

Life Lessons From Learning To Surf

Fitness, Spirituality, Passion

Few sports have been more romanticized than surfing. Few neighborhoods have captured the world's attention more than Malibu. Few sports have an easier opportunity of entry than surfing.

Although the Hawaiians seemingly invented it a few hundred years ago and Captain Cook may have been the first to publicize it, its real embryonic stage in the United States was in the 1940's and 1950's in Malibu.

The early adaptors explored in mostly anonymity and were thought of as the fringe element of drop outs and cut ups. It was clearly out of the mainstream of what the world thought of as sport.

Not until it caught the imagination of ____ whose daughter was a surfer and was made into the movie "Gidget" using popular film stars did the sport move into the second phase of mainstream adaptation.

The sport went from a few thousand aficionados to millions in the span of a few years. Now surfing is a multi billion dollar industry with true idols and major clothing lines for the real and the wannabees. The drop out syndrome image of the original surfers has metamorphosed into the fit, stylized, cool image of people who can blend a life of success with a connection to nature.

Unlike sports that require teams, arenas, chair lifts, and man made environments, surfing needs nothing but a shaped and glassed plank and access to a coastline. Whereas super bowls are contrived and super hyped events, surfing gets most exciting when the unpredictability of Mother Nature lays a giant swell on the door step of some island or coastline.

Billions of dollars are invested and waged to match the best professional baseball, basketball, and football teams at heralded extravaganzas, but only a few great surfers can challenge and conquer the unpredictable giant swells created by God. And yet it remains to be seen whether man can really surf everything nature can deliver.

Surfing is much like climbing Mount Everest. Years of training go into the development of a mountaineer that can withstand the physical demands of an oxygen deprived environment and conditions that could make the conquest impossible.

And yet these conquests cost a fortune, coordination, and teams the mainstream human cannot access. This is truly a rarified opportunity that challenges the invincibility

of nature, but leaves little opportunity for the aspirations of the average Joe. And besides, there is not much romance in dressing up like a polar bear to see if you can withstand below zero temperatures and survive not breathing.

Surfing is characterized by its existence in the most desirable environments and taking advantage of conditions that people dream about while slaving away at the office or plowing their way through freezing snow drifts to get to work.

Unless you already live on an island or at the beach, who doesn't dream about white sandy beaches, fresh ocean breezes and warm tropical waters. Dressed in the minimum of entrapments, you can soak up the sunshine and luxuriate in warm caressing water.

There is also the psychological attraction of water and oceans to those that are troubled or seek relief from pressure and anxiety. It has been likened to being surrounded in the symbiotic fluids of early life when we were totally cared for rested in that heavenly place; the womb.

Apes find comfort in bathing and it seems humans also find pleasure in drawing a hot bath, soaking in a hot tub, or swimming in a 75 degree pool or visiting a tropical beach for vacation. On the West Coast, we dream of Hawaii as our perfect escape from the turmoil of daily responsibility.

The ocean adds the attraction of an ideal environment with the excitement of being connected to nature. Surfing adds the element of finding out who we are and what we can do. It also has total freedom, for in the ocean, there are no rules, no lines, no restrictions, and no authorities. Its man against nature or in this case, man harnessing nature for the pleasure of finding his limits.

Getting Started with the First Days of Surfing

Not only was I a beginner a little over a year ago, I have started several people on their first venture on a board. Nothing gives me more pride and pleasure than to see a person get their first ride. I feel like I have added one more aficionado to the great sport and culture of sport meets nature.

Since I live on a sand bar beach in Oceanside, it means that a surfer has to paddle through the waves to get to the rides. If I lived on a reef, one could paddle on glassy water around the waves and then enter from the side or back of the waves.

The first challenge new surfers face on my beach is the difficulty of paddling. Three of my recent introductions have been men that felt they were very fit. My thirty four year old neighbor is extremely muscular and in his youth spent twice a day in work outs. My thirty year old second neighbor is a Marine lieutenant who works out every day and is

very buff. My third friend is a fifty year old fitness buff who prides himself on how many push ups he can do and loves running the stairs in our near by ocean front stadium.

All three could not believe how tired they were after their first few sessions battling the rough surf. Regardless of your training, surfing requires the development of stamina in muscles you have not trained. Training is recommended, but nothing builds the stamina like frequent paddling and submitting yourself to the task of learning.

Getting hit and rolled over in the surf also robs your body of a great deal of energy. People are surprised at how difficult it can be to get the voluminous beginner board through the waves. The classes utilize them by pushing students off in the foam of waves that have broken and are near shore.

(They have the disadvantage of starting with a board that has a lot of volume to make it easy to catch a wave. The disadvantage is that the volume makes it catch the full impact of the weight of the wave. Advanced surfers use smaller boards which can be “duck dived” under waves and their smaller volume eludes the waves force and weight.

Starting on a smaller board or “short” board is a mistake, because the skill needed to catch and ride a wave is too great for a beginner. They are also harder to paddle. Many people buy a short board because that is where they want to wind up, but they don't have the skill to catch the larger waves necessary to provide the power to move the board.

After a first experience, a person is likely to have one of two reactions. This is more difficult than I thought it would be. I am going to have to man up and conquer this beast. Or this is not for me. Maybe I'll try body boarding.

My First Days

I have been a fitness buff my whole life. At sometimes I have been greatly fit and at times I have let aspects of fitness fade. When I moved to Oceanside in May of 2010, I was in a period where my fitness had faded. I moved to a street on top of the beach so it was accessible with a quick walk down the forty stairs to the one way frontage street and out onto the sand.

My goal was to get in great shape with running, biking, surfing, and swimming. I have always enjoyed running hills or up anything and I saw the 40 wood stairs as my first opportunity to start building some cardio. While running the stairs, you could see the beach, the surfers, the beautiful blue skies and the Oceanside Pier. I knew the stairs and I were going to be great friends.

After a month of running stairs, running the beach, and daily enjoying tanning on the beach, I had not ventured into surfing. I needed a board and I needed a wetsuit. The

year 2010 was one of cool summer weather and cold ocean temperatures. It was an anomaly of thirty years of previous warmer climates. In a telephone conversation with my college aged daughter, she said I was never going to surf.

It struck me, that as I watched the surf everyday from the top of the stairs with the locals who would come to check out the action, I continued to put it off. Her conversation made me realize what I was doing.

I immediately marched down to the K-5 tent in the park below the stairs where a local couple operated a surf school and used 8 foot Styrofoam boards. I asked Louie, the husband if they would sell one of the boards. A quick trip to the bank for some cash and I was the proud owner of an soft top 8 foot mini long board.

Another quick trip to the local surf shop and I was the proud owner of a 3/2 thickness wet suit. Now I was ready and I was out the very same afternoon. The surf is often rough on the inside, which is the wave closest to the beach, because it is very shallow and waves crash abruptly, not softer like on the outside.

Waves are energy passing through the water. The water doesn't change position, but revolves in a circle as the energy travels from its storm or wind source to a place that finally causes it to expel that energy. That place is usually an ocean bottom where the circling energy has its pattern interrupted and becomes elliptical in shape until shallower bottoms, reefs, or rocks cause it to erupt into a wave and foam.

Depending on the original force of the swell, the wave and foam can hit hard or barely move you as it rolls past. When trying to penetrate the foam with a big inflated board, the energy of the foam can send you spiraling back to the beach

As a beginner on my big board, I got rocked so many times as I tried to get out to just turn around in the foam. The combination of rough foam and the energy required to paddle created a real test like no challenge I had experienced with any other sport. I started paddling as far as I could and when a wave had broken and was coming my way, I would turn my back and let it hit me. Then I would try to stand on my board.

I had chosen a new Storm Wave board sold by Costco and made in China which the surf school uses for beginners. The husband, Louie, said that I would not need wax as the board would get broken it. After two weeks of getting on the board and sliding off, I came to the conclusion that even though this was a new sport, I could not be that uncoordinated.

I trundled over to the Surf Schools tent where I met Brooke, the true operator of the School. I had mentioned I bought the board, but I kept slipping off. Did I need wax? She

said the board comes with a film to protect it in shipping and that I should wax it. After a quick wax job and return to the surf, I got up on the first attempt.

Sometimes we have to learn the hard way.

What is it about the Sea that gets Surfers so Addicted?

In the beginning on a sand bar beach, the apprentice spends a lot of time getting wiped out. You try to jump over the waves or go under them and let your board go, or turn turtle which is going upside down as you let the wave pass over you.

It is clearly a contest to see if you can survive and have a good time or if the ocean is going to send you to the beach with your tail between your legs like a whipped puppy. >Maybe this is where to you test your faith in yourself or raise your self esteem to declare you can't be beaten into submission. <

You often get out of the water and tell yourself you survived, but admit you had been in hell of a dog fight. Mother Nature can innocently dish out more than you may want and she just continues to roll. You are somewhat assuaged by seeing real surfers out in the waves frolicking like so many seals or dolphins looking as though they were born in the sea.

You want to be one of them. If you can't be a seal or dolphin, then you could be a real surfer who takes what Mother Nature dishes and turns it into your own power and rides her into submission as the wave expels its last and final energy. When the wave has died, it is done forever. You can ride it to its death and experience its finest expression.

What is the feeling of glory in this? I have sky dived and scuba dived. In sky diving you are certainly daring the odds, but there is not quite the same feeling as being in the ocean. In scuba diving I have done somersaults under water at 100 feet and felt a certain freedom. I used to like to let my air run out at 40 feet under and just float to the surface as the air in my lungs expanded on the way up.

Hiking in the Sierra Nevada Rockies at 12,000 feet and camping next to Lake Mildred and the adjacent water fall gave me a close bond with the simplicity of nature. Here there was life at its basis. There was sunshine, water, air, and food. Any creature could survive if it knew the ropes and life could not get more simple.

The board is you paint brush in surfing. It allows you to express what it is you would like to paint. Some love to cut it up on a short board. Others appreciate the easier and more retro feel of the long board. Some of us have fun with the fun board that gives you characteristics of each.

The real essence is that the surf is the canvass and the board is the brush. The wave is the paint and you can create the picture in your mind. When the wave is coming, it is your opportunity unfolding. The paddling into position is your practiced skill setting up the painting. Catching the wave and getting to your feet is the beginning of your dance. Riding it out in any fashion you desire or are capable is embedding your influence and joining with Mother Nature in a simultaneous orgasmic expression of unity.

Then I have to ask you. How many opportunities in your life do you have to create your own master piece and be the author of your finest work? Others may judge or praise, but no one can prevent or take away your signature. It is the one time that you alone are and free to do as you please.

Beginners have to understand the Sweet Spot on their Board

A surfboard has a sweet spot where it will paddle best depending on where you lie on it.

Each person's weight differs, so the sweet spot will vary for each person, especially on longer boards. On the 8 foot Styrofoam or soft board as they are called, my position at 175 pounds will be different than my friend's spot who weights 200 pounds.

I offered to give my 50 year old friend some instructions to get started. On the first day, I noticed he was lying way back on his board and the nose was projecting up a foot or two off the water as he paddled. This makes paddling twice as difficult and when a wave hits you from the front, it throws the board up that much easier.

When he came to shore the first time, I explained that he should move up on the board so that the nose was only a few inches off the water. The proper paddling position is ankles together and out of the water and chest up as you paddle. At the position the board paddles easiest is the sweet spot.

This is important for catching waves as well. The wave is moving faster than you when it approaches from behind and you want to be moving as fast as you can when it catches you. If you are in the sweet spot, you can paddle faster and the wave will push you easier.

The next time my friend went out he was doing the same thing. The nose of his board was sticking up in the air almost a foot off the water as he paddled to catch a wave. As I watched, he missed six or seven waves he should have caught. The soft boards are designed to be the best wave catchers in the ocean.

If you are not catching waves, it is probably the surfer's fault. I left before my friend finished his session, but the next time I saw him I mentioned the sweet spot again. He said he was lying back on his board because he didn't want to pearl.

Pearling is where the nose heads straight for the sand and throws the surfer off the board, sometimes violently. It is feared by all surfers. A board will pearl most of the time because the surfer is on a close out wave. A close out wave is one that does not break with a gradual face, but instead the lip comes over the entire length of the wave and there is no longer a face on which to ride.

Avoiding the close out waves is a life long trial. On sand bar beaches there are always close outs and they are usually on the inside waves. The inside waves are the ones that break closest to the beach where the wave, in shallow water, finally hits the bottom and throws a rather violent lip over the top.

The outside waves are the ones that break further out and are usually more gradual just because the wave is breaking in deeper water. At Oceanside, the waves at 6 foot and over are usually closed face regardless of where they break, so catching and riding them is always a challenge.

Larger waves are moving faster so the decision to catch them has to be made quicker. You are often paddling to get speed and then at the last moment you can feel whether the lip that is forming is going to close out. It takes some experience to develop that feel.

The defenses to pearling are either sliding back on the board to keep the nose up, weighting the back of the board after you stand or catching the wave at an angle so that the straight down plummet is avoided. Short boarders can catch and turn quicker to get past the lip in the first section. To ride the face and avoid the closing out foam you have to move fast to get to the open section where the pocket or shoulder exists.

Nonetheless, if you lie prone too far back on your board as a habit, you cannot paddle fast enough to catch waves as they curl. If you get too far in front of them, they break on you. Even if you are going to angle on a wave, you want to be lying on the sweet spot.

To test your board and grow confidence in it, I suggest you boogie board a few waves to see how it handles. You will probably learn that the board handles fine and you can trust standing up on it for the next wave. I boogie boarded my first 5 and 6 foot tall waves to see how my board would handle.

Beginners shouldn't necessarily be trying to catch waves as they are breaking. The timing is generally too difficult for the newbie. Beginners should try to catch the foam after the wave has broken and get the idea of paddling and "popping up". The secret is to get in front of the foam where there is a good push from the wave and the water is more calm.

