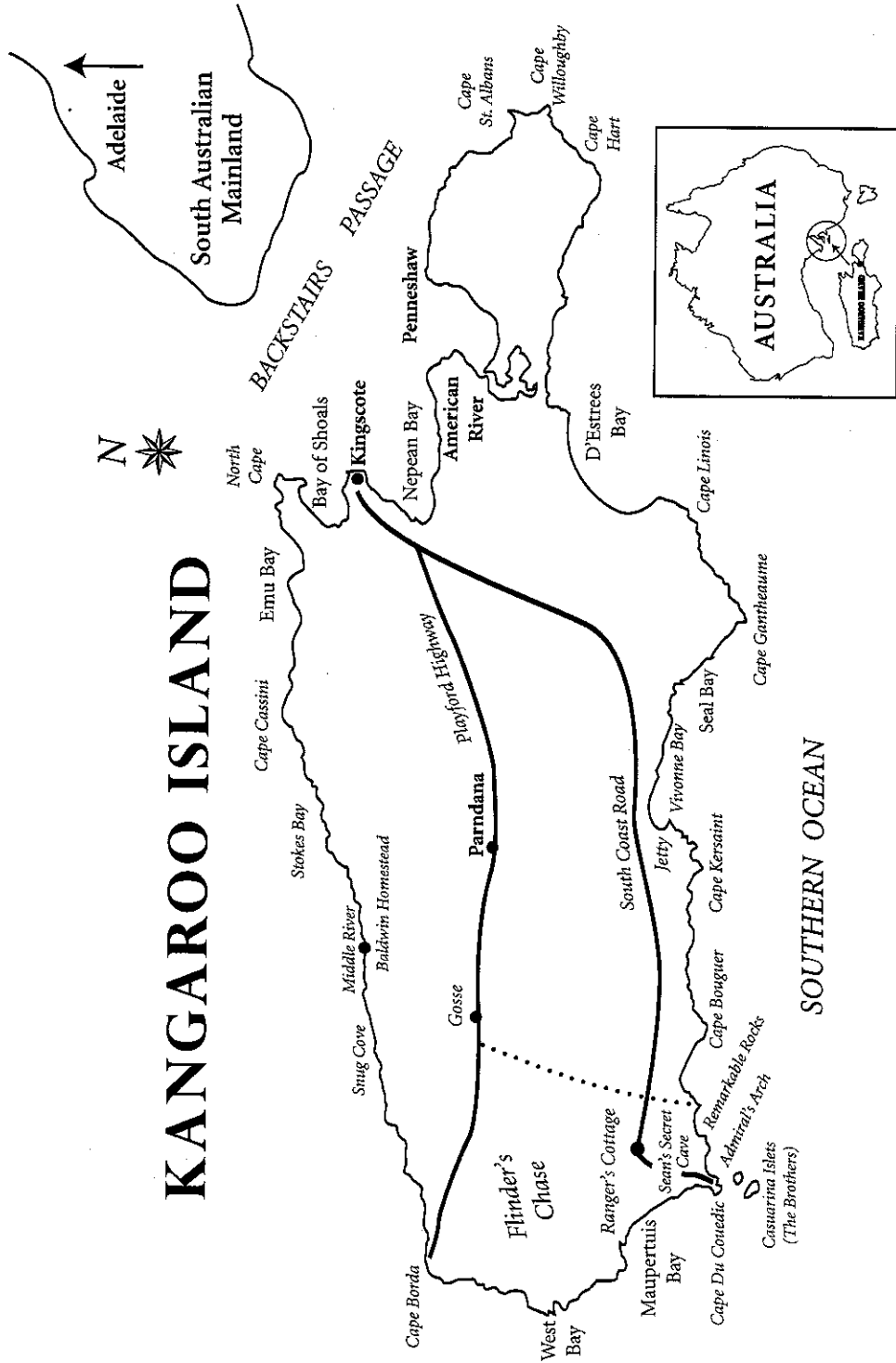


KANGAROO ISLAND

By

Tony J Boyle

©2011



PROLOGUE

On March 2, 1802, the British ship HMS *Investigator* dropped anchor in the magnificent bay of a large island located a few kilometers off the South Australian coast. After leaving Sydney months earlier to circumnavigate Australia, the explorer sailor, Captain Matthew Flinders, led his meat deprived crew ashore and slaughtered several of the kangaroos feeding on the coastal grasses that edged the sandy beach. A few days later, the crew's bellies full of the rich red meat and the ship's stores replenished, a grateful Flinders raised the British flag and claimed the rugged island for the Empire, naming it Kangaroo Island.

