bit to the rip, no point in battling the whitewash to get out the back when the rip will do it for you. At thigh height she pushes forward on her board and starts the steady rhythmic paddle heading towards the small group of seal-like buoys just beyond the break.

A set comes rolling in, each wave has an eager free rider taking advantage of its offerings. Lou waits, she sees her daughter take off and watches her disappear behind a curling green veil. Turning back to the sea Lou sees the next set, she lets the first two go to her buddies then turns her back on the next one and paddles smooth and hard. She feels the swell come behind her, it picks her up, she springs to her feet, big bottom turn, weightless for a second, then grinning she sees the smooth green face calling her along the wave.