Standing up in the middle of the foam is like being in a washing machine. It will be very difficult to get your balance. Also to be targeted is riding foam that has enough speed and power to push the board and not waiting too long before you stand up and allowing the momentum to die. If there is not enough speed or you wait too long, you will stand up and the board will sink or remain motionless.

So, lying on the sweet spot and chest up as you paddle, catch the foam. When you feel it pushing you, place your palms flat down at your chest and pop into a stance. The stance will have your favored foot forward at a slight angle and the rear foot either perpendicular to the board or at an angle. If you have snowboarded or skateboarded, you will probably take a similar stance.

When you pop up, remain low and balanced between your toes and heels. The upper torso should be slightly bent but not leaning out over your toes. It should be centered and neutral over your knees or maintaining the neutral balance between your toes and heels.

My first teacher was Brooke of the SurfCampsUSA.com beach surf school who couldn't help herself but to give me tips as she saw me surf. She would say, lying on the board as you catch the foam is not your friend as much as you think it is. Standing up is your friend, because that is when your board has real balance. This becomes the key all the way through the learning process as you graduate from riding foam to riding 6 foot waves.

The True Love Bite of Surfing

I have read many a book by surfers and heard interviews of the life long board experts and surf champions. They all say that when you get that first ride, you become addicted for life.

At first I wondered why surfers would sit outside waiting for waves that didn't come. Because I have the opportunity to surf everyday, I soon learned that a day without surfing was a day I was disappointed. Many surfers will say the waves are terrible but I am going in to get wet.

That first stroke is like the first sip of an ice cold beer on a hot day. You want to say thanks for being here, "I'm back". It's like greeting a good friend where both of you are all smiles and asking how it's going. The ocean is waiting for you to do your thing.

When you come out after a good day you are very amped and the first person who sees you or asks how it was is going to get it with both barrels. The joy pours out of you like a bursting watermelon and the adrenaline is triple espresso. It's fun to see your surfing friend after their session when they are all amped you can see it in their eyes.

The excitement starts building as you prepare. When you start putting on your wetsuit your mind starts accelerating to a point where you can't trust you will do everything right. I like to get my board waxed and everything set before I start putting on my suit because once I am in motion, the adrenaline is pumping.

This occurs for me because I live across the street from the beach and am in the water a few minutes after putting on my suit. There is the anticipation of a good day and a little fear of getting trounced. There is the knowledge that good rides await but that a real work out is also waiting.

If the surf is up and rough or rippy or a combination of both, it takes a real effort to paddle out. Then you have to avoid getting caught in the impact zone of breaking waves, make the right decision of catching the good ones and avoiding the close outs, and watching and avoiding other surfers in the line up who might be coming your way on a wave and have their hands full watching their ride.

I have three priorities. I want to above everything else be safe. This means I try to avoid getting clobbered in the impact zones, I try to avoid surfing the close outs, I watch where other surfers are going to be riding the waves they catch.

My second priority is respecting the line up. That is where the other surfers are waiting outside or inside to catch waves. I watch the other surfers in the line up to be sure they see me as they take off in my direction. I size up the line up to see who the good surfers are and try to figure out which direction they go when they catch waves. I get a handle on who are the over aggressive ones and who are the more respectful riders. I watch them to be sure that we each get our rides without dropping in on each other.

My third priority is catching my own waves. If there is a line up and they have given me my turn, then I want to catch the wave so that it is not wasted. This is my opportunity to have fun and once I am safe and have my turn; it is my time in the sun.

When after months of surfing you have made it to the outside to catch waves, are strong enough to paddle, know how to stay safe, understand how to work in the line up, and can catch your wave, you have really arrived.

Yesterday morning I went out with three friends. The waves were small but the day was beautiful and we were excited to be going out together. We all surfed in a clump and watched each other take waves and do our thing. As we paddled back to our own line up we could make a few comments about the ride or what was happening. The adrenaline was pumping.

The water was clear and one friend saw 4 Corbina swimming underneath him. While we were paddling for position someone else yelled out "shark". I didn't hear the whole

comment, but it is a word you do not like to hear. I asked what shark and my friend said it was just a sand shark. There have never been big sharks spotted at our beach and I would like it to stay that way.

I once had a dolphin clear the water 15 feet from me in between me and another surfer. When I first saw the silver flash coming out of the water, I thought shark, but then realized it would not be jumping between us. It was a spectacular sight neither of us will ever forget.

With my friends, there were no outside waves breaking so we paddled and searched for any break and the small inside break waves were taking us right to the beach where you jumped off into three feet of water or less. We had a great time because we were doing it together.

I had similar camaraderie experiences with skiing and snowboarding and even playing basketball or tennis. They are all great when shared. There is just something however about being in the water on a sunny day looking for waves that makes surfing a little special.

Three Methods of Paddling

There are probably as many ways to paddle as there are surfers. Everyone adopts what is most comfortable, most effective, and probably the least damaging or tiring.

One of the results of a day of paddling is very tired shoulders, arms, back, neck, and rotator cuff. The rotator cuff seems to cause the most difficulty because it seems to be the one area that surfing stresses most.

I constantly stretch with yoga exercises that loosen my back, neck, shoulders, and arms. When I come out of the water, I frequently do some cable exercises both facing the cables and away from the cable to release the lactic acid from paddling.

Any exercise that builds strength and endurance of your posterior rotator cuff, specifically your infraspinatus and teres minor musculature is good. As these 2 muscles become more toned and in shape, the stability of shoulder joint increases. More stability = less joint play = less shoulder pain.

The result for beginners is they may not be able to surf everyday. The fatigue and soreness from surfing and paddling may require a day or two of rest. I am at the point where I can surf everyday. I conserve my strength and generally come out with reserves. This allows me to surf an hour or two when the surf is terrific and I don't want to come out. It allows me to surf twice on great days.

One stroke surfers use for paddling is to cup their hands and pull. Your chest is up and you are reaching out along the front sides of your board and pulling straight back. You may find that this hurts your lower back. I have incorporated a full regimen of core exercises with a big flexibility ball to strengthen my stomach and lower back.

A second recommended stroke is the one modern swimmers use to do free style. My daughters swam free style in high school and they were taught a stroke I didn't know when I swam. The stroke is in the shape of an "S" where you generally are pulling in three directions with each stroke before the arm comes out of the water half the distance that it would in my old form of free styling.

For swimming it is faster and for surfing, it is more efficient. If you are not schooled in this stroke, you will probably not use it. It also seems to put minimum stress on the rotator cuff. I also have used a variation of this stroke by putting my open hand in the water and pulling away from the board. It eliminates that downward stroke that stresses the shoulders.

A third stroke I read about is where you put your whole arm in the water and with the fingers of your hand open and relaxed, you pull back along the board from front to rear. I have used it and like it. I can get a lot of power using my whole arm and open hand.

The one I use most and most professionals would probably use is paddling with just your hand and forearm up to your elbow in the water and stroking fast when you have to. The stronger you are the more power you will get. On the way out, I may paddle fast and when I have reached the outside, I will slow down the rhythm.

The relationship you develop between paddling, effectiveness, and tiredness may determine the type of board you like. When I started with my soft board, the paddling was relatively easy. I didn't realize this until I got on thinner boards and then got back on the soft board. At 3 inches thick and with a lot of volume, it can glide across the water on calm days with great efficiency. I learned I could catch a third more waves than with a thinner board because it was faster, easier to catch the small waves, and I didn't get tired as soon.

My original ambition was to start with the 8' beginner board and move to the short board where I could do more athletic maneuvers. Everyone recommends to people over 30 that they start with a learner board and go longer after that. Then if they want to go to a short board after a few years, make the move.

One reason I wanted to go to the short board is that on rough days, the short board can be duck dived under raging foam and with the longer or higher volume boards you are going to take a beating or may not even get out.

The wisdom of that advice first escaped me in my own stubborn determination to have free will. What became more evident as I tried shorter boards is that they paddle slower so catching a big fast wave is more difficult unless you can beat everyone in the line up to the peak spot of the wave (more later).

As time passed, I did see the wisdom in the philosophy for “older” surfers that the idea is to catch as many waves as possible and have more fun. Paddling with less stress and catching waves almost any point on the break does have a lot of advantages at the end of the day.

I am in pretty good surf condition because I am in everyday and I do additional exercises for strength, stamina, and flexibility. Week end warriors or surfers not in great shape realize the short comings of not being in paddle shape because they have to work too hard. The teenagers and early 20's surfers can overcome most of these obstacles because they have energy and have probably not worn down any body parts.

Now I have realized that I will stay on longer boards for awhile instead of getting shorter. I have a 7'6" fun board which is 25/8 thick and 21" wide that is a compromise between a long and short board. I also have a 6'10" board which is 23/4 inches thick and easy to paddle.

Both boards perform the same as they are easier to paddle than thin short boards, but they need power to catch a wave. They are not good foam riders. The shorter board is easier to ride on steep waves because it is not as likely to pearl. It also feels like it is the length of my body and I feel compact with it.

When I jump on the soft board again, I can paddle like the wind in calm and small surf. It is good because you catch small powerless waves easier and you can catch them sooner. If you catch a wave sooner, you have more time to stand up. When you catch it late (just as the lip is breaking the top) you have to move faster.

Different factors will influence your board choices. Of course, having a quiver of different boards is fun and gives one relief from the same paddling routines. I also learn different techniques with each board that generally translate back to better performance when I switch boards.

Beginners don't realize that they will be paddling much more than they will be riding waves. The amount you can paddle without getting too tired or injured determines how many waves you will catch each day. Some experienced surfers like to sit “outside” and only catch the best waves. They are happy with 3-5 waves on big days when there is a line up.

I like to catch as many waves as I can for the period I am in the water. I am constantly paddling and staying active and ready to move to a wave. On a sand bar the waves may break in sets at slightly different spots and different distances from shore. I have to honor the line up, but I often find that when I start catching waves, the line up gives me more room.

So a 7'6" mini long "fun board" is easier to paddle than a short board, can easily duck dive better than a long board, has good stability when I "pop up", catches waves easier than a short board, and I don't have to catch a wave right at the peak like a short board might need to do.

The disadvantage of my board is that I can't catch small waves as easily as a long board, it is not as fast and maneuverable as a short board, and it is not quite as easy to paddle on calm days as a long board. So we pick the board according to what is important, our conditioning, and our priorities.

How Might Surfing Give Life Parallel Lessons?

Most cultures value success. It has always been part of the male psyche. It starts with the most basic instincts of surviving and winning a mate. The female in every species is charged with selecting the male that will be the best provider and has the strongest genes to pass on to the next generation.

In our culture, it seems sometimes that a Ferrari means you have great genes. With many species the male is the more attractive or beautiful. Male ducks have the most colorful feathers and a buck has a handsome rack of antlers. Money certainly means you might be a good provider and it might be assumed therefore that you are a superior male.

As we become more civilized, women have become more self sufficient and more discriminating about the type of lives they want to lead. Eating and mating no longer have the priority they once required. They look for qualities in men that might include kindness, intelligence, passion, emotional intelligence, and loyalty.

A man that is confident, has gratitude, is generous, and lives to benefit others can be happy and a great find for a lucky woman. His attributes become the attraction rather than only his net worth. He has an infectious desire to enjoy life and wants others to do the same.

I have found that surfing creates great gratitude. Surfers feel it on a daily basis, but even more so on a great day. There is hardly anything that beats being alive to experience a great surf day. It is a day when body and soul join with Mother Nature in an ecstatic embrace.

Once you have the surf bug, you want to surf at every opportunity. You either are thankful for your physical capabilities and/or you want to improve them to improve your skill and time in the water. You clearly recognize that nature provided you with a body that makes paddling on a board and catching a wave a wonderful opportunity.

You clearly recognize that being in the water is a connection with Mother Nature, earth, God, and spirituality. It is hard to have negative feelings or life stress while you are surfing. It is the total escape. It could be likened to deep meditation where for a short period of time, you are focused on an activity and not distracted by other worldly obligations or concerns.

When your attitude is refreshed on a constant basis with this gratitude, it reflects on how you treat others and what you want to have in your life. Too much stress or negativity brings you down from your high. You realize that negative information or people detract from the oneness and ecstasy you experience in the water.

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You start recognizing those type of activities that may detract from your enjoyment and performance in the water. You recognize that nutrition, body care, and supportive exercise might enhance your surfing experience.

Like any experience, you have the desire to make it a little better. Some may desire a new board. Others may want to increase their skills or stamina. Some may look to provide more opportunities to get in the water. Nutrition is clearly a necessity for the power and the recovery. It becomes more difficult to deny the existence of a super power or God who could bring man and waves together.

Surfing is also a culture or society. Surfers respect the ocean and its power to thrash. Surfers respect others who can participate. Surfers learn to respect each other's rights in the water. Surfers learn to have more self respect as they survive and prosper in challenging conditions.

This attitude can't help but carry over to other activities and relationships. You start seeing the value of groups that work together, respecting the need and rights of others to express themselves. You have self esteem and so you can be more generous with others' needs to feel good about themselves.

You have a secret little place that feels so fortunate to have the surfing experience and you want to share this joy in many ways with others. Surfing creates enthusiasm and you like to find other activities in which you might duplicate this enthusiasm.

You are clear on activities that are less satisfactory and rather than accept your fate, you will probably try to improve your experience to make it more complementary to the

feelings you experience in the water. In a sense, it is only natural to bring your life to the highest plain you experience with this water experience.

If you can surf and feel great, you would really start dreading a relationship or activity that brought your feeling of gratification or self worth to a low level. As I get in better physical condition, it is only natural that I envision even better conditioning.

As my heart soars with being in the water, it is only natural that I would want to sustain that feeling for as long as possible and in each activity if possible. It would be more natural that I would start eliminating the negative activities and looking for more positive activities.

