
THE SUN SETS ON BALI

Dave Fisher

Well where to begin...

Love gone wrong and career abuse hit me between the eyes.

I had been in love with an Indian girl called Janice in Melbourne. Lived together for two years in gingerbread style cottage in the Dandenongs. She was rather beautiful and I fell, hook line and sinker for her: swallowed the lot! Alas and alack! She walked away with a French guy and left me holding the baby... myself!

So, I focused on my career and found myself with a good salary offer from a Melbourne company, selling aluminium around Australia. I worked very hard and produced a good number of new accounts within three months, which should have guaranteed a bright future in most companies. This generated annual revenues of hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales and I felt confident in putting an offer towards the purchase of a new house.

I worked for three months less a couple of days and was eyeing off a property at Seaford, Victoria... It had 4 bedrooms and a music studio, so I considered it an ideal base for domestic and musical pursuits.

After inspecting it an offer was required with a deposit so I rang my employers to get their assurance that we would continue our fruitful relationship. Then the bombshell hit... 'I wouldn't do that yet David!' Surely he was jesting! I had worked my xxx off to make my new career work and had dropped a Sales and Marketing manager's role in Sydney to take it.

The next day after an embarrassing morning waiting around, I was called into the office to see the M.D. In the most farcical situation, I was told how much they loved my work but '*Hasta la vista* baby'... I was to leave with only one weeks notice. On this point I dug in my heels and extracted one month's pay. They had the new accounts coming and didn't really need me now.

Some of the guys who had committed to buy pulled out in disgust at the way they treated me. Others started their new business relationship with the Aluminium Co. I was out in the cold unemployed and totally disappointed at the treatment I had received at their hand.

So what does a man do after 20 years in the corporate arena? Get stuck into the frequent flyer points... and see the world!

I had been to Bali with Jan; the Indian girlfriend in 1998 so I thought it would be a reasonable place to go. It was cheap, friendly and the weather was hot. I always liked the hot weather.

Being a creature of habit, I booked into the Aquarius Hotel in Kuta. I had stayed there with Jan, my ex, and knew it was close to the nightlife epicentre. On the way there I decided to stay with an old friend in Perth. His name is Peter and he professes to be a chef. He is also the owner of the corniest collection of jokes you've ever heard.

He was busy creating a wedding cake business after a stint at Koko's restaurant as the head chef. As he was busy, I had to amuse myself and wandered aimlessly around Perth for a few days. Fortunately, I met a girl called Danielle, and we spent some time together. Long walks around the river, the pubs and the wine show ensured that it was great fun. One memorable time was at the Fremantle markets playing harmonica with Bob, their in-house, silver haired minstrel.

All good things come to an end and so I left for Bali! I was getting a little too comfortable in my cameo visit to Perth.

Bali was everything I needed after my preceding time in Melbourne. I had lost my job, my girl, and my life in Melbourne and I needed to regroup.

So to the Aquarius Hotel in Kuta: just what the lonesome boy needed. I had my guitar with me so I just sat on the porch and played songs for a day or two. I met a few locals and travellers and was invited to a party with some French guys. It was a low-key affair but it broke me into the social scene and allowed me to mingle.

The French restaurant was to be a welcome base in the future whenever I felt at a low ebb. Laurent and Riri were perfect hosts and raconteurs, always good for a chat or tall story. Unfortunately, they parted under love's constant pressure, and at the last reckoning, were enjoying the single scene with some exuberance.

Well, I had come to party and party I did! My way was to meet people and play music so I went hard at it for three days. I played harmonica with any band that would let me and found them to be very amenable. I had previously played with bands in smaller venues in many countries: England, Ireland, Australia, France, Turkey, Thailand, Vanuatu, and many others... Why not here?

I played a memorable set with local guys at the popular outdoor café called Millertime. Kadek and Ketut were quite talented and our sessions became a habit over the next two years. At this stage I was planning to be in Bali for 1 month before leaving for India and England. These plans were about to change!

Four days in after music and nightlife-led recovery I went to Millertime for a coffee. The waiter there happily advised me that I shouldn't touch their coffee. He said I wouldn't be pleased to taste it. Nonetheless, I ordered it. This caused some

great amusement to a pleasant looking girl who was in the vicinity. She was very impressed by the honesty of the drinks waiter and further amused at my determination to forge on regardless. I drank the coffee and survived. However, it heralded the beginning of my Bali adventure.

Her name was Paula and she seemed a little too inquisitive for my liking. I evaded her for a while, then slowly warmed to her girl-next-door qualities. I was interested to meet someone from Borneo. I didn't even know that it, Borneo, belonged to Indonesia. My coffee, which wasn't too bad, became two and we talked for a long time. She was waiting to see the owner about some local land sales and had an amazing depth to her character.

