

Acknowledgements

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To my big brother, Steve, you are my rock. I am so full of admiration for you and what you have achieved in your life. Thank you for giving me your blessing to write about our family. I know how proud you are and how hard it has been for you to let me 'hang all our family's dirty washing on the line.' But you knew I needed to write this and trusted me that it would be done in an authentic way to help and inspire others. I see the man you are—the wonderful brother, son, husband and father. Then I see the airline captain of the A380 and I am just in awe. I love you so much.

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understood why they were important to my story. I look forward to growing old together. Thank you for finding the courage to work through your pain so that our marriage could have another chance. You are the love of my life. Willy, you have filled a void for both of us and helped heal our pain. I look forward to seeing your wagging tail every morning when I wake up.

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To my friend Venessa, I admire you. It has become clearer to me in recent years that our friendship will be deep and everlasting and that our paths were meant to cross. You're one of the people I most like to spend time with because of the depth of your character and your endless spirit. Thanks for your support with the book...you know what I mean.

When I met John Singleton he had cancelled all scheduled meetings because his day wasn't going so well, but he still met with me. You read my book proposal and made a decision about whether to support it within a few days. You said, 'I get people pitching things all the time. I like to try to give one in ten young Australians a chance.' I was fortunate to see how you work and how you make successful decisions. Now I understand why you are such a successful man. Thanks for giving me that chance, Singo, and for picking up the phone and calling Kevin Weldon and Pam Seaborn.

On a cool July day I met with Kevin Weldon at Bondi Icebergs for lunch. We talked about aeroplanes and books. Thank you, Kevin, for supporting me and for your time. I am indebted to Pam Seaborn, my literary agent, for believing in this project and for taking me under her wing. I appreciate all your hard work and your graceful

professionalism. Joan Stanbury edited my story and became my 'life coach' in the process. Thank you, Joan, for helping me believe in my ability to write, for telling me to 'just keep going', for your intellect and patience. To Fiona Schultz at New Holland, you had faith in my book when others didn't; for that I will always be grateful. I would also like to thank Diane Jardine at New Holland for having the patience of a saint.

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While I was in the final stages of editing the manuscript Ron Silver died. The news saddened me a great deal. Although we hadn't seen each other in years, I will always be grateful to him for planting the seed about my move to New York. Ron was an eloquent and gracious man and a good friend.

To the millions of people around the world who are suffering from arthritis and other chronic diseases this book is for you. Together we have a collective voice and together we can find a cure. We must *all* continue to have hope.

Dr Paula Marchetta, you once said I was one of your sickest patients. But you got me back on my feet. Thank you for your tender loving care and for your endless gentle words of encouragement.

Thank you to Jeffrey Gottfurcht and the dream board for inspiring me beyond the book. I look forward to making many dreams come true for children living with RA all over the world.

I would not have survived my life's journey without the following people to whom I will be eternally grateful. Thank you: DBD-David Pearlman, Tracey Moore, Vicky Semmel, Kelly Nixon, Uncle John Fickers, my dear nephews, the Readings, Robbie Anthony, Trish Brennan, Lorraine Stephenson, Al Merrin (for answering all my desperate texts), Mark Lizotte (for the use of your lyrics and for singing my wedding song), Joseph Lebowitz and his wonderful family, the Moulots, Laura Light, George Dymond, Linda Miglierina, Amy Iamundo and my UNIS family, Tony Moore, Jay Alger, Steve Terzuoli, Michael Friedman, Fiona Scott-Hanley, Seth Ginsberg, AARDA, AF, Jesica Church and so many more...

Foreword

When I first met Karen Ager in the US through a mutual friend, I had no idea she was anything but another beautiful young Australian and another loss from Australia to the bigger world of the United States. It wasn't for a couple of days that I was told of Karen's story. It is a story of a young girl stricken with crippling arthritis as a teenager but instead of giving in to a life of wheelchair dependence, she took on an arduous spiritual struggle with brute and wit. *Enemy Within* is an unbelievably honest, intelligent story full of hope and expectation, of learning to live and love with arthritis. It is a story of great highs, great lows and of great loves. When you read this you think of all the problems you have and compare them with Karen's. You look at what you have done and compare it to what she has done. I last saw Karen a few months ago with her brother; she remains undeniably beautiful and elegant and beyond complaining, although, if I was her, I would be complaining morning and night. Most of us know someone with arthritis or with a similar disability. I have never read a book like this to offer such hope. In fact when I am down I think what Karen has been through and I am on a high in no time. I think you will find the same.