For me, the conditioning I envision necessary has promulgated a greater commitment to nutrition and fitness. I see the need for balanced nutrition and balanced exercise. I need to eat the right foods and engage in exercises that stretch, build strength and build stamina. I have to consider the right amount of rest necessary.

When I am not surfing, I want to learn more so that I can make faster progress. I might read books, watch video, and converse with the advanced surfers on techniques. I envision my self a better surfer and therefore my life being in a better place with more ecstasy when I am in the water. That ecstasy stays with me for the rest of my day and then builds into anticipation of my next water experience.

People who watch us are envious of the passion we have for our sport. They often say they wish they had something for which they felt the same. This passion for our sport is also a passion for our lives. It is a passion for being alive. It is a gratitude for everything that exists and in spite of existing wars, poverty, and evil doers, we have a world of our own that is functioning quite well.

Three Processes for Catching Your First Waves

Catching waves is the key to enjoying the sport of surfing. The bigger the waves become the more difficult it becomes to catch them and even more precarious to survive the wipe outs.

The beginning surfer should start with the easiest and the safest wave which is really the foam generated after a wave has broken. Surf schools are great vehicles for teaching new students about safety, how to handle a board, and how to get up on the board when you catch a wave.

The second advantage schools provide is having an instructor help you get your wave in the proper position for a foam ride and then giving you a push when it arrives to get you in front of it. If you are doing it on your own, then you can learn the same process perhaps by watching what instructors do in the water with their new students.

If you have a friend learning at the same time, maybe they can push you when the wave arrives. The advantage of this process is that you want to stand up in front of the foam, not in the middle of it. The alternative is to catch a strong foam wave and then paddle until you get in front of it and then pop up.

When I started with my daughter, I at first put her in position and then I pushed. After she became used to standing up with my assistance she started paddling for the waves herself and then turning around to get in position for the wave and then paddling to get in front of it before she stood up.

At the beginning, you will ride the crashing inside waves that break close to shore and are strong enough to push you. As you develop in riding ability and strength, you can paddle out further to get a bigger wave that is breaking that will give you more power and a longer ride.

Going out further may require ducking some of the foam that is barreling into shore. The soft or styro foam boards catch all the force which makes handling them difficult for the beginner. There are a few ways to work with this foam board

The first is to paddle fast as you can and let the nose of your board rise through the leading lip of the foam. If the foam is only a few inches thick up to a foot, this might work. Once the foam is over a foot thick, it will hit too hard to just pierce the top.

The second method would be to turn turtle. That means you go under water and hold your board upside down with the nose pointing toward the wave. The wave will hit and pass over the board. If it is really strong it will grab your board and tear it out of your hands or feel like it is ripping your arms out of their sockets. So don't hold on for dear life in big waves.

For real thick or powerful waves, you might also think of abandoning your board and diving under the wave. You then come up after the wave has passed and pull your board in via the leash. Be careful when ever you let go of your board that there is not a surfer or swimmer behind you that will get hit by the board.

As you get out further in pursuit of foam waves you will want to get in front of where waves break. You do not want to be in the "impact zone" of large waves. The impact zone of well formed waves is where the peak folds over first. In this path is where the wave is strongest and will trash you if you are too close.

>Stay far enough inside or towards shore where you can catch the foam at its strongest most stable state. If this is confusing, you will understand after a few trips out. When you get turned around, start paddling before the wave hits you to minimize the impact and give you better speed to get out in front. >

When you are out in front, there is a little wall of water like a mini wave in front of the foam. When you get there you could run the wave straight to shore or try to carve the board toward the back or front and drive the wave diagonally.

I rode my soft board for months and caught up to 5 foot waves. They are very capable boards and only offer the disadvantage of being hard to handle in rough surf. In the early days, you will not be trying to maneuver in the pocket, you will just be catching the waves and riding straight in.

When it is time to try and catch a wave as it is breaking, start with small ones. The small ones won't toss you too bad and they are moving slower. You will get your first experience of riding down a face which puts the board at an angle towards the ocean floor. This is a position where you could experience pearling although you probably have experienced that already just riding foam.

Many a surfer has said they were terrified as they stepped up to a new level. When you are ready to catch a wave in the pocket you will know. Just like catching foam, there is timing involved. If you are paddling too slow or catch it too late, it will run under you. If you are too far in front, it will land on your back and now you are riding foam again.

If you have a choice, don't catch it where it peaks. The peak on a well formed wave is where the water rolls over in foam first. This is the most powerful spot on the wave and should be saved for later unless the waves are small and mushy.

Small and mush means they don't have much power and then you want to catch them at the most powerful spot which is where they break first at the peak or apex.

When you are paddling and catch the first pocket, let it catch you and you will feel it. Then put your palms flat on your board and pop into position smoothly, like you did in the foam. The wave will usually have enough power to push you whether you stand or not, so there is no need to jump up so fast you lose your balance and fall over.

Get up quickly, but patiently and with hands forward, weight balanced evenly on both feet, and back bent but not leaning over the toes. One of the early sensations of going down a face is that you are afraid and so you lean back and fall off. The other is that the speed is unexpected and you are leaning back and fall off.

The first commitment has to be mental. You have to commit to catching the wave and getting your weight more forward to stay with the board. As you progress, you will start getting up naturally and not thinking about the process. At the beginning you have to think about getting forward on your board and not letting it run away from you.

Two ways to keep the board from pearling or going nose first are to lean your weight back while you are still in the prone position and even pop up with your weight on the

back foot. The other way is to start off at an angle so that the nose of the board is heading toward the direction the wave is breaking and not toward the sea floor.

If you head the board at an angle, once the wave catches you it almost locks in your ride whether you get up or not. If you want to boogie board your first angle ride, you will have a great time. Once you catch angles, you will also realize you have a lot of time to get up. You shouldn't purposely wait a long time, but you will know that you can get up under control.

How Do We Fight Frustration with Our Life Processes?

When we start surfing, we have begun expecting that some day we will be like the surfers we are watching or even see in the videos or movies. When a man meets a new woman, both know what he is thinking, but there is a process. When we start a new job, we might want to be President, but we will have to first pay our dues.

When we set out to get good grades to go to college or begin a new career to be a top performer, we know we have to pay our dues and earn our advancement. There are few quick rises to the top or notoriety.

What is the attitude we adopt that gives us patience? The Japanese have a word called "kaizen" which means steady improvement. It can apply to an individual, a company or even a nation. Trees grow a day at a time and we have to focus on the behavior that will allow for steady improvement.

Learning to surf can be like trying to lose weight. No one loses ten pounds because they fast for a day. There is nothing that brings immediate results for worthwhile goals. If something is that easy, everyone would be there or maybe the goal is not that worthwhile. You could certainly become a criminal in one day, but is that a worthwhile goal?

The greatest test of our commitment is when we hit obstacles. Every worthwhile goal has obstacles. We could examine our life long reaction to impediments? Do we immediately shun the activity and move to something or someone new? Do we analyze the problem and consider alternatives? Do we energize our commitment and resolve to keep pushing?

Surfing has lots of obstacles and maybe that is one of the reasons the community feels bonded. One has to have the physical strength and athletic ability. One has to have the courage to face constant fears. One has to have the resolve to engage often. One has to have the ability to learn. One has to have the passion to become better. One has to have respect for the line up and the awesome power of Mother Nature.

There are lots of tests and steps in learning to surf. Think about the skills that had to be learned for other sports and how long it took. I have learned so many sports that I know the process takes resolve, patience, and ability to overcome setbacks. Learning to ride mountain bikes and learning to play tennis had lots of little steps that had to be learned one at a time. Each step had to be practiced.

Achieving a goal requires passion, commitment, discipline and courage. If it doesn't really have importance to us, we will probably not prevail over the setbacks and obstacles. I can remember giving up on things rationalizing that the goal was not worth the trouble or pain.

I can remember triumphing on difficult challenges because I was committed to succeeding. The importance of the result is crucial to create the commitment to withstand the pain. I have left tasks and relationships because I decided I didn't want to endure the setbacks or pain for a result I could no longer visualize.

Maybe in the process there is a loss of hope because we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I have heard a few stories about scuba divers that drowned with air in their tanks when they got tangled with seaweed. If you don't quit, you don't fail.

And then in contrast there is the Colorado hiker that sawed off his own arm with a knife because he knew he would die if he remained pinned by the boulder. What levels of commitment have we experienced and what is our level of resolve if something is important? What kind of remarkable successes have we had where we triumphed over adversity? What kind of experiences have we had where we gave up too easily?

Where does surfing lie in our level of goals to be achieved in spite of all the obstacles? I have seen several people that started surfing enthusiastically and couldn't abide the slow pace of learning.

I used to run on a daily basis. The 5 mile runs were pretty easy because I had completed so many. When I knew I was going to face a challenge at work, I liked to first build up my physical routine and experience pain so that I knew I had the resolve to take on tougher challenges.

When I knew that I faced a tougher real life challenge, I might run ten miles or throw an hour's aerobics class on top of my five mile run. I wanted to build my mental toughness to pain and desire to quit so that I could battle with my mind when it turned its attention to my work.

Fear is the feeling something we are facing is greater than our capability to deal with it. I learned a long time ago, that taking small bites out of a big problem eventually makes it disappear or brings it down to manageable levels.

>Challenge is relative. I would find a 5 mile hike with an 80 pound pack a real chore. A marine is used to doing 15 miles so 5 miles would be nothing. I might want to learn something in which others are already experts. Am I willing to pay the dues to be there myself?< (don't understand the point)

I have committed to writing for a few years. It is one of my passions. I have friends that have started and quit in the process. I have become frustrated with certain aspects, but I have kept writing. It is a sign of our commitment and what we really enjoy.

One motivational leader that was popular in the commercial and residential real estate industries had many quips for the problems we face in life and careers. He said a commitment was indicated by the result. If we achieved our goal, we were committed. If we didn't achieve our goal, we were not committed.

He used the example of how many people would miss their flight to Hawaii to begin a two week vacation. We know in our daily experiences which of our behaviors is out of commitment and which ones we would drop if there were big obstacles.

Most of us would sacrifice our lives without thought to save our children. We might give it a second thought if we had to risk our lives to save a stranger. We know in advance when we are committed. Some processes may require evaluation to determine what we are willing to risk, compromise, or sacrifice for the result.

(This whole above chapter is too repetitive) commitment covered too many times.

They Should Call This Sport Paddling, Not Surfing

Some things go unnoticed or unheralded, but they are essential to the whole.

The human is an amazing life form, but where would it be without a heart? Sprinters are famous, but where would they be if walking didn't come first?

Not to belabor the point, but everything that happens in surfing, begins with paddling. We have to paddle to the waves. We have to paddle to catch a wave. We have to paddle out to the waves again to catch a second wave.

When we are tired paddling, we are through for the day. Some days are so great, I never want to get out and then on one wave I fail to push myself up for the pop up because my shoulders are tired.

At the beginning, our sessions are limited to the amount of energy we have but it usually centers on our ability to keep paddling out for the next foamy or next ride. I was able to last 20 minutes to a half hour in the beginning riding the foam, because the sum total of walking through the waves, ducking them, getting smashed, and paddling consumed all my energy.

After months passed, I noticed that I was stronger and could stay out longer because my shoulders and arms were developing more stamina. Once I was past riding foam and started riding breaking waves, I faced the same problem. I could stay out for as long as I could paddle and then pop up.

Even now on great days, when I miss a pop up because the strength was gone, I know I am getting to the end of my session.

Two things I did to accelerate the development of paddling stamina. Once I had moved to riding breaking waves and was on the outside beyond where the foam starts, I would always be moving. I would not just sit in the water on my board waiting for the next wave. I stayed in motion continuously paddling back and forth to stay occupied while waiting.

If you are in a line up and don't want to sacrifice your position, you won't want to leave so you have to look for more opportunities to paddle. Maybe paddle from one break to another or just forget surfing for awhile when the waves aren't breaking and paddle up and down the beach.

Maybe on a quiet day when there are no waves, just go in to paddle. Surf everyday possible so that you build your paddling stamina.

Then there are the push ups and shoulder building exercises. Everyday when I go to the beach to observe the waves and take pictures for my surf reports, I do my second set of yoga stretches. Then I lean against a low three foot wall and do sets of push ups.

I find that I like doing them in sets of ten. The first ten are the toughest because my muscles are tight and the push ups hurt. I find that after the third or fourth set, my muscles are loose and the push ups are easy. Then I might do thirty in a row.

I also like to do an exercise where I assume push up position on the ground and then bring my knees up under my arms and stand up. This assimilates a pop up. If you add a push up to each repetition, you are creating that much more benefit.

Hopping up on a short wall with both feet that spread into your surf stance will also build your quads and pop up ability.

An exercise that creates core and shoulders is the plank/push up combination. Holding the plank where you are in push up position but resting on your fore arms and elbows develops stomach and lower back strength. You can extend into a push up and back to your forearms to add more benefit.

Doing weights to build arms, shoulders, and backs can also help. I like to do cables. I have a set that has two handles and three cables that reach to a center piece. I can

wrap the cables around a post and do sets facing away from the post and sets pulling while facing the post.

I like to use the cables after a long session in the water to release the lactic acid that has formed in my back, shoulders, neck, and arms. It seems a good cable session relaxes my muscles and takes the tension out of my shoulders.

In the mornings, my yoga exercises are mostly to open up my back, chest, arms and shoulders. Leaning into a door with your forearms used for support and falling as far as you can forward, releases the tension in your back, shoulders and neck.

At the beginning, my neck was always sore. I realized it was the tight muscles in my back that were causing my neck pain. By leaning into a door jamb several times a day, I could release that tension and loosen my neck.

I also hold my arms straight out to my sides parallel to the ground and turn them with palms up and down to rotate my shoulders. I place my arms in front, to the side, and then to the rear turning them in each position. They are often sore as my rotator cuffs are stiff.