Pirates, whalers, sealers and escaped convicts came to the island after Flinders. Then, in July 1836, the ship *Duke of York* arrived from London carrying South Australia's first settlers. These gutsy pioneers were the founders of the farming and fishing industries and the main town of Kingscote.

Over the next 200 years, the people of Kangaroo Island successfully developed the island's fishing, farming and tourism industries while managing and retaining its unique pristine environment. Kangaroo Island today is a highly promoted and well known tourist destination to Australian and International travelers with over 200,000 of them visiting each year.

The islanders are noted for their friendliness, hard work and commitment to their inherited environment, and there are thousands of fascinating stories in the lives of these Kangaroo Islanders. This is one of them.

CHAPTER 1

It was August, winter in the southern hemisphere. A powerful and dangerous southwesterly gale was roaring in from the Southern Ocean and battering the thick, sandstone walls of the Cape du Couedic Lighthouse. Anchored firmly in the limestone rock at its base, the old tower had stood imperious and unmoved for over 80 years, its sweeping light warning passing ships to stand well out from the dangerous and isolated south-west corner of Kangaroo Island. The beam of its rotating light swept through the rain and skipped along the top of the massive, white-capped waves that charged toward the coast. At the peak of their power, the rolling giants thundered onto the rocks and exploded into plumes of spray that rushed up the vertical cliff walls until, losing momentum, they fell back into the sea to perpetuate the broad white line that defined the island's southern coastline.

In the scrubby brush crowding the landscape a kangaroo pushed back into the thick bush to shelter from the screaming wind and stinging rain. Lightning forked across the sky and reflected in the eyes of the trembling Joey peering over the lip of its mother's pouch. A clap of thunder followed, and the youngster dropped from view to the bottom of its furry sanctuary. With her nose twitching, the mother checked on her youngster. Satisfied it was unharmed and protected in the warmth of her pouch; she lifted her head and stared out to sea.

To the west, fifteen hundred meters offshore from the cliffs of Seal Bay, a fishing cutter, its engine dead, struggled to stay afloat. For a moment, all seemed lost as the huge seas buried it

under a wall of water, but the plucky cutter emerged seconds later, as another wave lifted it to the top of its licking tongue; like a cat teasing a mouse. An intense flash of lightning revealed the black letters on the bow of the timber hull, *Smokey Cloud*. In the wheelhouse, a boxy structure at the stern behind a swaying mast, an anxious young woman stared out into the storm as she wrestled desperately with the ship's wheel.

Cassie Baldwin, fear and exhaustion threatening to overwhelm her, screamed into the raging gale, "I'll never give up! Never!" As if testing the girl's fierce resolve, an intense gust of wind hit the cutter abeam and pushed it broadside into a breaking wave, rolling the little ship toward disaster. She reacted instinctively and spun the wheel to port to point the bow back into the massive waves. The boat came back from the brink of its death roll and plowed through the spray of the next the cresting wave. She turned to snatch a look at the open hatch cover. A dull yellow glow marked its entrance. "Hurry, Matt, get that motor started, or..." She pushed the thought from her mind and turned back to keeping *Smokey Cloud* pointed into the storm.

"If you're out there, mummy, help us," she cried.

Blessed with the exotic beauty of her Spanish-born mother, the feisty young woman, her body strong and athletic from years of classical dance, competitive sports and working on her father's farming properties as hard as any man, stared ahead. She wiped her dripping nose on the sleeve of her sky blue sweater still soaking wet from the wild dinghy ride to the ship from the Vivonne Bay jetty an hour earlier. The blue contrasted superbly with the olive complexion of her skin and the rich brown of her hair, pulled back into a ponytail. The wheelhouse and the wet sweater offered little warmth and her teeth began to chatter.