To meet someone from Borneo was cool and she admitted that she didn't have many friends in Bali and was quite lonely. So being an intrepid traveller, bound to learn about new cultures, I offered to accompany her to the beach for sunset. Kuta, it was decided, as the location. We sat there and watched as the sun lazily made its way down over the horizon.

To watch a Kuta sunset
And feel a cooling breeze
There's magic here in Bali
For your spirit to be released

The above is from my song Bali Dreaming... it was probably conceived at this time as I sat talking to Paula about things of a world beyond my own. She told me of her experiences in the Dayak world of West Kalimantan. They had been through a nasty war with Madurese people who were forcefully resettled on their territory. Stories not shown on T.V., which cannot explain how real people feel when subjected to the violence and horror of such a situation.

It was hard for her to talk about it but I would imagine quite therapeutic. She went on to talk of her Dayak world in which visits from spirits were an everyday occurrence. This was to be a forerunner of a series of incredible twilight zone events, which seemed to follow us. She seemed to have an advanced 6th sense, which aroused mine also. I had experienced a little of this phenomena when I came with Jan in 1998. Whilst staying at the Istana Rama hotel with her I felt this strange tingling feeling, which crept up my body from my feet upwards.

I recall looking at my Indian girlfriend and seeing the whites of her eyes loom large in contrast to her beautiful brown skin. We passed this off as something weird but the hairs on my neck didn't get much rest around Paula. There were many occasions when I would feel strange spirits in the air only to have her knowing smile

confirm the presence of something from beyond our realm. Mine was not to question why! Ironically, I was a strong sceptic prior to meeting Paula. Jan was exasperated earlier, when I could not open my mind, perhaps Paula was the next stage of my spiritual awakening.

So back to Kuta... after the sunset scenario, Paula and I developed a warm friendship, which blossomed into love. We developed a closeness, which still pervades our lives even now. I wanted to be a big brother for this likeable girl but our softer personalities came together to create a wonderful union. Humour soon emerged in the cross-cultural gaffes that we constantly shared. She asked me what the seed in an apple was called and I happily told her it was a pip... Lo and behold, the next morning she proudly announced that breakfast was to be a bowl of pips??? I looked and saw a bowl of muesli ready for consumption. Another funny moment was when showering together she shared a most intimate comment... on seeing that I was not Mr. Universe, she declared that 'You know something? You look like Mrs. Doubtfire...' Not quite the compliment I was expecting!

So many quirks come to light when living in another country. One of the strangest occurred when a 747 plane was labouring to get off to Singapore or somewhere similar. The plane disturbed the local frog population and a cry of 'xxxx off' resounded from the throng of amphibians. Nobody believed me so I recorded the delinquent frogs as they sang another plane off to Singapore!

Another interesting event was the visit of the electricity meter man. He would come on a monthly basis and tell me I hadn't paid enough... The fact was that I had gone well ahead in payments because when he had no access in my absence, he would estimate in excess of my usage. I had a bank of electricity to be used for which I could gain no credit. At each visit, he would assure me that the credit would be processed. The next visit would show this not to be the case. Eventually, like Custer, I made my stand. With six-months+ electricity unused, I stated I could not pay until all of the credits were cleared... I called my trusty interpreter, Paula, in to the fray. After an exhaustive explanation to her about the morality of the situation, I was happily advised that I was wrong... I must pay because the bill was always right. I left my Bali flat with electricity for a further 8 months and just accepted the wiser ways of those who know better!

Another interesting event was the incessant license check that occurred almost daily... I would have up to 5 police all admiring my international license with a view to turning flaws into cash. I was armed with everything needed to appease my examiners. In spite of this, I often came to grief. Eventually, one learns to go with the flow and help the officers quench their thirst or appease their hunger.

I remember leaving the Jaya Pub, after playing harp there in Seminyak one evening by my 100cc motorbike. A friend asked me to give him and his slim girlfriend a lift to his home a kilometre and a half away. Frank and Julie alighted and we crawled off up the road. Our 3-man episode was not spectacular considering 4-5 locals ride the one bike at one time. Sadly, we were caught in a Jaya Pub stakeout... Two Polisi came after us in warm pursuit... hot was not appropriate. We duly pulled up and my inebriated friend, Frank, proceeded to fall into a bush. Our dignity blown, it was now time to negotiate... It was determined that we should be fined on the basis of only one helmet being worn, but three noggins (heads) present. Funnily enough, after receiving their cash booty, they wished us well and gave us immunity to the rest of the ride. As to drink driving, they sent us away calling '*hati hati*'...be careful!