The more times a day you open your chest, back, shoulders with exercises, the more you release the tension. The pulling from paddling tightens the same muscles, so these are counter measures to support the muscles that are doing the work. When the muscles doing the work get over used and stressed, injury occurs which keeps you out of the water.

It is important to build the strength of the muscles and then the strength of the counter muscles to prevent injury and reduce the pain following exercise. On a day when the waves are great and I stay out until I drop, my muscles are going to be very sore and I must spend time afterwards loosening them up so I will be ready the next day.

So riding on the board gets the glory in surfing, but the real engine is the paddling.

Swimming with The Dolphins

One of the great pleasures of surfing is being close to the dolphins. When people are on the beach they see the dolphins touring up and down and often notice how close they are to the surfers.

When you are on the outside, you also notice how close they often come where you are sitting. Recently, I was about ten feet from a surfer and I saw two fins about five feet on the other side of him. Two dolphins were swimming back and forth, seemingly ignoring him while they perhaps were looking at fish underneath.

On a recent occasion, four of us were sitting on the outside when a pod of dolphins decided to take a close look at us. A baby raised its head above the water and just stared at me to figure out something about humans.

Another incident I will never forget as long as I live showed me how big they are. On a very quiet calm day with hardly any waves, I went out just to get wet as we often say. There were only two of us out near the stairs at Tyson Street.

We were about thirty feet apart as I approached the outside and I was just about to say something to the other surfer when I saw a flash below the surface in between us and a dolphin came up and completely cleared the water with his body like at Sea World.

Then he continued in the direction of shore with two more leaps, went to my outside with two additional leaps and disappeared. The other surfer and I were mesmerized and afterward said to each other, "you will never see that again".

What amazed me was the size of the dolphin. When you see their fins from shore or even out on your board, you imagine they are cute little things about six feet long. This dolphin was at least twelve feet long and had to weigh over 400 pounds.

After researching them I learned they can grow to 12 feet and 1500 pounds. They take care of the young as a community and the babies stay with the mothers for six years. Luckily they seem to think of surfers as brethren. I have seen them surf waves next to surfers. Was it a contest?

Surfing On Any Day, Big or Small

When I finished riding foam and was looking for the good days to catch waves, I would go to the stairs at the street above the beach where I live and where the surfers gather to look at the day's swell.

They would often surmise that it was too small or not good and leave. I would surmise the same and not go in for the day. I could miss a whole week laying these judgments on the poor surf conditions.

One of the things I have learned is that wave sets might be ten to twenty minutes apart. I have been fooled both ways. When it seemed small, I would get my soft board and as I started paddling out, here came some monster surf.

I have also paddled out thinking it was only a day for getting wet and paddling to find those interim sets had really good waves. I have also gone out with my expert 22 year old neighbor who has been surfing since he was seven and found out how much fun you can have in two foot waves.

He drops in with his 7'11" long board and drives the pocket for very long rides. I also found it is a great opportunity to learn. One instructor I talked to on the beach while he was watching his students on a small wave day said anyone can ride big waves, but it takes talent to make something out of small waves.

Surfing tournaments frequently have to suffer small waves like the U.S. Open in Huntington Beach this year. So here the world's experts have travelled to compete and show their stuff when waves are no taller than three or four feet. They have to get speed going down the pocket so that they can do their lip turns and cut backs. It's much tougher when the surf is small.

So now when I see it's a real small day of one to three feet, I relish the opportunity to go in. Most of the time I have found that it is better once you get there than what you observed from a distance. Secondly there are usually good waves hidden in the various sets that are arriving.

I have rarely been disappointed. It also gives me the opportunity to practice what I want to learn as my next step with out the risk of getting smashed as a result of mistakes. Falling in a 3 foot wave is nothing like going over the barrel in a 5 foot wave.

One of the fun things to practice is beating the breaking section and getting to the pocket to begin maneuvers. In larger waves, if you don't get past the breaking lip, you have to straighten out and head for shore or try and build speed driving at an angle in front of the foam to get to the next section or wave forming before it breaks.

On larger waves you can get closed out and smashed trying to learn this, but on smaller waves there is no bodily risk. After you have learned to drop into the face and then make the turn, your next step is to beat the breaking lip to get to the wave that is just forming to break.

The power is at the top of a wave and the closer to the break, the more power. So as you have made it to the outside pocket and the wave is losing momentum, you will want to cut back to where the wave is breaking to regain the power and speed of the wave.

This is so much easier and gratifying to practice on smaller waves before you get to the bigger ones. Once you have the feel, it is easier to go through the same motions on a bigger day.

Getting the Feel of the Wave

One of my big breakthroughs from riding the foam to riding breaking waves was when I actually started observing and feeling what the wave was doing.

When you are riding foam, you know where the wave is and what it is doing; it is pushing you from behind. When you are catching them as they break and riding down the face, you start by just riding them out toward shore so you are once again in front of or in the foam until the wave dies.

When you start getting an angle on the break, you ride out the pocket until it dies. You have the thrill of seeing the wave forming in front of you and basically just staying in the pocket until the end. You haven't started hunting the break looking for the power.

At a certain point you will start feeling the pocket and how much momentum is remaining. When you start to feel that you have now outrun the power, you will want to turn back into the wave to regain the speed. This turn is called a cut back.

After you make your cutback, you ride until you get back into the power and at this point you will probably meet the foam and turn shoreward until the wave dies. If you watch video you will see that the advanced surfers make a cutback and then when they have regained the power of the wave, cut back again to find the pocket.

In the early stages, you will not be maneuvering much in the pocket but you will start to look for which way the wave is breaking and make your first bottom turns or create your angle in that direction. Then you will start to feel what the wave is doing under your board and looking ahead to decide whether you should continue or cut back to regain more momentum.

As this skill increases, you will start to work on building speed after the bottom turn so that you can go from section to section and maneuver and do cut backs. Getting the feel for the wave as you progress comes with building your ability to build speed and do face and back side turns. (more later)

Every day when I go in, I have something on which I want to work as progress toward my next step. I might want to practice grabbing my back side rail or pumping to build speed or turning quicker at the peak so that I remain in the power of the wave.

When I go in, I look for the opportunity to practice today's goal. If the surf is small, I can practice with little risk. Catching a rail in a small wave is much easier on the body than catching a rail and getting smacked by a big wave.

Techniques for Early Riding

When I was learning at the beginning, I was picking up every surf instruction book at the library or stores looking for the little tricks. I could watch surfers all day, but not know how they really accomplished their turns or maneuvers.

I was disappointed in how the instruction books were filled with comments about safety and how to pick a board and then gave about one paragraph on how to do a maneuver. I found one great book called the "Surfing Manual:Advanced" by Jim Kemton that gives the best explanations. It includes comments by several of the worlds leading tour surfers on how they accomplish these turns and maneuvers.

What I realized, however, is that I learned on my own how each next step of my progress was to be attained by all of a sudden placing my feet different or placing my weight differently. Then I could watch surfers and see more.

Each time I have made an advance, I could then see how the other surfers did the same and how they were doing it better or what they did to move to my next step. It is a painfully slow process. We want it to go much faster and have bigger breakthroughs.

The breakthroughs come in thrilling revelations. All of a sudden we realize we are doing something we didn't know how to do yesterday. All of a sudden a light is created that leads us to the next step of progress. The progress is in inches not miles.

The large steps are learning how to paddle, catch a wave, pop up to a stance, stay on the board, turn after dropping in on the face, knowing how to keep speed to do maneuvers and reach the next sections.

Another of the early steps is learning how to get a balanced stance. The biggest obstacle you see with beginners is that when they jump up on the board, they fall off very quickly. This happens when learning to ride the foam and then happens when you start to catch breaking waves and riding down the faces.

There are two real issues in the stance when learning. One is that in both riding foam and learning to ride faces, you pop up on to the board with your feet too close together. This leads to real imbalance which allows an unstable surface under the board to tip you into the water when riding foam and falling off the back when dropping down a face.

The stance has to be at least shoulder width apart with your eyes forward, your weight, for now balanced evenly between front and rear feet, and your upper torso balanced between your toes and heels. There should be a slight bend in your knees so that your legs can act as shock absorbers and your body is flexible to absorb the board's movements under your feet.

(Some Fitness guides stress some running barefoot in the sand to strengthen your feet and get them used to flexing).

It is also good practice to maintain that low crouching stance when you pop up to give you a strong sense of lower center of gravity. It is important in this low center of gravity

to not be leaning your upper torso over your toes or your head is going to lead you into a forward fall.

The torso should have a straight back and a slight bend over your knees but the torso should create a neutral balance between your toes and heels. At some point you will be pressuring your toes and heels to make maneuvers, but the upper torso leads more in the early stages by turning the shoulders.

The eyes and hands should be pointing in the direction you want to travel. When you make a maneuver, let's say to the face side, your shoulders and hands will turn to that direction. When you make a maneuver to the backside, your shoulders and hands will turn to that direction.

(If you have skateboarded, you will know that when you turn your head and then both shoulders in the direction you want to go, your body will follow.)

Your shoulders and arms should be forward so that you are pointed in the direction you are traveling and you are aggressively ready for speed. The biggest problem I had when I started dropping down faces was my commitment to going faster as the nose of the board was pointed in a downward direction.

I would often be thinking "whoa boy where do you think you are going". My first reaction would be to lean back as though that would slow down the board. The result is that you fall off the back.

You have to be committed when dropping in to go at the speed of the board and face what ever is coming. After a while you don't even think about it, you just pop up and your balance is set and you are ready for the drop and the speed.

I found I was also no longer worried about the downward speed when I was no longer worried about wiping out as I dropped in but was looking at the wave to see which way I was going to turn and what I was going to do to get maximum speed. I was thinking beyond the drop to my next step so my drop in was being left to my subconscious which knew how to do it.

The drop in probably affects different people at different size waves. At age 24, a world leading women's big wave surfer said she was terrified of 1' waves when she started at the age of 14. A leading men's tour surfer said he was terrified of 6' waves at the beginning and then 8' waves and then 10' waves and so on.

Laird Hamilton had said to one of his cohorts who said he was afraid of super large waves they were facing that everyone is afraid. You just do it anyway. It is one of the things that one overcomes out of commitment and to ensure progress. It is part of what makes the culture a bonding process. Everyone knows fear.

Placing the feet is something you will find most likely on your own. Various instructors and books talk about the angle of the feet on the board, but skateboarders and snowboarders come to the sport with a feeling of how they like their feet to be angled.

Which leg you like forward also comes pretty quickly and if you have been skateboarding or snowboarding, that is predetermined. I don't think the instruction on the angles of your feet is that crucial at this stage. They obviously need to be pretty perpendicular to the sides of the board, but some like a front foot at more of a forward angle and some like it directly perpendicular. The back foot might also be perpendicular or at a slight angle forward.

I only mention it because these little things are often on our mind and we might give them big importance.

Once you can pop up and stay on the board through riding the drop in you will start to be curious about weighting on the front and rear foot. You have probably already discovered that sometimes weighting the back foot on a steep drop in might keep the board from pearling.

You will also learn that turning and weighting the front foot will increase speed and your opportunity to beat the foam to the next section where the pocket awaits.

I watched hundreds of hours while surfers rode waves to try and get a feel for how they were weighting their feet and could not determine until I started doing the maneuvers myself. Once I got the feel for how it had to be, I could then see what others were doing. Once I realized that the front foot being more forward or the weight on the front foot created speed and the ability to steer the board, I could see and feel how others were doing it.

I also found that a few of my advanced friends were never very forthcoming about how to do maneuvers or move from one step to another. They seemed to feel that the learning process is different for everyone and that they weren't real sure of what they were doing at this point. I think both points are true.

One of my friends had been an instructor and with a little goading, he would give me several valuable tips. He was used to telling people how to advance from one stage to another and he was aware of what he did.

In the years of skiing, I found the same to be true. Only a few really knew how to explain what they were doing at anyone point in their downhill rides. The terrain, snow conditions, steepness, and equipment all affect how you edge and weight.

With surfing as in skiing or snowboarding, if you want to accelerate faster, take a lesson from someone who can explain what has to be done. Surf instructors always want to watch you for a few rides to know what to say.

I found the same was true when I took my one snowboarding lesson. After two turns the instructor said “stop” and could tell me what I needed to correct. I have always been one to learn mostly on my own. I do observe others, read books, and watch video to help my progress.

Cross Training and Support Exercises for Surfing Endurance

One great way to make quicker progress is to get stronger and develop more stamina than the surfing alone provides. Paddling is definitely enhanced by doing more paddling. Whenever I was sitting on the outside, I would keep paddling for the entire time I was in to develop that strength and stamina. The results show up in months, not days or weeks.

To assist the shoulder strength you can do upper body exercises such as push ups, cables, weights, and even yoga. I try to work the counter muscles as well to be sure that I don't over develop the working muscles and develop injuries. Loosening and stretching is very important because the work creates tightness and tight muscles snap.

I also try to add aerobics. When paddling to the outside on a rough day, you might need to paddle for 5 to 10 minutes straight as you duck dive waves and try to make it to the next breaking wave before it catches you in the impact zone. This is when you would really appreciate the stamina and recovery resulting from aerobic training.

I happen to like stair climbing. Running is difficult on one of my previously injured knees, but when I run a few miles, it does help my recovery from a strenuous paddle. Running up my 40 stairs ten times before I surf also warms me up and gets my heart pumping.

On days when I know the surfing will be calm or when I feel more energetic, I will run the stairs 20 to 40 times. This is good for the lungs and good for the quadriceps. It also helps recovery on days when you are paddling and catching lots of waves in quick succession.

Biking is also a great cross training activity. It can build the legs and develop the lungs. Using muscles not normally used support the working muscles that are over used in surfing and can help prevent injury.

Squats are everyone's go to exercise to develop leg strength. The more advanced you become, the more power you need in your legs to power your turns. Whether you use weights or just include calisthenics that require the squat position, you will develop your legs, lower back, and even your breathing.