Waves continued to slam the hull. The wheel was wrenched from her grasp, and its spokes savagely rapped her knuckles. A wall of seawater exploded against the wheelhouse

window, a moment of sheer terror that set her heart racing. As she strained to see through the water-streaked glass, ghostly images formed in the shadows of the intermittent light show surrounding *Smokey Cloud*.

A wispy form appeared in the midst of the spray sweeping over the foredeck, “Mummy!” Tears formed in the young woman’s eyes. Her thoughts flashed to a picture of her mother and the headline in an old Islander newspaper. ‘Beautiful Spanish dancer, Kristina de Coronado, marries Kingscote’s popular young mayor, Monty Baldwin.’

Kristina’s image floated to the wheelhouse window. “I am with you, Cassie, always with you. God is watching over both of you. Keep fighting, all is well.” Another wave of water exploded over the glass and Kristina was gone.

“No! Please don’t leave, not again, no.” Immediately, she experienced the same terrible abandonment she had felt when Kristina was killed; a growing sense of fear and despair was threatening to break her resolve to fight on. “For God’s sake get a grip girl, get a grip!” she shouted.

She brushed the tears from her eyes and looked ahead. Lightning lit up the swaying mast and pitching foredeck seconds before it plunged into a wall of water, stalling the cutter. The abrupt stop jerked her forward over the wheel; one of its spokes caught her under the chin and sent her tumbling. Fighting for balance on the heaving deck, she pulled herself upright and, ignoring the angry red welt already beginning to swell, snatched back the spinning wheel.

“The radio! Where the hell is the radio?” Her eyes swept the console ahead of her. “Ah!” It was to the right of her head and bolted to the wall a little below the wheelhouse ceiling. She reached up, flicked on the switch, snatched the microphone from its cradle and pressed the transmission button. “Mayday! Mayday! This is *Smokey Cloud*. Does anybody read, over?” The

receiver hissed and crackled. Again, she pressed the button. “This is *Smokey Cloud*. Can anybody hear us...engine down, sea anchor out, not holding...drifting toward the coast, over.” A bigger wave hit, rolled the cutter violently and slammed Cassie back onto the deck. “Bugger!”

The radio crackled. “...*Cloud*. This...*Wave Dancer*...are you. We are off Point Ellen...contact...repeat. Do...copy, over?”

She struggled frantically to her feet. The spinning spokes of the wheel cracked her knuckles again. “What bloody next!” she cried, wringing her hand and grabbing the swinging microphone again. “*Wave Dancer*, this is *Smokey Cloud*, having trouble hearing you. You are breaking up. We are off Knobby Island, engine down. Sea anchor dragging, over.”

The radio crackled again. “...find you. Hang on...*crackle*...we are...*crackle*...Fire flares, repeat...*crackle, crackle*...”

“Did you say flares, over?” She listened for the voice connecting her to hope, but there came only the scratching of static, the howling of the wind and the waves crashing over the cutter. She looked about the wheelhouse for the flares, saw the cabinet under the wheel and slid open the latch. In that moment, *Smokey Cloud* shook free of hundreds of kilos of seawater pushing down on her bow and charged up the face of the next wave.

The cabinet door burst open, spilling out flags, ropes, tools and a heavy metal box labeled “FLARES.” A razor sharp hunting knife jammed in between the box and Cassie’s left leg, slashed through her moleskin pants and cut deep into her thigh. Blood immediately began to darken the cotton of her off-white pants. Stifling the urge to scream, she fell and slid along the deck with the cabinet contents toward the rear of the wheelhouse. *Smokey Cloud* reversed pitch, saving her from crashing headlong into the open hatch that dropped into the engine room.

As the flare box started to slide by her, she managed to grab it and then wedge her body

between the hatch lip and the timber wall. She opened the lid and looked inside at six cartridges, each wrapped in orange cellophane and set side by side in a shielded section isolated from the pistol. She snapped the lid shut and attempted to stand, grunting as the pain knifed through her thigh. Again, the cutter fell off the top of another mountain of water and again, Cassie crashed to the deck, dropped the flare box and slid to the front of the wheelhouse.

The radio crackled. This time, the voice was loud and clear. “*Smokey Cloud*, Cassie, this is *Wave Dancer*. We picked up your call. Put up flares. Do you read? Please put up flares, over.”