Another evening was not so amusing and could have been disastrous... I played harmonica with a band at the Jaya Pub on a stand up basis. It was a really good session and I was quite proud of the way we had played. No free beer had been offered so I bought a pot at Melbourne prices, quite expensive for Bali. I quaffed it and thought I might head off to a party, which had already started. No barman was in attendance so I left the money and set off. As I went to put the bike keys in, a guy raced up and tried to prevent me doing so. It was a dark area and I was not happy with the intrusion in such a shady spot. I assured him that I had left the cash and waited for his return. Return he did, with two Bintang bottles in hand, destined for my head. Looking carefully at his eyes, I saw he meant business and prepared to try and weather the storm... maybe we fight? Well, luck was a fortune as the band's drummer had emerged and stated that he'd seen me leave it... and on re-entering once again we found it was, in fact, still there. It's a fine line between pleasure and pain!

Still smarting from that experience I rode away steaming inside that the guy was going to smash the bottles over my head. On finding the money and the manager watching he had beaten a hasty verbal retreat. However, his eyes told me the story... The night still young, I tried to regroup and refresh my attitude to enjoy the balance of the evening. I rode into the bend... and...'oh no'.... a police roadblock! 'License? Yes! Ok, I can handle it...' I approached the band of merry men, always pleased to welcome an errant westerner. 'Do you have license?' I nodded and proffered it. 'Do you have Alphabet?' 'What (Apa?)', I replied... A jumble of incoherencies followed resulting in me being the focus of attention to the encircling throng. All of a sudden I realised that he wanted registration papers. Ok, it was covered; I had them under my bike seat. On producing them, the band of deflated men narrowed their eyes. At 2 am, not a good look or feel. Suddenly, they brightened... they had focused on my externally worn money belt. 'Ah, you got something for me?' the main protagonist ventured. I alerted them to the fact that it wasn't cash bulging there, but a bunch of

harmonicas. Immediately, they saw alternate opportunities... 'You give to us????'... 'Sorry guys but I am a professional musician' and to emphasise the point, I pulled out a harp and played it to the gang. Can you believe? They immediately jumped into party mode and started to dance with each other and me. Dark lane, and potentially dangerous, then I am playing with the kids. What an amazing moment! Dancing arm in arm with a member of the Bali constabulary!

I then gave them money to buy themselves a drink as they, in fun and good heart, had earned it. Riding away, I had to shake my head and think, 'What am I doing here?' 'Bali...Heaven and hell' (Paula's view)

After I had been in Bali for a few weeks, Paula and I were strolling towards Kuta Beach one afternoon. I saw the Hard Rock hotel and thought 'how good to play there...' I mentioned it to her and said that I would set myself a goal of recording some of my own songs there if they had a studio. I loved the thought even though it may seem a bit cheesy...

Well, lo and behold, my dream came true. I booked in and paid the fees and recorded 12 songs in the Boom Box studio. I followed the Australian artist Diesel into the cans. He had been practicing for a show there. I heard some of the practice session and it sounded great. I recorded the songs and was particularly proud of a song called 'Bali Dreaming'. It came to be played there by a number of bands and was requested often prior to the Bali disaster. It was a great moment when the three managers of the Hard Rock came to me in the bar one night and asked me to join an American blues band and an Aussie band to play harmonica with them in a festival. Although intimidated by their high standard of music, it went off really well. I played with maybe 10-15 different bands there as a guest performer.

Then, of course, the explosions occurred and devastated Kuta, and the whole island. I had been based in Bali for nearly two years then, writing songs and living with Paula. We had the run of Bali and it was an idyllic existence after the difficulties that I had faced in Melbourne. I was playing music 3-4 times a week and really enjoying a creative lifestyle in Bali. Some thing hitherto not experienced during my corporate lifestyle at home.

On the eve of the bomb blast, I had agreed to join a band at the Millertime Café to play a few songs. It was always fun there and the guys in the band were always very welcoming. We would do old classics like Knockin' on Heavens Door by Bob Dylan and Roadhouse Blues from the Doors stable of songs. I had organized to meet a friend from Seaford at Kuta and we would connect via hand phone later that night.

However, Paula and I decided that we could walk the 4k's up the beach to Batu Belig for dinner first. On arrival at Batu Belig, we discovered some Indonesian friends who had set up an impromptu beach party there. I loved the atmosphere of people dancing on the beach whilst we strummed the songs. It was like the Caribbean in my imagination. Well, time dragged on and the party grew with new dancers and revellers. A group of Koreans from the Intan Hotel, Bali joined us and danced the night away. The hosts insisted that I be sociable and stay and have another beer... and so I decided to have a night off from the Kuta lifestyle... We stayed and danced and played unaware of the impending attack planned for Kuta.