The plank is a second go to for developing core muscles. You lie on the floor on your forearms and hold your body straight off the floor for as long as you can. One minute is considered minimum core fitness. You can also do side planks and even lift a leg while doing so. This will find new muscles for most people.

I like to use a large flex ball for core exercises. I lie on my back and place my feet on top of the ball then raise my buttocks off the floor. I roll the ball from left to right with my feet while my core is struggling for balance.

I then like to take the ball between my feet and do leg raises. At the beginning you might do ten or twenty of each but after awhile you should be able to do 50 to 100 of each.

When you are tired surfing, the first thing that goes is the focus. You might then find yourself in a dangerous situation as your mind has wandered and you lose the concentration to see or avoid a big wave. One of my early warnings is when I miss a pop up and wind up riding the wave like a boogie board.

When I am not fully attentive, I feel it is dangerous. You might get hit by a wave or run over by another surfer. When you are not at full strength, your will to save yourself after a good trouncing is reduced. You must always have reserve energy to save yourself in a bad situation. When my energy is depleted, I get out.

Surfers Have Sad Days

As much as being in the water is important, we have expectations of having fun.

Some days there are nothing but close out waves and in our efforts to at least get some rides, we get trounced. No one enjoys get over trounced. Sometimes we get caught in a set of strong waves and rip currents making it a struggle to get to the outside. By the time we get there we are half used up.

Sometimes the sets that looked good dry up because the tide filled in and we are left with only a few rides. Yes, I have felt disappointment and witnessed disappointment, and heard it in others' voices. Even though we can feast on the minimum, we sometimes feel we have negative experiences that didn't live up to what we were hoping.

One thing I have learned to do, however, is rarely make excuses for why I am not going in. I have found just as many times when the surf looked unexciting, that there were great waves. The waves are subject to all kinds of influences. Those influences can come to bear at any moment to create a great set that was unexpected.

Most surfers have also learned that the waves look different when you are in than they look from afar while observing. Surf can change in twenty minutes or a great swell can

come up in twenty minute intervals. If you are on a reef, the waves are consistent. If you are on a sand bar, you never know what you will get.

I still go in each day with an objective in mind of what I want to achieve. It may be that I want to race through the pocket to catch more sections or I want to do a double cut back. I look for the opportunities to make my next step every time I am in.

One of the dynamics of surfing is that it can deliver highs and lows. If everyone can get perfect waves everyday, they would probably get bored. The fact that the conditions change and you never know what you will get make the great days that more special.

Like life, sometimes we get low for no reason. Sometimes great things happen that are unexpected. Always looking for the best and having an expectation of performing to the best of our ability and taking advantage of all the training we have invested will on enough days deliver the golden ring.

Where You Lose it in Surf Boarding and Life

You have a bad day or bad experience or a few bad experiences.

I have three friends that started surfing at about the same time and each has lost their enthusiasm. They found the going a little tough and really didn't have the commitment to learn more about how to make it better.

I have had the commitment to surf as part of my exercise routine since moving to the beach in May of 2010. I didn't start surfing until a month after having begun my exercise build up. Once I started, however, I knew it was for me.

I was fortunate to start on the right board. A soft top 8' board is perfect for beginners. As time went on I would check the surf every day like the other surfers from top of the stairs on the street above the beach.

They would judge from their whether it was worth the effort. I found in this process I would often miss a whole week because I was judging the surf was just not right. I later learned that sets are often twenty minutes apart and what you see in a few minutes might not be what is there when you go in.

I also learned that the waves can change totally in twenty minutes as the tides fill in or drain. I have come to the conclusion that I just go in every day and take what is there. I have found that there are not very many surfers on the monster days when the surfing is a lot of work because of duck diving, rip tides and currents.

I have found there are not many surfers there when the waves are only two feet because sometimes they are closing out. I have learned, however, that you can learn from each type. The waves are not always what you expect. They often trounce you. You often find great surprises when you expected nothing.

It's about commitment. What are you committed to when you begin. A real estate guru used to say you could tell your commitment by the result. If you reached your goal you were committed.

Seth Godin recently posted an article about how some people could put in a little more effort and become professionals instead of amateurs. I commented to him that people take the same attitude about weight loss or fitness.

People want to lose a quick ten pounds through a fad diet but don't really want to change their regular eating habits. People want to get fit but buy shoes or join a gym and that's the end of it.

The price of reaching anything worthwhile is facing the ups and downs. The downs look like total discouragement. There are days I am discouraged with my surfing progress. I just commit to everyday facing what is there and learning what I can. I know that sometimes I make advances of a millimeter and other times I go backward. Then on one day I make a breakthrough and I know it was all worth it.

I go out and even if there are not rideable waves I enjoy the warm water and the fact I am paddling in the sea. I enjoy being immersed in the ocean and realize how much better it is than sitting in my home or on the beach looking at the ocean.

My friends had a few bad days and didn't see themselves surfing in the near term. In fact they saw what a battle it was going to be to get to a respectable level. We can make those same judgments if we are in sales or starting at the bottom of a corporation or entering med school, or starting in politics, or learning how to mountain bike.

We have to understand our commitment. We have to understand that if we don't quit, we haven't failed. We have to have faith that we are able to learn and observe and ask questions and put ourselves in uncomfortable positions to grow.

We do not make progress in anything without leaving our comfort zone. We have to learn that everyone that tries to advance can have set backs. We can't be afraid of what people say when we don't make progress or even make fools of ourselves.

I have been writing for a few years almost everyday. I have friends that wanted to be writers but quit because ideas stopped coming or they lost inspiration. I have seen people begin all types of endeavors and bounce out when things didn't go their way.

You can do it if you want it and don't quit.

How Far Can You Carry Stoked?

For the surfer, stoked means adrenaline. It's the high before or after a session.

Before you go in your blood seems to be pumping and your adrenaline is active as you expect great things. After you have had a great session your adrenaline is pumping because life is great.

Gratitude is certainly at the core of stoked. You are so happy that you have the opportunity to experience what is going to happen. Afterward you are so happy that you are alive and have discovered a sport or recreation that gives you the greatest joy imaginable. The fact that you combine your physical capabilities with the forces of nature is a connection that certainly speaks of a higher order. It is certainly a feeling of unity with the cosmos or God or what ever your highest ideal of life on earth seems to merit.

I just watched "Surf School" on Netflix which is the Red Bull sponsored national high school team surf championship. Living in Oceanside, I felt the kinship as two out of the four final teams were Carlsbad and San Clemente. It is a great story about how kids raised with surfing and competition compete as teams and not individuals to bring glory to their schools.

But it is about the camaraderie of physically gifted teen agers developing a skill to their highest potential and throwing it into the ring to see how they match up against others doing the same. Surfing is a culture for each of them supported by family, schools, coaches and their peers.

Carissa Moore just won the ASP Women's World Championship in France. She started surfing when she was about 5. At 18, she is the youngest champion ever. She has blended a skill, an aptitude, a passion, an attitude, and a drive to reach a high plateau.

She is all in. Isn't that what makes life really special? When you become one with a passion and it becomes who you are and expresses what you can do? Flow or being in the zone is the highest form of emotional intelligence according to the expert Daniel Goleman.

Flow is the result of engaging in an activity in which you have developed through practice a competency. The engagement is without distraction and without thought of reward or consequence in the midst of performing. It is being lost in the beauty and sensation of the moment. It is having just enough adrenaline and before being anxious. It is an arena from which you never want to emerge.

The term "stick it" can apply to your best performance when you are in the moment and you have fully focused your mind, body and soul to perform at your highest potential. It takes courage to risk being "all in". It is an ultimate declaration of who you are and subjects you to judgment.

Going for it requires a suspension of concern for judgment. It is your declaration that you are going to put yourself on the line for yourself or maybe in front of others to see how much courage and how much talent you possess.

It is definitely being “stoked” and it can apply to anything.

Are You Fulfilling Your Role As Predator?

Even though man is a meat eater, we don't hunt our meat anymore.

We have a reptilian brain that reacts to fight or flight. Some predators are the prey of other predators and need to have offense and defense. Animals that are prey have only defense.

The world acts on us from the time we are little. I am reading a book about the Judds the mostly mom and daughter singing duo. Naomi was a single mother and then a single mother with two girls. She never had money and had to fend for herself.

Her good looks were a boon and a disadvantage as it opened doors and then made her prey to male employers. She was a waitress in the day and studied to be a nurse which she was eventually at night. But she always had dreams of a better life. Music became her path so then she had three pursuits in addition to raising two daughters.

When I surf I feel I am the predator looking for the right waves. Sometimes I am the prey as big waves trounce me. On some days I win most of the battles and on some days I lose most of the battles. Then I go out again the next day to win.

The world acts on us with global warming, the economy, taxes, and life's circumstances. We often get beat down by so many battering winds. The human will is indefatigable. In the army and marines, Special Forces personnel are trained to withstand the most trying circumstances that few humans could endure. They are trained to perform in the most exhausting and stressful situations.

We really have no idea of what we are capable of achieving. We often give up before we find out. We become prey and we stop acting like predators. Dreaming and visions are the light at the end of the tunnel. They are the path of the predator.

What ever you want may be worth pursuing even if you never reach it. It is part of the human spirit to be a predator; to chase dreams.

Surfing is Dolphin Friendly and Visa Versa

A few days ago four of us were outside south of the Oceanside Pier when four dolphins traveling by decided to come in for a closer look. They swam around as at ten or fifteen feet when a baby came up ten feet from me to give me a studying look. I said “Hi baby” but it said nothing back.

Dolphins care for their young up to six years and when they are born they are milk fed by mothers. Babies are nurtured by the community.

Recently when a few of us were out two came within ten feet of the surfer next to me. They were sort of wildly swimming back and forth as though we didn't exist. They often hunt as a cooperative pack corralling the fish into a circle or against a bank where all the dolphins can then feed.

Recently when just one other surfer and I were out on a very calm and glassy no wave day, I saw a sudden flash in the water between us. He and I were thirty feet apart and this huge dolphin breached the water between us. It was at least twelve feet long and easily 400 pounds. It did two more breaches toward the beach and then went outside of me and did two more; never to be seen again.

The bottle noses can get up to twelve feet and 1500 pounds.

There was recently an event day sponsored by the World Paddle Association. In one event everyone swam a mile around the Pier. I over heard one swimmer say the dolphins were swimming under them and they were huge.

They are friendly to man. They hunt fish, squid, and other small sea life mostly by sonar. They have poor eye sight and yet can find food and navigate the oceans with the use of what is called echolocation. They are warm blooded mammals that can spend up to fifteen minutes under water but mostly they live on the surface and dive for food.

One day I saw two surfers take off on a wave and a dolphin was surfing right next to them. I don't know if they saw it. Dolphins must think we surfers are relatives. They have been known to nose swimmers to shore and I am told that there won't be sharks around when dolphins are present. Yea dolphins.

Drive is An Asset That Can't Be Purchased

What creates the drive that some use to propel their fortunes?

When I say fortunes, it doesn't always have to be money. Sometimes a fortune is achievement. Sometimes no one really notices but a few in a person's circle. Not everyone can be famous or notorious. Yes criminals have drive too.

Some grape vines in Germany are grown in rock strewn hills that make the vine struggle through hard ground for nutrition. These vines struggle and produce some excellent quality grapes. Unlike their lucky brethren that are nurtured in Napa Valley, these grapes have to work harder.

What creates the spark that makes the human will unbendable in a drive for recognition? Sometimes the drive is for self realization. Sometimes it's for external acknowledgement of worth. It is the drive like a seedling to push through the earth and bask in the rays of the sun.

Seth Godin today writes about the mystery of success and how we like a story that creates the success and the legend. We like it better when the going was tough and faced seemingly unbearable obstacles.

I am currently entranced by the story of the Judds and how the single struggling mother Diana who became Naomi created the beautiful flower of two voices harmonizing in love, joy and triumph. It is also the story of Christina who became Wynnona and discovered a joy and talent at 12 that required years of polishing by expert stone cutters to become the diamond we enjoy.

Gabrielle Reese was abandoned by her mother at an early age and grew tall too fast to become an object of ridicule by her school mates starting at the age of 7. Always a rebel and fighting for some normalcy, her drive pushed her past normalcy to stardome.

There is talent, opportunity, hard work, and the need that creates some of the finest talent in all fields of endeavor. There are outstanding athletes, politicians, lawyers, musicians, chefs, writers, social workers, police, and parents that have stories to tell.

God felt no need to make things easy. Very few species on earth enjoy an easy life. The earth itself is continuously tormented with ground shaking rock eroding forces. There is a Will available in the Universe that can be harnessed to create mind bending, mythical, and legendary achievement. It's more than caffeine.

We should never cast aspersions to achievement that people were born rich, they have looks, they were lucky. There may be all that, but there are just as many with these attributes whose pedals never see the light of day.

We Have More Addictions Than We Realize

Addictions are habits or behaviors that control us. Some are good, some are harmful, some are just limiting. Some we don't even realize.

Addictions seem to serve us. We adopt them because they seem to serve our purpose, give us comfort, security, identity, escape, or grounding. I am not a doctor or psychologist but I do observe and recognize my experiences.

The harmful addictions like drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, food, and anger can get a hold on our lives that we don't realize and have trouble breaking. It is common that most alcoholics will not admit they are addicted and think they can stop at any time.

There are less harmful addictions that also get a hold of our lives that can be broken by substituting something else. I would say the world is addicted to their cell phones. People will say it is important they stay in touch as they check Face Book while riding their bikes or driving their cars, but this is a serious addiction.

Many of us have an addiction to our computers or the internet; so much information, news, and excitement at the touch of a button. I get news, communicate, watch movies, and listen to music. Where would we be without our cell phones and internet connections? The looney bins would fill up with twitching people.

