



# GONE SURFING

**SURFER, TEACHER, *NOMAD*, COMIC – SULLIVAN McLEOD**  
HAS DONE IT ALL – AND NOW THE **MARGARET RIVER** BOY HAS  
WRITTEN ABOUT HIS **WILD ADVENTURERS** AROUND THE **WORLD**  
STORY BY **DANIELLE BENDA** PICTURE BY **KARIN CALVERT-BORSHOFF**

**T**HERE'S A LINE IN SULLIVAN McLeod's book that describes how he feels as he stands on the roof of a castle near the coast of Brazil, a girl by his side, watching the sunrise after a night of partying and days of surfing. "I know, as I watch the sunrise, that I will never live with four walls and a back yard. Life insurance policies will not be signed. Possessions will not be accumulated. I must go, go, go. I must continue travelling. Discovering, living. I must keep meeting crazy cats. Life is too short for boundaries."

McLeod is not sure if that's really how he feels now, or will feel always, but he knows it's definitely how he felt as he stood on that roof, kissing a pretty girl in Brazil a couple of years ago.

And there is no denying Sully McLeod is a free

sprit, unlikely to be constrained by houses and insurance policies any time soon.

Raised in Margaret River, the third of four boys, McLeod, an inveterate traveller, itinerant worker and sometime stand-up comedian, always loved surfing. However, by his own admission, while occasionally being able to pull off a good manoeuvre or two, he was never a great surfer.

Nevertheless, at the age of 29, in 2006, he decided to follow a dream and join the international World Qualifying Series surfing tour.

Against the odds, given his propensity to be waylaid by a party, his difficulties raising money and his inability to keep track of his possessions, he succeeded in having a great adventure through Indonesia, South Africa, the UK, France, Portugal, Spain, Brazil and Hawaii.

Admittedly, he watched more surfing heats



than he ever took part in and didn't actually make any money as a surfer, but he met surfing's greats, got to hang around with some pretty interesting people, travelled to some amazing beaches and finished the year ranked 567 out of 853 surfers registered on the tour.

And he got a book out of it. *Tunnel Vision* will be released next weekend to coincide with the Perth Writers Festival.

Filled with tales of McLeod's hair-raising and very funny adventures, *Tunnel Vision* is also an appealing travel book, describing beautiful beaches and great (and not so great) backpacker joints. For the surfing aficionado, it is also full of insights and inside stories on the surfing world.

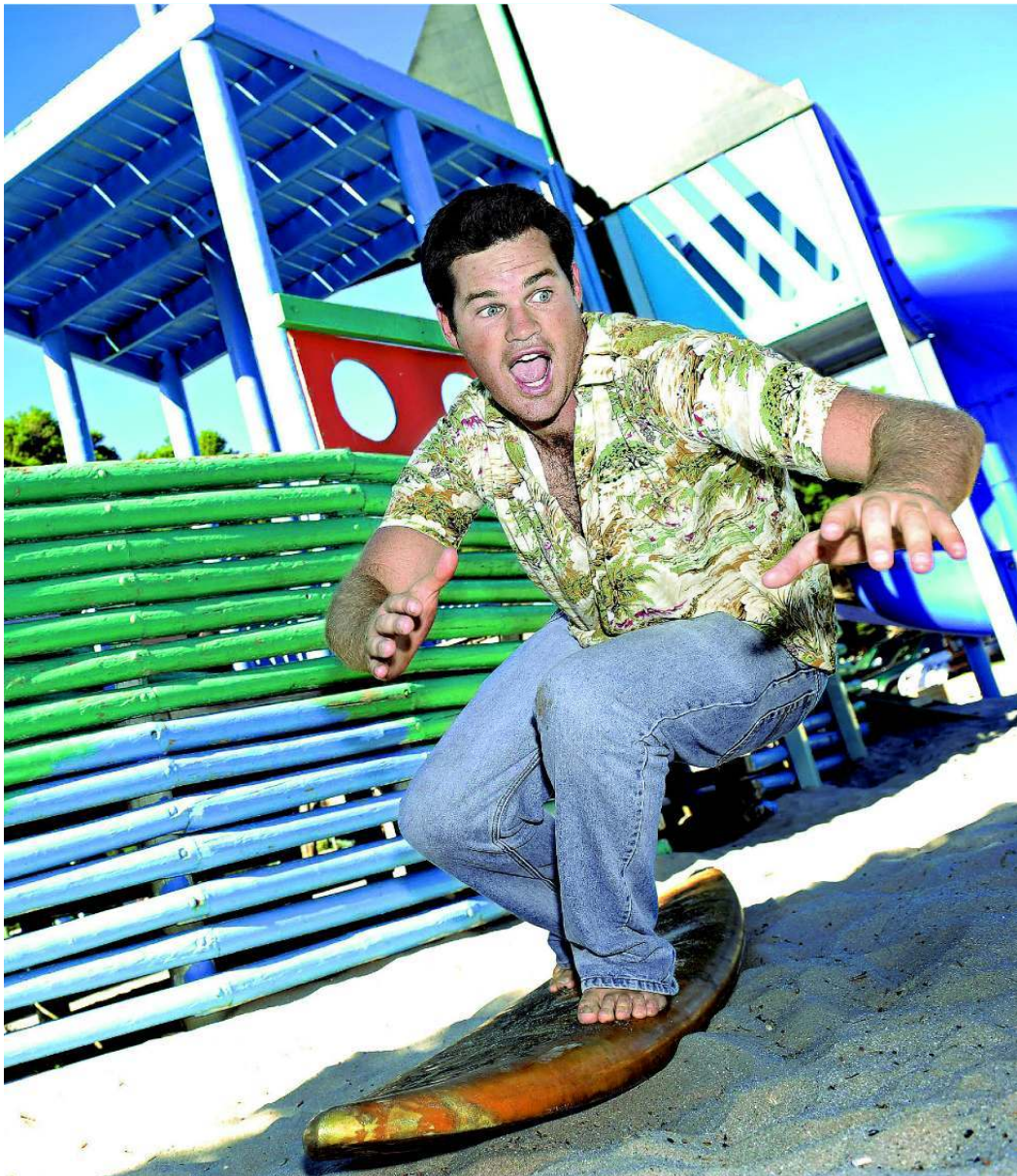
McLeod had no book contract before he took off. He came back from his travels, spent six months writing his manuscript and sent it off to publishers. Out of the thousands of unso-