John Singleton

Chapter 1

Life's a Beach

I was on my beach—Black Rock on Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay—on a blistering summer afternoon, watching my cousin, David, jog to the water's edge. He high-stepped like a gazelle through the shallows and then executed a perfect swallow-dive into the bay.

Beach days in Australia are like beach days in many other parts of the world. It could have been the Hamptons, New York or Venice Beach, California. The teenage energy was the same—out of control hormones, slim athletic bodies, the hope of finding true love and *the scene*. Girls are chasing lifeguards, there's experimentation with drinking and smoking, music pumps and there are acres of naked skin.

Lazing around on the sand I stared at the familiar sight of the Red Bluff cliffs extending into the bay. The gently lapping waves licked the custard-yellow sand. The guys from the local private schools began arriving on the beach. They threw off their shirts to reveal young, perfect chests as they raced each other to the water. I began to squirm on my towel hoping that none of them would see me and decide to pay me a visit. I rolled over and hid my face in the cups of my hands. Sweat bubbled on my forehead, but I didn't care, I just didn't want to be seen. This was part of the reason I preferred to go to Black Rock beach *without* my girlfriends. They attracted attention.

I had two groups of schoolmates. Jackie was the *glamourpuss* amongst us. She was blonde, sporty and had a figure to die for. Her mum gave her the freedom to do what she wanted and her confidence attracted what we considered the *coolest* guys. When I went to the beach with

Jackie we were never alone for long. I didn't like it—there was no way I could relax.

My other group of friends were of a more academic bent—lawyers-in-the-making. They chose to study rather than hang out with their less-serious fellow students and even in the late 1970s were sensible enough to stay out of the sun. One of them, Helen, had set her sights on being named dux of Mentone Girls' High School and we all just accepted that it would happen. She was pretty with short brown hair, and I thought she worried about the size of her large breasts too much. Perhaps I was envious. Sandra, another academic friend, was cute and quirky. We'd all get together at street parties once in a while.

These friendships offered meaning to my life at a time when everything else seemed to be falling apart. Together we shared our teenage hopes and dreams about the future. I loved the contrast of values between my two groups of friends. The challenge of trying to corrupt Helen and Sandra by exposing Jackie's daredevil exploits tossed a healthy dose of comedy into the mix.

My cousin David had come from Sydney to stay with us during the holidays and we had walked to Black Rock beach together. When he burst through the water with a flick of his sleek brown hair, I flipped on to my stomach and began fiddling with the pages of *Dolly* magazine that were smeared with suntan oil. Reading about the next Dolly Cover Girl didn't interest me much, nor did the 'Are you trying to be popular?' quiz. I just wanted to be out there, swimming with David, matching his strokes as he swam to the rusting *Cerberus* battleship. Its wrecked remains protruded in the distance from the glassy bay.

The *Cerberus* had been scuttled in 1926 by the Royal Australian Navy. Its half-submerged hull had become a breakwater, defending beachgoers from waves whipped up when Melbourne's changeable weather turned foul. It was also a swim-dare destination for us local kids.

At 15 and already as tall as Mum, I was a strong swimmer. I could have kept up with my cousin in Port Phillip Bay, but I wasn't keen on making the short hike across soft, uneven sand to the water.

There was also the matter of my pink-flowered bikini top. I wished it had more to cover. A recent growth spurt had taken me up over the heads of most of my classmates, but other girls my age were growing in ways that interested the boys more. And then there was my coordination—or lack of it. I was known for tripping and falling, for missing chairs when I tried to sit and letting plates and cups slip from my hands.

Still, I might have risked 50 paces through shifting sand in a bikini, even with those pompous, private school boys tossing a football nearby, eyeing the girls like hungry gulls. But darker worries pinned me to my towel.

To an outsider looking in we were the perfect family—my airline pilot father, my glamorous mother, my tall, handsome brother and me. In reality, all was far from well.

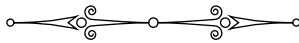
Within the walls of our immaculate home my parents' marriage was crumbling and my brother and I, though calm and resilient on the surface, were caught up in undercurrents of tension and insecurity.