I was addicted to watching CNN at 5 p.m. and as many football games as networks could broadcast for both college and pro. I realized TV was an addiction I could break and free up at least ten hours a week. In its place I feel more comfort and control and enjoy more reading.

I realized I didn't have to carry my cell phone and my world would work just fine. I was addicted to an American diet with certain foods that maintained my heavy weight even though I worked out several times a week. I started taking the most harmful foods off my plate and putting healthy foods on and lost 45 pounds.

When I moved to the beach I was addicted to visiting Dairy Queen several times a week for a soft cone dipped in chocolate. I substituted Snicker bars, then granola bars and I was finally broken of the addiction.

I am addicted to surfing like some of my neighbors and there is a compelling need to get wet every day. When the surf is not up surfers get down. I get addicted to the feeling of exercise and I can run myself to over train and then I experience lethargy and exhaustion.

I am addicted to reading, but it seems to be a good thing. I love to learn and reading takes up hours that I might otherwise use to contemplate my navel, but I don't feel up to the guru thing yet. I am addicted to writing in the mornings, but I don't see the harm. I do see how it grounds me.

Realizing, analyzing, and contemplating our habits and behaviors might lead us to life saving new habits, life freeing new habits, and more enlightened new habits. Addictions can keep us in ruts and make life boring. The best way to add some zest is to take something off the plate. Something big might lead to a whole new attitude.

Can We Have a Simpler Life without Leaving the City?

There are a lot of factors in the wind that says we should get our house in order.

Sometimes a simple life could look like downsizing which it might be. But seeking a simpler life could also mean a change of values that leads to freedom and happiness, not just deprivation.

In a great book, "Simple Living", the husband and wife authors Frank Levering and Wanda Urbanska leave their pressure packed jobs as Hollywood writers in Los Angeles to live on their families farm in Virginia. They are the third generation of an apple and other fruit growing enterprise that was dying as their parents got older.

They found simplicity and they felt deprivation but found several freedoms. They toiled in the fields while maintaining their writing and lived in an antiquated abode and drove a non status car. They physically and then mentally dropped out of the keep up with the Jones big city life mentality.

Finding freedom has a lot to do with the priorities in your focus. Are you trying to own more or be more? I have found in my recent years as I retired out of the real estate industry and moved to the beach, that for the first time in my life I have dropped out of the rat race.

I have simplified my life by simplifying my desires and giving prominence to being more. My passions have come to the forefront and I have eliminated time wasting and distracting activities that rob me of brain capacity. My passions are writing, surfing, fitness, healthy eating, and reading.

I have left out TV, carrying a cell phone, playing Face Book and messaging games, and my addiction to sports on TV. I have saved half my week and put in reading 4 books a week, writing everyday, surfing most days, exercising everyday, losing 25 pounds, and shunting the constant need for new stuff.

Sometimes the way to create more time is to take big time users off our plate. We might be faced with a void and fear of boredom, but the excitement of filling the time with something that expresses us is an opportunity.

We often over work. A quote out of the book makes a great point:

"The British writer and social reformer, John Ruskin once wrote, 'In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: They must be fit for it; they must not do too much of it; and they must have a sense of success in it. '"

To support not doing too much of it and having some success at it we need to have balanced lives in which many passions fight for prominence.

Why Beginner Surfers Get Frustrated

A little more than a year ago, I was a beginner for the second time in surfing. I learned in high school and then followed a life of skiing and snow boarding. My return to live on the beach made surfing a natural pursuit.

The first thing new surfers encounter, especially on a sand bar beach, is the difficulty of paddling against the power of the incoming foam. Two of my neighbors, a 30 year old marine lieutenant and a 34 year old body builder and skate boarder were shocked at how fast they were tired.

I was shocked at how tired I was at the beginning. Nothing will really create the necessary stamina except for months of paddling. Let's face it, if you can't paddle you can't ride many waves. Myself and my neighbors soon found that with increased stamina, we soon forgot about getting tired.

At the beginning the tiredness is accompanied with soreness and fatigue. I found that doing cable exercises for my shoulders and arms loosened my muscles and released the lactic acid. I also found that leaning forward in a door jamb and with my forearms on each side and falling forward as far as I could go, released the tension in my neck and back.

Then next step is learning to stand up while riding the foam. This is a hard step to avoid and those that buy advanced boards or go out to the breaking waves early may never recover without returning to this step.

It is best to get a soft top or long board. Both will catch the foam (wave after it has broken) easily and offer a pretty stable platform to stand up. You cannot do this too many times. I did it for at least four months several times a week. In the process, I got stronger, learned how to avoid getting clobbered and observed how the waves outside break.

The other common beginning mistake learners make is trying to stand up in the middle of the foam where it is very unstable. You must paddle to the front where there is an unobservable second wave and stand up in this portion. Closely following this error is the tendency to remain prone on the board too long waiting for stability at which time the momentum has left and you stand up to sink.

At some point it is time to catch a wave before it breaks. Whereas foam is easy because you just let it hit you in the back after it has broken, catching a wave as it pockets requires timing. If you paddle too early it breaks on top of you. If you paddle too late, it goes under you. With a soft top board you don't have to paddle too hard as long as you start early enough and are moving before the wave reaches you.

Standing up leads to the biggest thrill of surfing. Nothing tops those first few times. It's the first time your board will be pointed down and most people experience the surfers nemesis, the pearl. This is where your nose dives into the bottom and you follow with an impact into the water.

Your weight should always be in the sweet spot which is where your board paddles easiest. You can lean your weight back on the board if you think you are going too steep or weight the back foot once you are up. But you have to also be aggressive and get neutral and even forward leaning to keep your balance and stay up with your accelerating board.

The fear of the pearl often keeps people from progressing. As an experienced skier and snowboarder, I faced this fear many times in the need to get the boards going down hill to gather speed. It is a fear you have to over come in surfing.

I now am dealing with that fear in bigger waves where I don't know the outcome once I commit to going down a face that could be a close out. A close out is the nemesis that is faced after you have learned to avoid pearling. In this act, the whole top of the wave comes over at once after you are already in the pocket.

But, I digress. Getting past the tiredness, surviving the knocks waves give you while you are wrestling with your board, getting up in front of the foam, and then committing to riding down a breaking wave are areas many beginners commitment does not survive.

The Ocean is An Exciting Place

I have lived on a street above the Ocean for over a year and have certainly seen it everyday. Yet, I do not tire of it and in fact I have to see it.

Last night my neighbors and I were going for sushi in town. My surf buddy started for the back gate because it was the shorter route. I asked if we couldn't go out the front of our building so I could see what the ocean was doing.

This morning I followed my normal routine of getting up early and doing the preparation work for writing my post. After it was finished and posted, I took my camera to take snapshots for the three surf reports I do everyday.

I usually go down to the beach and stretch, do push ups and maybe run the stairs. I was walking with another neighbor as we looked at the waves and all the surfers in the water. I felt the best time might have been in another hour when peak high tide was an hour old.

But, the waves were breaking and I was anxious to get in. So without doing my usual routine I told my neighbor I was going back to suit up. I go in every morning almost regardless of what is happening. I hit good and bad waves. Sometimes I have to endure

the rough or bad days, but my routine inevitably places me in position when the days are good.

It is partly that I want to keep improving and it is partly that I need to be a part of the ocean experience. If I watch it I am only a spectator. If I get in, I am a part of the unfolding. I can say to myself, I was in and ready to receive whatever Mother Nature wanted to deliver.

Metaphorically I could say it is a God connection. I could also say it is a self connection if you believe everything is one, it is me getting in touch with all that is me. I and the ocean can become one as I immerse myself in it and even let it beat me up sometimes.

After I have finished my work in the mornings, I like to go back to the beach with my book and sit in the sun. I see the waves, I feel the sun, and I soak up the breezes and the warmth. Once again, I feel like I am basking in the bosom of Mother Nature and feeling the warm beautiful surroundings of what God has provided for us to enjoy.

As I celebrate the sensual pleasure of basking in the sun and getting in the water, I am celebrating what it is to be alive. I am creating my connection and it feels very nurturing. I can sit every day for hours. I like to keep my mind busy with reading and learning, but I am at the same time soothing my psyche, calming my nervous system, and refreshing my spirit.

This unwinding helps me feel fresh in the mornings when I need peak creative energy to create a view point on something affecting us all. The refreshing prevents burn out. I can have the same excited energy each day as it usually feels brand new.

When I have been in the water in the morning, I have a certain contentedness that pervades my whole day. If I haven't been in, then I am waiting for my opening. The ocean completes me. It gives me gratitude and greater eagerness and patience to deal with my daily encounters. I can listen more open heartedly to my friends and neighbors as my neediness has been partially satiated by exercising in the water.

Not to be under played is the fact that I usually paddle and surf until I am tired. This physical exercise creates a mellowness as well. Take a dog or horse out for a good run in the morning and they are content to sit on the rug or hang out in their stall and enjoy the rest of the day.

I used to get a great release from mountain biking in the nearby hills. The feeling was not quite as sensuous, but there was a combination of exercise, connection, and reveling in the beauty of the outdoors.

If you can get this connection everyday in some fashion, you are truly blessed.

Is There a Difference Between Commitment and Stoke?

The English language often falls short of expressing some emotions. A revelation can be a million words all reduced to an instantaneous flash. How do you explain the almost unexplainable?

I am reading a book wherein the father guiding his son in surfing is trying to explain on their trip in Baja what it feels like to get barreled. The son experiences it and he is left short of the words to express what it means to be surrounded by water that could crush you and yet seems to be caressing you.

Commitment is usually the effort to get better or reach a goal. I am committed to being a better surfer and yet I am so stoked that going in the water does not take much arm twisting. When I started, I would go to the surfer observation point and sit with the rest of the dudes to decide whether the waves were worth entering. Many days they would decide it wasn't the day.

In my commitment to get better, I decided that I shouldn't judge. Each morning I have a routine that starts around 6 a.m. with some writing and stretching. By 7 to 8 I am free to take my first look across the street at the waves and take pictures for my three surf reports.

I will often stretch some more and do push ups and then run some stairs for warm up to maintain my cardio. By this time, I am really ready to go into the water. Once in, I find the wave sets are often not what they appear to be from the street. Because the sets change every twenty minutes what was calm may soon go off.

Some days I get the giant storm surf that makes me choose between close outs and the rideables. On the next day I might get the perfect in between waves. I might do a second session just to get wet on a calm day and find really fun small sets.

My commitment is to keep going in and not judge whether it is good or bad. The more I am in, the bigger the stoke. The outcome is continuous improvement.

Timing the Wave

As I progressed from intermediate towards advanced, the most difficult lesson on my sandbar beach was learning to time the wave. Having just spent two days surfing Terra Mar at Carlsbad, I realized how easy some surfers have it and why they go there.

It is long board spot that favors high tide. The waves always come straight in and break the same although the heights can be different. They then break right or left but the right break is best.

What I learned was that you could anticipate each wave was pretty much the same. Because the heavy kelp slows the wave down, they are pretty easy to time. Because they are slow, you have to get way in front of them if you are not on a long board.

The difference at a sandbar beach like Oceanside is that several swells could create waves that all come in differently. A SW swell would have one type of wave. A SW mixed with a NW swell might peak and look different. The bigger waves are moving faster and will break further out and faster. The smaller waves will break closer in and move slower.

When you are sitting at the line up and looking out, you first try to determine how big the wave is. If it looks bigger than the average wave you have seen and is breaking out further you need to paddle into it and turn at the last moment into the face. This will allow the face to pick you up and take you to the top.

At the top, you can tell if it is a close out or will break more gradual. At that point you can decide whether to paddle into it or back out. If you get in front of this wave, it might crash on you or suck you over the falls.

If the wave looks smaller, let's say in the range of four feet, it is moving slower and you might need to get in front of it and be moving. Your position in the line up should be where you can catch the most frequently breaking waves without having to paddle too much.

For this wave if it is going to start peaking where you are now stationed, you want to start paddling to get forward momentum. Then when it is arcing over you, you might need to paddle real hard and kick as well. (I am assuming you are on a short board). A long board catches everything with less effort.

Having Fun On Small Days

Real enthusiasts know that you can always learn something.



I like the small days to try out new moves. Sometimes the waves don't cooperate, but I have not lost anything by visualizing and trying to put a new maneuver into my plan. Besides, the small days are often bigger in the water than they appear on the street.

At Oceanside, I am often amazed that the waves looking like two foot closeouts from the street are actually larger and more rideable once I am out. And it rarely fails that larger sets are rolling through the mix. When its calm and glassy, I really enjoy the aesthetics. Paddling gives me my day's exercise.

When there is not much happening, your buddies get together to talk while happy they are in the ocean instead of some place else. Today the waves were small but constant so everyone was getting plenty of rides. Then there is also the pleasure of telling your friends when they ask that "Yes, I was in today and it was fun. "

Having Fun in Life When Not Much is Happening

Turmoil in the Ocean is Often Matched by Turmoil on Land

A lot of beginning surfers give up when they face the exhaustion of paddling and the rough housing they endure from the waves. Getting trounced depletes energy. It takes a while to get into surf shape.

There has to be a real commitment to enter every day and develop the paddling power while learning how to avoid the impact of the waves. Both come gradually. It takes month to start recognizing your shoulders are getting more adept and your stamina is slowly increasing. It takes a while to learn where the waves peak and impact the hardest.

The better you are able to dodge the waves by duck diving, going turtle, paddling into the leading lip and finding the seams between the breaking waves, the longer your shoulders last. The longer your shoulders last, the more waves you can attempt. The more you attempt, the quicker you learn.

It seems I progressed slowly for a year until I started feeling real breakthroughs. By trusting that improvement occurs with determination and effort, you will see improvement. I feel sad when I see someone get discouraged and give up.