At 9.30pm, a little tired, we bid our friends farewell and walked towards our flat at Seminyak. On arrival, I definitely didn't feel like running the gauntlet of pollution and the crowds of Kuta and decided to have a little sleep. This was much to the chagrin of Paula who wanted to dance the night away at Paddy's Bar.

I fell asleep from the happy tiredness of the walk, the party and a few beers and drifted into my dreams. This was odd behaviour as we would normally be in Kuta or Seminyak on the party trail. Strangely, at 10.30pm, I awoke and remembered my friend Cyril who I had been babysitting, as he was alone. He was in Paddy's Bar in Kuta and planning to meet me so I called him and told him I would play at the Jaya Pub in Seminyak instead. He was pleased to catch up with us and left shortly afterwards for the Jaya. I, unfortunately, dozed off again and waited for him to call on the way through... He didn't get that far but heard about the blasts in Paddy's and the Sari Club and returned to help. He carried four deceased people out of the Sari Club that night and suffered a horrific experience. He was never quite the same guy after that event.

We were puzzled by the plethora of text messages the next morning saying 'Are U Ok?' I thought I must have sent a multiple message to all by mistake. Then the reality of the bombings hit us! How lucky? We were due to be there only 200 metres from the site. Further, it was odds on that we would have been in Paddy's for a dance and to meet Cyril. I obviously saved his life by my call after suddenly waking up...

The aftermath of the bombings was devastating for everyone associated with this beautiful island. So many people killed and hurt and so many innocent lives and businesses disrupted or permanently maimed.

Paula and I visited the scene the next day and were stunned. We just didn't know how to react to such devastation. It was a massive blow to the Balinese people, their economy, and their spirits. Everyone had goosebumps evident on their arms and was devastated by the blast. It was so unexpected on this beautiful island. The Balinese were acutely embarrassed that this act could be perpetrated on their

cherished guests, especially the Australians who they welcomed so heartily. We were stunned by it all for a few days and then Paula simply said, 'This is bad for my psychology, I'm going home'. She did.

It brought back feelings of the past such as the Madurese- Dayak wars that she had seen and it was all too much for her. I didn't argue, as the immediate future was uncertain for us now. Travel warnings were issued by DFAT in Australia saying Bali was off limits, further, the rest of Indonesia was even more dangerous.

In spite of the warnings, I travelled to Kalimantan to see Paula once again, but I couldn't live there in the predominantly Muslim area... and Paula would have to wait for a year to come to Australia... I wrote the song 'Bali Dreaming' so we could always be together, alas not, maybe now it can be used to raise some funds for Bali... see Radio Australia website: <http://abcasiapacific.com/cause/lives/fisher.htm>

Bali Dreaming ©Dave Fisher Bali 2001

Bali Dreaming, Bali High, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali dreaming, I tell no lie, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali Dreaming, Bali High, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali Dreaming, I'll tell you why, Amaj7 dmaj7

To watch a Kuta Sunset Bm c#m

And feel a cooling breeze Bm c#m

There's magic here in Bali Bm c#m

For your spirit to be released Bm E

There's monkeys in the forest, Bm c#m

Kintamani standing tall Bm c#m

There's happy smiling faces Bm c#m

In Bali, love it all Bm c#m

Bali Dreaming, Bali High, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali dreaming, I tell no lie, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali Dreaming, Bali High, Amaj7 dmaj7

Bali Dreaming, I'll tell you why, Amaj7 dmaj7

Nasi goreng at the warung Bm c#m

Or surfing wild and free Bm c#m

Then day turns into nighttime Bm c#m

Legong dancing come and see Bm E

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| From Sanur to Lovina | Bm c#m |
| You'll always be surprised | Bm c#m |
| Sea temple in the twilight | Bm c#m |
| You won't believe your eyes | Bm c#m |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| I'm Bali Dreaming, Bali High, | Amaj7 dmaj7 |
| Bali dreaming, I tell no lie, | Amaj7 dmaj7 |
| Bali Dreaming, Bali High, | Amaj7 dmaj7 |
| Bali Dreaming, I'll tell you why, | Amaj7 dmaj7 |

In the end, we parted, and started new lives. The bell tolled for Bali, and still does...



Dave Fisher is a singer songwriter who has lived in Bali for two and a half years. He has played in over two hundred bands around the world, and travelled widely, using music as a form of diplomacy. His song 'Bali Dreaming' is currently on the Radio Australia website at:

<http://www.abcasiapacific.com/cause/lives/fisher.htm>

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