With David as a house guest for our New Year celebrations, my family had papered over all the problems and put on a 'no-worries' facade—but he was due to leave in a few days. My brother, Steve, would soon be studying full-time to become a pilot at the local flying school. He planned to begin his course in January. With our parents' marriage floundering, Steve was my rock. I had so many fears for the future, but the most pressing one was that I didn't know how I was going to continue fitting into life at home when the foundations were so rocky.

After we moved into our new house in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Black Rock—a custom-built, stylishly decorated showplace that Mum kept spotless—I became aware that the glue that had held my parents together was becoming unstuck. Or maybe there had been problems in their marriage from the start. Evidence of the friction between them came to me as I lay under my lime, daisy-covered duvet in bed. The brick wall behind my headboard went down to the rumpus room, where Mum and Dad convened for drinks and arguments. Their voices floated through to my room with

disturbing clarity.

Sometimes they squabbled about my father's pastimes. As a captain with Trans Australia Airlines (TAA), Dad was often away on interstate flights. I remember he was away 14 Christmases in a row. As a child, my clearest memory of Dad was of him smartly dressed in his uniform, cap and all, leaving as we waved goodbye to him from our front porch. Somehow he still found time to build a sailing boat in our garage, a project Mum hated for its mess. Later on Dad fancied himself as a gold prospector and busily researched abandoned mines and ordered gold-detecting machinery from America. To Mum, whose Dutch parents left war-ravaged Holland with eight children in tow, Dad's hobbies were over the top and she considered them nothing more than childish indulgences.



Mum and her family arrived in Australia in August 1950. Slots were filling up quickly at the Bathurst Holding Centre (migrant camp) as displaced Europeans fled their home countries. Australia believed it must populate or perish. Because of the huge numbers of immigrants arriving on its shores, within a few generations Australia changed from an Anglo-Celtic population to a multicultural one.

Mum was just one of two million post-war arrivals. As her family tried to settle into the camp, there were already signs of overcrowding. Existing army barracks had filled up and acres of khaki canvas were being used in the construction of a temporary tent city. Clattering pots boomed from the communal kitchens and broken English conversations echoed from the bathrooms. Mum sat on the side of her steel-framed bed and sobbed.

'Ik wil terug naar Nederland, terug naar mijn school in Groningen...'

'I want to go back to The Netherlands, back to my school in Groningen,' she cried.

Everything in Australia was so different from the Dutch landscape and way of life. The change to her life was fundamental. She was no longer Anneke, she was Johanna. She was no longer Dutch, she was 'New Australian' (the term coined in one of Australia's first attempts

at political correctness—it replaced the derogatory-sounding *Reffos*, short for refugees).

My mother's very identity had been stripped from her and in the ultimate humiliation she had no real address, just a number in a holding centre camp. Her tears were the same as the tears of every other child there; they needed a home not just a roof over their heads. She was grieving for everything that had been familiar—even the security of her snowy walk to school on well-worn, uncomfortable cobbled streets.

Eventually Mum was sent to work at the age of 14 because her family had little money. Determined to achieve, she worked her way up from clipping cottons at a garment factory in Wollongong to modelling the clothes that her fellow workers made. On the catwalk she was a very impressive figure and before long she was approached to enter the Miss Australia Quest. Her confidence was growing but, with a Dutch-speaking family at home, her English lagged behind. Passing up the opportunity to enter the quest she worked overtime to improve her English-language skills and in the early 1960s travelled to Sydney to become an air hostess in the still-glamorous world of flight. It was a sure-fire route to matrimony.

Mum began flying with East West Airlines, a regional carrier in New South Wales. She met my father when, as a potential tenant, she visited his apartment in the sun-drenched eastern Sydney suburb of Bondi.

Bondi is at the heart of a magical coastline of curling beaches, headlands with cascading cliffs and an ocean that never ends. It is a place for summer romances and midnight skinny dips. For decades, airline pilots have met and fallen in love with air hostesses—now called, less romantically, 'flight attendants'—on its glistening sands.

Bondi, meaning 'sounds of water breaking on the beach', is beautiful—but the beauty can hide treachery. Well known for its surf and strong currents, in 1938 freak waves swept 300 bathers from a sandbank into a rip which took them out to sea. Eighty Bondi lifesavers rescued all but five swimmers. The day became known as Black Sunday to the locals.

Dad's apartment backed right on to Bondi beach. A leap over the