It isn't much different when trying to make your way in the world. Very few worthwhile accomplishments occur without going through the same daily effort and subjection to abuse. The world tests our strength, stamina, determination, commitment, minds, and heart.

Those who want it most, get it. Those who are more easily deflected have to find another path. Unless you are willing to settle for less, there is no easy road to the top. When I learned to mountain bike, ski, and snowboard, I learned the same lessons.

It takes a long time to develop sport specific muscles and stamina. By devoting myself to the task with the faith I would improve, I did. I wound up proud of my achievement in everyone of the endeavors.

I found the same thing when I started in residential real estate. The best performers were tirelessly devoted. I had to commit a 1000% to working as hard as they did and improving my skills. I had to learn marketing, soliciting, and negotiation. I was never a number one sales person, but even as number three I was earning a good living and way ahead of the other people in the industry.

I later became an office manager and had to learn new skills. Now I had to impart sales skills and motivation to people who may not have been as motivated as I was. I needed to have a transmission that throttled down my expectations to the level sales people were willing and capable of delivering.

Eventually my spirit of competition got through to most of them and made them better performers. Getting the most out of each person was the most I could accomplish. I had to recognize the varied skill and commitment levels. I had to recognize the different rates of speed at which people improved.

I had to empathize and re motivate people who went through discouraging experiences. No one really wanted to quit, but they had to develop the tools to accept rejection and short term disappointments. I had learned the best way to insulate yourself from a deal falling through was to have five deals working.

In every endeavor there are tricks and there are key improvement levels. Take the human fear of failure and self recrimination out of the process and people move through the process easier. At the back of most people's mind is the image of someone saying they can't do it.

The more successes a person has the softer this voice. The way to have more successes is to place yourself on the line more often. Fearing to venture forth because of a fear of failure impedes the opportunity to have more success.

Take self judgment out of the picture and put yourself up to fail as often as possible. After a while, it can even become a laughing matter. If you don't make it, it is often the opportunity for a new strategy. I have always held that if you don't quit, you don't fail.

Failure is often the inability to reach a short term objective. Long term objectives can be reached by creating a new strategy and moving forward. Several U.S. Presidents have faced defeats running for office before they started tasting victory.

Consider whether the short term objectives were your ultimate goal or just steps on the way. In reality, our ultimate goal is happiness. After that it might include family, friends, community, love, self expression, and independence.

You can try and fail on a lot of paths before you reach those personal goals, but you can also be enjoying yourself every step of the way. Take some time to appreciate the fact you have the opportunity to pursue your goals. Appreciate your mind, body, friends, and support. Have gratitude and it will make you more generous and attract more support.

Why We Love and Hate Routine

In a Face Book conversation recently with an old friend I commented that I had never been good with routine.

Now I live by routine. What I didn't like in the past was the predictability, the thought that I would be doing the same exact thing for the rest of my life. It would make my skin crawl and create the desire to bolt and run as fast as I could.

Now I love the predictability of routine because I associate it with improvement. I have been writing almost every morning for a year and a half. I have struggled and triumphed. It has become easier in many ways. It has become part of me. Many of my friends who could not write could not get into the routine because there was too much thought in the way.

I love to surf. In the mornings, I see surfers join at the top of the stairs over looking the beach and decide whether it's a good day. Wanting to improve, I often joined in their judgments. That means I wouldn't surf on many days. Now I have learned to just go in. The surf is always a surprise and more than it appeared.

I know exercise is important in my life and want to continuously get stronger. The process of exercise makes me feel better and continues to turn fat to lean. I know in the process I am making every part of my body healthier. I do my morning stretches and then later a warm up, then surf, and now in the afternoons a run.

I don't really think about whether I want to do it or whether it is a good day for it. It's just part of my commitment to becoming better and healthier. In the background I am continuously improving my eating. I have the challenge of feeling strong enough every day to complete my routine. I need fuel and recovery. I eat the best foods for each and take the most important supplements.

Having passions is great fuel for enjoying life. Learning for me is a passion. I read continuously and sometimes fear I will go through my local library and have no books I like. But I find my routine of going each week to change out my books allows me to find new ones that I would not have thought I liked.

If the routine means improvement we will continue to experience change.

Learning to Fall

When I first started learning to catch waves as they were breaking, falls were inevitable. The larger the waves the bigger the falls. When I didn't really understand waves, I might fall off the top and drop three to four feet. Sometimes it felt like water and sometimes it felt like cement.

Often I would hurt a shoulder or an arm or just do an amazing face plant. The impact can shake you up a little and be disorienting. I might just have to recover my board and sit for a few minutes as I gathered my wits.

I found the same to be true when I got caught in the impact zone of a large wave and got churned under water as I did several backward somersaults. I was more worried about where my board was than whether I was going to recover.

Ever since the morning I came to the surface after getting thrown by a small wave and the fin of my board was bobbing on the surface to meet my head, I have learned to cover my scalp and face with my arms. I reach my arms over my face to touch the back of my head and hold it there until I have reached the surface and know my board or someone else's is not there to greet me.

I asked one of my experienced surfing buddies about the falls and he said after a while you learn how to angle or ball up to deflect the impact with the ocean surface. I had always found that when I was falling my brain was too stunned or moving too slow to allow myself to think of a defensive move.

After a year and a half of surfing and in the last six months of surfing most everyday, I had a breakthrough moment. I was outside on a good NW swell where for a change the close out waves were breaking on the outside and the open waves were breaking on the inside. My first wave was on the outside and at the top I realized I was going down.

I instinctively coiled into a cannonball and hit the water with no major impact to my limbs. I was stunned that I had done that without thinking. It occurred partly because with my experience, I knew I was doomed early. I also think that because of my experience I was not always in the fright mode and was clearly in the present.

There is a transition when you start learning how to read the waves and how to ride them, that you are no longer afraid of what will happen and have a much better idea of what you want to accomplish. As you catch the wave, you have certain expectations of where you are going to ride and when you are going to pop up.

If it doesn't work as you expect you are surprised. You are also so attuned to what should be happening that you are more quickly alerted when things are going wrong. You also have a better feel for exactly what the wave is doing. Sometimes if I miss the pop up, I will hold onto my board to prevent it from jumping around in the surf independent of me and also to hold me up near the surface.

When I fall big time, I often suspect I am heading for the ocean floor and so while I am tumbling I will put out my hands or legs to see if I have touched or am near the bottom. This orients me to where I am. Then I can push off or at least know when I will reach the surface.

In small waves, holding my breath has never been a problem. I figure I am rarely down more than ten seconds. On a real big wave I suspect I have been under for as long as fifteen seconds. In breath holding exercises on dry land, I have held my breath up to two minutes. I will frequently practice holding my breath for up to a minute.

The body will easily hold breath with no problem, but the difficulty occurs in the mind. If you practice you will see what I mean. After twenty seconds the mind says it is enough, but you can easily overcome that. The mind has to get used to the fact that you can hold your breath longer.

The only times it ever became an issue is when the impact of the fall knocked the breath out of me and then I wanted air more quickly. This issue with breath is also one of the reasons that I end my surf session as soon as I am too tired to feel safe.

When you get too tired, your mind starts to lose focus and you might be too lackadaisical about avoiding a big wave or looking out for other surfers. If you were out on a big day, you might get into a situation where you needed all your strength and stamina to stay out of trouble.

Your ability to surf in longer sessions builds with time. You also become more adept at reading waves and knowing how to avoid getting pummeled. You also learn how to roll with bigger waves and how to fall to minimize the affect.

Duck diving, getting hit by waves, and falling all deplete energy. When your energy becomes depleted, you become more vulnerable to mistakes. I am always best for the first several waves and then after so much paddling and time in the water, I notice I become less sharp.

As soon as I miss a pop up or do something careless, I know that is a signal to end my session. My number one rule about surfing is safety first.

Can You State Who You Are in a Few Words?

One thing everyone has in common is that we are a product of evolution meant to thrive and procreate. Life has been doing this for 3.5 billion years as we progressed from bacteria and algae.

Your life here will have little significance in geologic time or on the fate of mankind. That shouldn't be depressing and maybe it's liberating. If you don't make the most of your time here, the only one that suffers is you. Many haven't noticed that as earth itself progressed from molten rock to today's environment, it has become a paradise.

Each of us has also become a great piece of work. We are perfectly synchronized to enjoy the paradise in which we live. We sometimes think of ourselves as our occupation or as our biological status like parent.

These are accurate, but do you have an idea of what your main priorities are that define you?

I used to think in one term and that was money. It's not important how I got there, but the concept clearly defined my pursuits, my behavior, my attitudes, my results. It defined how I spent my time, what I thought about, my priorities, my goals, and seemingly my purpose.

In that period of time, I did have and enjoy family, sports, vacations, friends, and spending. The concept was a little ego centric and not in line with our true nature. Now I have changed my concept to growth and contribution. It is true that I have more independence now and can choose my priorities.

I want to grow into the person I think has the traits for which I aspire and I want to share my journey and observations. I have lost 45 pounds through healthy eating and exercise and have gratitude as a result of my current life choices. I think both are worthwhile sharing.

I see many who have the opportunity to choose positive life styles involve too many negative addictions and I wonder what they see as their purpose. Are they just victims? Is your priority love, adventure, personal growth, wealth, sports, music, cooking, writing, family, work?

That which is most in your mind will affect your behavior. It will affect your life's results. If it is too self centered it will close off relationships. If it is of higher purpose, it will open up relationships. If you choose integrity it will attract people and opportunities. If you choose guile and cunning, it will make people suspicious of you.

Character is important. Gratitude or lack of it can determine whether you are happy or sad. Enthusiasm is infectious and born of a healthy attitude. Health is a result of controlling your mind and developing discipline. Courage is the result of both confidence and faith.

It's never too late to define yourself as long as you haven't hit the end of your 80,000 days on earth. (You can live the 80,000 if you are not eating too many French fries)

Could You Drown Surfing?

I am a very good swimmer and have a lot of respect but not great fear of the ocean.

After my second year of surfing, I have been so tossed and worked, as they say, that I have little fear of what will happen when I go out. It doesn't mean I will ride every big wave because I know that if I am not equal to a particular wave I will take an unnecessary beating.

Progress is continuing to take bigger or more tricky waves. I call tricky the close outs that require you to catch them just right, get an angle and get up very fast. It is real rewarding when you catch a tough wave for even a short ride.

I suspect that many beginner intermediate surfers like to practice for the day when they can go out in big surf and ride waves. It is what we dream about as the test of our learning.

I have learned enough about survival in big surf to know how to duck and bob and wait and run to keep me safe most of the time. Not too long ago, I was out on a big day and I got caught in the impact zone of a 7 foot wave. It rolled me over under water like I have never been hit.

Once again, I found that I could do backward under water somersaults, not meet up with my board, and surface with little more than the wonder of how powerful waves are. These experiences usually leave you a little punch drunk as the tossing has been almost concussive.

Yesterday, I ventured out into the waves brought by the most recent New Zealand storm. This storm just marched through Teahupoo in Tahiti during the Billabong Open and they had to delay once as 30 foot waves rolled onto the beach.

When I went out in the morning to take my photos for the three Oceanside surf reports I provide, I observed that some sets were huge, but that there were long lulls allowing one to paddle out. I thought I live here and this is what we wait for so time to suit up.

When I returned to the beach along the street right above the beach, I noticed that there was a lull. I picked up my pace to a jog knowing that timing can be crucial. I got to the beach, put on my leash and made it out before the next big set.

I had seen some reasonable four and five foot waves that I thought would be fun to catch in between the huge close outs. The first reasonable wave came by faster than I anticipated and I missed it. Then being on the outside, I saw a large wave coming that I wanted to get behind.

I made it over this big wave and felt like I did a four foot free fall over the back. The next wave I spotted looked like it was 7 feet and I wanted to get past it too. As I paddled madly to get beyond it, I realized I wasn't going to make it. Now I wanted it to break in far in front of me as possible so that when the foam hit me it would be a little more dissipated.

Unfortunately, it kept building and moving forward so that I could tell I was going to be closer to the impact zone than I would have desired. When it broke, I slid off my board and dove to get as deep as possible.

Under water it collected me with tremendous force and I started doing the backward somersaults I have grown accustomed to. The water in waves moves in a circular motion so that the waves energy returns the water particles to where they began after they have made a complete circle.

The water doesn't move forward, only the wave's energy. This is why you get somersaulted under water because the water under the wave's influence is moving in a circular motion where it rolls forward and then back to where it originated.

This time while under water I realized that it was a much stronger force than I faced with my previous seven footer. I could tell that in this commonly called "hold down" I was not being released. The violence to which I was a hostage was also making me feel I did not have enough oxygen.

Even though I know I can hold my breath for a minute, when you are being worked it seems the oxygen is being dissipated and that you need more before you have even been under twenty seconds. It makes you respect the conditioning of the big wave surfers who get pinned several times with hold downs up to two or three minutes.

For the first time, I had thoughts that I could easily drown in this situation. I was helpless to do anything to about the force that had me in its claws. I realized that I was not near the dissipation of energy that would allow to me to simply pop up to the surface. After I finally stopped tumbling, I started clawing toward the surface in a move I would have to classify as nearly desperate.

When I reached the surface, I had that spacey nearly concussed sensation. I saw my board and swam to it for support. The next large wave was on its way and luckily my travels had taken me inshore enough that this one would break on top of my after it had turned to foam.

I had not desire for more somersaults, so I started paddling determined to let it hit me and take me to shore. The storm force of this wave was also evident and it took me from zero to sixty in a few seconds. I held tight to my board as the foam had me

revolving around on the axis. I worked my self to the top of the board and had one of the fastest moving rides to shore I have experienced.

The over all impression was that I survived a seven foot storm wave that probably held me down fifteen seconds. I surmise I might not survive a hold down of thirty seconds that might be delivered by an eight to 10 foot storm wave.