licitated manuscripts that arrived on the desk of Allen and Unwin, he says his was the only one selected for publication last year.

*Tunnel Vision* follows McLeod as he travels on a shoestring budget with a backpack and a board bag. He dosses on couches, gets drunk with feral campers, sleeps on hostel porches, hitches rides with fellow travellers and kisses pretty women.

He gets lost in countries where he has no idea of the language. He is robbed, loses his passport, gets booked on the wrong train, gets booked on the wrong plane and loses his passport again.

Although occasionally tired, hungry and dejected, McLeod's charm is his upbeat nature and his steady refusal to let the bad experiences constrain his behaviour. He trusts strangers and makes new friends, he embraces experiences, thanking his lucky stars for them. For now he is





back in Margaret River, working part-time in his parents' bookshop. He still owes the \$20,000 it cost him to do the WQS tour. He also still lives in a treehouse in the back yard of his parents' house. Furnished with a bed and a desk, he wrote *Tunnel Vision* there.

He has just come back from Brazil where he spent three months living in a favela (a shanty town), teaching English for a month and tossing around ideas for another book – fiction this time. He stood out in this poorest of Brazilian neighbourhoods full of gangs, drugs and guns.

"I had these men guarding me with machine guns when I was teaching. It's a crazy world. It is actually quite hard to describe it," he says.

"Everything smelt like diesel and everything was so full of life. All the kids running around, it is like a madhouse full of craziness.

"The people live their life with passion. I love it. But it's hard to have any impact trying to teach English in all that craziness."

His father Keith and mother Pauline are apparently used to his adventurous ways. "I don't tell them that much," McLeod chuckles, "They will probably read it, but they are used to it."

Born in 1977 and educated in Margaret River and Busselton, McLeod has been constantly on the move since he left school.

"I have had a lot of jobs. I have been sacked a lot of times," he says. "I can't concentrate for a long period on things I'm not really into."

His CV lists jobs as diverse as a door-to-door salesman for a telecommunication company (Sydney), a spy for a Greek Restaurant (Rhodes), an assistant to a professor to check the originality of ideas (European Patent Office, Holland), a canvasser for dodgy solicitors to see if anyone wanted to sue their landlord (London), an audience member paid to laugh at lame jokes for live TV shows (Hollywood) and a driver of a drilling rig without a truck driver's licence (Kalgoorlie).

"And then I realised that it had got to the point where I was telling all these stories about how things had gone wrong in my jobs and I got a few laughs, so that's how I thought I might try stand-up comedy," he says.

"Over the years I honed my act to the point where I could rely on a few laughs but it was never ground-breaking," he writes in *Tunnel Vision*. "If Lenny Bruce is the Rolling Stones of

stand-up, then I'm the pub band playing covers in the corner."

McLeod has since performed at comedy venues around the world including the Melbourne Comedy Festival and the Edinburgh Festival.

"I can't live in one spot. I haven't been able to do it since I was 18. I haven't stayed in one place more than six months for the past 10 years," he says. So far the urge to settle down has evaded him. "Every now and then, you really fall for someone," he says. "That has happened – I have fallen for a Norwegian girl – but what are you going to do? I am quite selfish in a way, I suppose, and I don't commit to that."

McLeod says he even finds the writing process hard to commit to. He loves it, but it's not easy.

"Sitting down to write is not something I can do naturally, I can do it for an hour or two, but a page or two of writing takes a lot of effort," he says.

While he has always been a reader he was never much of a writer. His father Keith is an English teacher and wrote an acclaimed novel *Shore and Shelter* (2000, Fremantle Arts Centre Press), but McLeod says that he did not shine at English at school.

"I guess it started with emails and it grew from there. I think I started to get the knack of it and got some confidence in myself," he says.

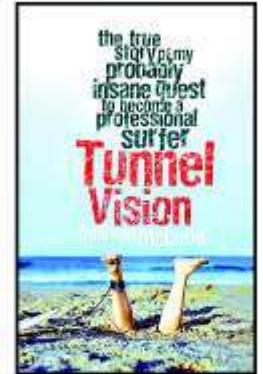
Now he is hoping the round of publicity and writers' events he will take part in over the coming months to promote his book will give him the chance to talk to other writers and find out more about their craft.

He also hopes that his experiences spruiking *Tunnel Vision* will help him get back into stand-up comedy again, particularly *The Moth*, where writers tell their tales in front of a live audience. But, not surprisingly, McLeod is also cooking up ideas to get on the road again. He wants to go through the southern states of the US this year.

But his next move is getting out of the treehouse and into a rented house with friends.

"I am getting older, and it is a bit embarrassing to still be living up there," he chuckles. ■

***Tunnel Vision*, Allen and Unwin, is out March 2. Sullivan McLeod will take part in the Perth Writers Festival on Monday, March 2, and *The Moth* on March 3 at 7.30pm in the Octagon Theatre.**



*I haven't stayed in one place more than six months for the past 10 years*