Cassie reacted with a burst of new energy, grasped the railing above the forward cabinets and hauled her hurting body upright. Lurching drunkenly with the violent motion of the corkscrewing cutter, she supported most of her weight on her right leg and reached for the microphone.

“Understand...situation critical...will fire flares...please hurry.” The main cabin light, already at half its usual brightness, blinked off each time the microphone button was pressed. Realization turned into a new fear. “Oh, no!” She jabbed down on the button for the last time. “Generator down...running on batteries...must conserve power. Out for now.” She snapped the microphone back into its cradle and flicked the power button to ‘Off.’

A series of loud bangs that came from the engine room startled her. Suddenly, the wheelhouse light went out and the ship was plunged into darkness. Cassie froze. She knew that she needed help to get the flares up. She had to get Matt.

Panting heavily from pain and fatigue, her threatening panic barely controlled, she remembered the flashlight hanging under the radio. A series of lightning flashes helped her find it, take it off the hook and then crawl across the pitching deck toward the engine room hatch. *Smokey Cloud* topped another wave and then tipped over into a vertical dive. Cassie’s quick

reflexes saved her; she managed reach out and grab on to the hatch cover lip, which kept her from sliding back and slamming into the wheelhouse's open cabinet door. As the game little cutter bottomed out in the trough, an exhausted Cassie dragged herself over the last few centimeters to the engine room hatch opening. Sweating and gasping for air, she paused to catch her breath. The pain from the damaged leg was suddenly overwhelming; the beam from the flashlight revealed the extent of the bloody mess. Horrified, she realized that she had to stop the bleeding. Among the litter on the wheelhouse floor were several flags, one of which she was able to snare by stretching out her good leg and dragging it to her with her toe. Despite the violent pitching of the deck and the stabbing pain that came with every movement, she was able to wrap the pirate flag around her bloodied thigh and tie it off tight, so that it stopped the bleeding and served as a bandage. When she finished, she saw that her hands were shaking; tears started to roll down her cheeks again. She descended into a well of self-pity. Her mind flashed over her short life.

For 10 of her 20 years she had worked hard on the farm, did well with her school studies, consoled her father after the loss of her mother, worked her bum off at ballet school and was invited to join the Australasian Modern Dance Company in Sydney. "All for nothing!" she screamed, tears pouring over her cheeks; then she vomited.

Disgusted, she hammered the deck with her fists. "No! No!" Anger finally overwhelmed the fear and the pain and a new energy radiated from her core, re-igniting her will to live and determination to fight on.

"Where the bloody hell are the flares?" She began searching the deck floor with the flashlight when another series of lightning flashes helped her see the flare box jammed between the hatch cover lip and the wall panel. *Thank, God.* She rolled onto her stomach and pointed the

flashlight beam into the pitch dark of engine room.

“Matt!”

“You bloody idiot!” The angry words were quickly drowned out in the roar of the storm. The engine room was barely lit by the single light bulb that swung wildly from the solid timber beam supporting the main deck; the smell of diesel fumes permeated the small space. A mixture of seawater and oily sludge sloshed noisily back and forth in the bottom of the open bilge. Mounted on heavy wood blocks bolted to the cutter’s keel, a big Caterpillar marine engine distinguished by its traditional yellow color, took up most of the space. The sound of a metal striking metal competed with the noise of the waves battering the hull.

Matt Ryan, tall and athletic, was squatting between the engine and the port side of the cutter’s timber shell, a wrench clasped in one hand while the other gripped the overhead beam. The amber glow of the swinging light picked up the stressed features of the twenty-one-year-old face. A mop of thick, sandy-brown hair framed the high cheekbones and complimented the impish nose set between sea-blue eyes. A wave crashed against the hull, and his head smacked against the overhead beam. He thumped the offending timber with his wrench. “What was I bloody thinking? I should’ve checked the fuel.”

The young man was growing more desperate. Transferring the emergency reserve of diesel from the jerry can into the main fuel tank and then disconnecting the fuel line to purge the air bubbles had taken too much time. The knuckles on his right hand were a blend of bright red blood and black oil, the skin on the back of his hand scraped bloody in his hurry to get fuel into the tank. He forced the fuel line connection into the injector assembly; the brass connector thankfully gripped on the first attempt.