It's good to know your limitations. That same afternoon my surf buddies decided they wanted to surf in Carlsbad which because of the large amounts of kelp and reef, slow down the waves. I was anxious to see these big waves slowed down so that they were more rideable.

When we paddled out the waves were huge but the impact of them hitting you was more mushy. I could tell right away that they were really not dangerous. We enjoyed riding the mushies that looked larger than they acted.

At this point, I was not intimidated by the 7 foot waves because I knew they would never hit like the waves I had experienced that morning. I didn't ride the largest ones because I am not ready, but my day will come.

Facing Your Fear

This week we have been visited by a powerful New Zealand storm. The waves at the peak of the storm were easily 8 to 10 feet. It was exciting to sit on the beach and watch these towering waves rise out of the ocean like a serpent before the lips fell over in a wall to crash into the surf.

I went out a day before the peak when the waves were up to 7 feet. After missing a fast moving 5 footer, I got caught in the impact zone of a 7 footer. I dove under, but it hit me with a violence and somersaulted me backwards for longer than I was used to. The breath I thought I had didn't seem like enough.

I found my self clawing for the surface. The violence had also moved my brain around in my skull giving me that pre concussed punchy feeling I have experienced in the past. When I saw the second wave coming, I swam to my board and climbed on for a very fast ride to shore.

I skipped the next two days as I watched these towering waves come in intervals and pound the surf in fascinating explosions if you were not a surfer and terrifying explosions if you were.

I had surfed on Wednesday and the surf peaked on Thursday and Friday. Thursday night I had observed from our Oceanside Pier as a few surfers took the waves on the north side of the Pier. The swell subsided a little and they were getting some good rides on a lower tide. On the SW swells the pier breaks up the impact and reduces the violence somewhat for the north side.

I decided to take a look Friday morning. On Friday morning I did my warm ups and added extra aerobics figuring I would not surf that day. When I walked to the north side of the pier I saw in the low tide that the waves had settled into head high sets. I figured now I needed a little rest and some food and I would return to give it a try.

An hour later I had suited up and returned to observe the 7 foot plus waves crashing through the pier and setting up the same walls I had seen the day before. Remembering all too well how the force was a little beyond my capability, I decided to tuck my tail between my legs and maybe try later.

I skipped the afternoon, but returned the next morning to a subsided by head high set of waves. I paddled out along side the pier which gives you an easy path to the outside. The pier breaks the current and rips of the south side waves and almost drags you out with a supportive rip.

I enjoyed a few waves and went out again on Sunday. The swell was still large, but it was easy to get out along the pier. The waves were still powerful and if you got caught inside after riding a wave, it was difficult to get back out. The waves pushed you northward away from the pier and unless you got out and walked back, you were done.

This is what everyone did. They got out and walked back. After one session I walked back and was standing observing the breaks. I saw that an inside break was giving a few surfers a great right break towards the pier and they never had to suffer the larger waves that were occasionally still coming in from the outside.

As I was standing there observing, an early forties surfer came up to me and seeing that I was still wet asked me how it was. He was there on vacation and explained that he hadn't surfed in a while and had a little trepidation about going out.

I related my experience and suggested he stay close to the pier on the way out and then pick the waves selectively when out. After he went in an older surfer with a nice bald spot came by to make his second round.

I had now seen him in the water two days in a row and we recognized each other. He said he had just gotten trounced falling into a wave and that kind of experience shakes his confidence. I could easily say that among the 30 and over set, the fear this day was palpable.

I also realized that the taste of fear is what also attracted me. It is like people who go to scary movies because they want to feel that fear. It does tell you that you are alive and peaks your adrenaline. In the movies, you know you will come out alive. In the water, there is no guarantee.

It is hard to describe the feeling I remember about my big trouncing on Wednesday where I was being violently somersaulted backwards and firmly in the grip of the wave for as long as it wanted to keep me. I had no power to escape. Drowning was running through my thoughts.

I did not have any great alarm or panic, I just knew that if I wasn't released, I could drown. It seemed that it would come on rather peacefully. I would run out of air and probably black out or take in that fateful mouthful of seawater and I would slide into oblivion.

I have read about patients on the operating table that had suffered heart attacks where their heart and brain were no longer registering. They were technically dead. Once they were revived they related experiences of having seen a white light and moving to a place of perfect peace. Sometimes there were visions and even beautiful music.

They could often hear the people surrounding them having a conversation about reviving them. Even though they were technically dead, their consciousness was alive and ready to pass on to world of consciousness surrounding what we call real life.

Many of these saved victims have related how they spent their ensuing years trying to recapture the seconds or even minutes they experienced having out of body experiences on the recovery table. They said they were almost sorry they came back.

I know this is a digression, but after my experience in the water, I think that the transfer from life to death isn't always painful. Unless it occurs from sudden impact at 100 miles an hour, the miracle of life is followed by the miracle of peaceful surrender. What a gift that you really don't want to receive until it really happens.

Fear is definitely part of the surfing experience. It becomes a little more obvious when you consider what I didn't see on these rough days; lots of surfers. Considering on how an average day with a suddenly good swell can bring 100 surfers to the water faster than you can say Jack Robinson, I was wondering where everyone was hiding.

The big swells are really for the very experienced or young and fit. The teenagers and early twenties are more capable of taking big hits and not feeling it. Yet when I returned on Friday and related to my 22 year old surf buddy next door that I thought it was too big for me, he said I don't blame you.

When he had seen me go out and return on the Wednesday previous to the storm's peak, he had then ventured out. That night six of us went to Carlsbad where the kelp and the reef slow down the swell and it becomes more manageable. He had said that his earlier venture at Oceanside had given him some fright.

Even though he is an expert that has been surfing since he was five and surfs big waves, I don't think he likes to contemplate the possibilities of storm waves. He doesn't fear falling off of big waves, but he clearly recognizes the power of waves that might test his ability to survive.

So, I would surmise that everyone has their limit line. One's desire to test their performance under frightening experiences can vary from person to person. Clearly we all have different perceptions of our capabilities and what constitutes a frightening situation.

I have read about Laird Hamilton, who is probably the world's most renowned big wave surfer, telling his fearful companions that everyone has fear. I have read about big wave surfers who said at the beginning they were terrified of six foot waves.

One of the women's top ranked big waves surfers after winning a contest where waves reached 25 feet said she was terrified of one foot waves when she began at the age of 14.

Greg Noll had once had on one occasion the opportunity in Hawaii to surf the biggest waves he had ever encountered. It was a giant swell and he knew at his age he might never see this opportunity again. Yet, he had a wife and children and contemplated for twenty minutes whether this once in a life time opportunity for which he had prepared all his life was worth the risk.

He decided to take it and did ride the biggest wave of his life which was at least 40 foot. This is the kind of waves that Laird Hamilton lives for. He even takes his paddle board into waves that are 30 foot. Facing fear is an ability that some people have in spades.

In every day life we have fears. Some people are afraid of public speaking. I would be afraid of having to sing in front of an audience. Other people might have fear of making sales calls.

One's ability to face and conquer fear is often a result of how many times in the past you have faced and conquered fear. I have had a lot of experience. There is a real rush when you face it and come out in tact. Adrenaline junkies clearly live for it.

It is important when surfing, however, to assess your capabilities and not be reckless. I have the feeling that I would not survive a 30 second hold down from a ten foot wave. So I have my upper limits. Now I know that I should not feel too great a trepidation from

waves smaller than that. You shouldn't allow fear to rob you of a great adventure but should have adequate safe guards to be sure you don't throw yourself into harms way.

Surfing is an adventure with no guarantees. Advancing requires dealing with fears because riding bigger waves is part of the process. Advancement in any life adventure could be the same. Personal relationships take us out of our comfort zone and I have faced many fears in this realm.

The real answer is that we cannot ever avoid fear if we are going to progress, but must learn how to manage it.

The Miracle of You

The fact you are here is clearly a miracle of life. You are a success of nature and you are nature. To the extent we create separation we create problems for ourselves. We are nature physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Separation leads to many types of death. When we don't eat naturally, we suffer ill health, disease and disability. When we are not connected mentally, we lack gratitude and suffer problems of identity and depression. When we are not connected spiritually, we are probably prioritizing material gain which leads to suffering.

Life has been evolving for 3.5 billion years. From bacteria and algae we have evolved to the animal and plant kingdoms. It is in nature's design that life would develop, adapt, procreate, and die. If you can't see yourself in this cycle, you are already rowing against the current. You have strong instincts imbedded in your reptilian brain.

Maslow's pyramid of human needs structures our instinctual needs from security and shelter to enlightenment. We have basic needs that have to be met and then we have opportunities to help us realize the beauty of the human spirit and experience.

If you lived as simply as a dolphin, you would have the need to hunt but you would have lots of time to play. Dolphins are extremely tactile between the sexes and nurturing to their young and females live to be 80 years old. Males, not so long.

They roam their environment in communities hunting on their own and in groups. The toddlers tag along feeding on milk for a few years and then learning how to hunt. The community raises the young and mothers tend each others siblings to give each other short breaks.

They use their talents to hunt and express themselves in play. Leaving the water is a tool to spot game, predators, and their own flock. Leaving the water is also a way to join their community in play. As a surfer, I see dolphins frequently and have been close as

they hunt around me, come in close to observe me, and jump out of the water near me to communicate.

We make life and happiness much more complex by straying from our roots. We seek happiness through acquisition. Each time we buy something to make ourselves happy, we stray a little further from our true spiritual needs.

Happiness is more aligned with understanding our connection to natural processes. In feeling it, reinforcing it, and expressing it, we are in alignment with our instincts, our psychological pyramid, and our spiritual needs.

When our jobs become our life and who we are, we have lost our connection. When the alligator on our T shirts becomes our means of self esteem and identity we have become engrossed in a culture that separates us from finding our true self esteem.

When buying the prestigious car becomes our means of establishing our alpha male dominance, we have sadly become estranged from our true nature.

As life has evolved into higher forms, the earth has also changed. Sometimes they have worked together and sometimes separately. The infusion of oxygen into the atmosphere 500 million years ago gave rise to a multitude of new species and the capability of using this free fuel to advance into larger forms.

The advent of ice ages challenged life to adapt to diminishing influences that reduced the chances to flourish. Chaos Theory is part of the Universal conundrum that would allow a stray meteor to strike the earth and cause catastrophic damage to an existing order.

Today we face many geological challenges such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, floods and global warming that mix the fate of the living with the evolution of a natural order.

When the earthly environment has been supportive, life flourished. When the catastrophes occurred or when the environment became difficult like falling meteors and the ice ages, life became a struggle.

Man has been given a brain that has allowed a display of what we would call brilliance. Compared to the average we can measure that some have advanced in math, science, music, art, athletics, and commerce. We establish scales that measure achievement and in scales of one to ten, some have hit ten.

But what we may fail to acknowledge is that we are all the same biological creatures that have basic needs and connections. We have the opportunity to express our talents, but the need to maintain our connection to the true nature of life.

We are not scientists, but can study science. We are not artists but can practice art. We are not CEO's, but we can run businesses. We are not fathers and mothers, but we are participating in a role that was intended to perpetuate our existence.

If we identify with a narrow range of activities, we fail to see the larger opportunity to truly understand and appreciate our opportunities, not just our gifts. We can be scientists and parents, but we are also dolphins, connected to an ever evolving stream.

We are a species that could show responsibility for perpetuation of the entire species and also protect the environment which has given us great opportunity. Or we could see ourselves as sales managers that create nice incomes and allow us to buy big cars, big homes, and big TVs.

We could appreciate our place in the natural continuum or become frustrated with our failure to advance in our job and then drink, drug, and smoke our frustration into mindlessness relief.

We could live to contribute or live to acquire. We could see our opportunity to make the environment a happier place or determine that we are owed security, health, and happiness.

Your Race Against a Slowing Heart Beat

As you get older your heart beat slows minimizing your athletic potential.

Even though your ultimate potential is reduced from that of your youth, you can still excel in less than ultimate achievement. In fact, many aged athletes are in better condition than they were in their youth from more consistent dedication and discipline.

I had an interesting week end as the New Zealand storm gave many surfers new religion. A friend of mine who has been surfing for 22 years and loves big waves is here today as he said because God felt it wasn't his time.

Caught by a wave in excess of 10 feet he was taken over the falls and blacked out before he woke and realized he had been "worked". It is possible in blacking out that you might take in that fateful mouthful of water or maybe you won't.

Even in his supreme athletic and muscular condition, he vowed that he needed to train better, eat better and hydrate better. He had gotten casual and reckless, in his own mind. My approach is that it is life and death everyday and I am always 100% when I go into the water in the mornings.

But in this last storm, I also realized that my strength and training were no match for the violence, energy, and power of mother nature. I have also let my training take second place to supposedly conserving my energy for more surf time.

But we are lucky. We have an immediate back drop to compare our fitness. In an [LA Times article](#) Amanda Mascarelli, discusses how older athletes are taking training seriously to regain earlier form and youthfulness. There is nothing that sustains the physiology of our form like exercise and of course good eating.

We are on a time clock. The body definitely starts losing nerve, muscle, and oxygen producing capacity as we age. Aging begins at 35 years old. How long can you wait before you want to renew the fitness of youth? It is clear that your body is degenerating and preparing for death as you enjoy those great pasta meals followed by your favorite dessert.

Exercises as simple as walking maintains and builds your physique and keeps your body in balance. Exercise allows the cycle of tearing down of muscle and replacing it with new cells. The body is meant for continuous destruction and rebuilding of cells on an hourly basis.

If you don't exercise, the body only tears down. It releases inflammation that never gets carried away by the renewal process. The harder you exercise, the more beneficial the renewal. The longer you wait to engage in strenuous exercise, the more difficult it is to begin anew.

As you get older and go over the peak and see the abyss, you might get invigorated. True fitness is the result of years of training, tearing down, and building anew. The longer you have trained, the easier it is to reach new peaks.