Another monster wave crashed into the cutter's port side and slammed Matt into the steel fuel tank. Howling with pain as two ribs splintered, he dropped the wrench into the black sludge under the engine. "No!" Eyes watery from pain and exasperation, he plunged his hand into the filth; his fingers clawed along the splintery bottom. Another wave; he cried out, jerked his hand out of the oily slime and clutched his chest. Desperately, he turned to Saint Anthony, the patron saint of lost belongings. "Saint Anthony, please come around, something's been lost and cannot be found!" Sucking in a deep breath, he plunged his hand back into the sludge. Miraculously and immediately, he felt the shape of a familiar object as his hand passed over it. His touch was at first timid, terrified it was not the wrench; it was.

"Thanks, Saint Anthony!" he yelled, as he lifted the tool carefully from the bilge filth and clamped it around the connector. "Don't let me drop this again; just a couple more turns. Good," he gasped. "Now, you big yellow bastard, let's get you fired up."

Starting the giant motor was hell, as he fought through the pain of his broken ribs. Leaning over the engine, he pushed the compression lever to the "open" position, gritted his teeth, reached for the switchboard and pressed the starter button. The single light bulb dimmed as the batteries struggled to provide the power to crank the shaft. With the batteries quickly running down, but still short of the revolutions needed to start the big diesel a desperate Matt slammed the lever to the "close" position. The compression built; one chamber fired and then another.

"C'mon, c'mon," Matt prayed. A third chamber in the big engine ignited, coughed a couple of times and then died. The switchboard exploded in a flash of arcing blue flame as the fuses disintegrated. The engine stalled and *Smokey Cloud* plunged into darkness. The noise of the storm hammering the ship's hull and was suddenly loud and terrifying.

Images of an earlier terror flashed through his mind, one that had haunted him throughout

his young life. He had seen it happening, as he passed her bedroom door. His mother naked and bleeding, was spread-eagled across her bed with a man bent over her, fist raised. The man looked up; intense blue eyes, blurred and bloodshot from alcohol, fixed on him. He fled, terrified and ashamed. His last memory was the bloody image of his mother throwing up her arms to protect her body from the lunging brute that was his father.

He stared into the dark frozen with fear. A beam of light swept through the dark and startled him. Shading his eyes, he saw Cassie waving frantically for him to come up to the wheelhouse. He reached for the steel ladder and began to climb, each grasp, each step was a challenge to push through the pain from his broken ribs. When he reached the top, Cassie grabbed his wrists and pulled him into the wheelhouse.

“Ugh.”

“Matt, you’re hurt.”

“Busted my ribs, Cass,” he gasped.

Icy chills ran through Cassie’s body. She took a deep breath in an effort to calm the rising panic that threatened to steal away the hope she had in her mother’s words and the close proximity of *Wave Dancer*. “Matt! We’re closing on the cliffs. *Wave Dancer* is looking for us. We have to put up the flares.”

Matt nodded and tried to sit up. He howled, clutched his chest and fell back to the deck.

“Matt, c’mon! We’ve got to get those flares up!”

Smokey Cloud’s bow rose sharply to climb yet another wave, forcing the couple to slide down the sharply tilted deck and slam into the rear wall. Matt’s head hit the heavy timber paneling and knocked him flat out onto his back; the stunned and badly hurt young man groaned.

“Matt! Matt!” Cassie bent over her mate.

“Here, Cass, help me up, mate,” said Matt, as he struggled shakily to his knees before toppling over onto his behind. “Bloody head’s spinning a bit. Give us a minute, hey? If I can get on my feet I’ll be all right.” He took a moment to focus and then braced. “Righto, mate, let’s go.” He jerked up onto his knees again

Cassie was quick enough to get into a kneeling position behind him. He started to wobble and shake. “C’mon, c’mon! You can do it! You can do it,” she gasped, struggling to stop him from falling over again.

Then the heavy glass panel in the sliding door splintered with a sound of a heavy pistol firing a shot. Cold seawater blasted through the broken window and washed over the wheelhouse floor. Matt had almost made it to his feet when Cassie’s leg gave way. She fell to the deck, and he collapsed with her, unconscious.