

## **Life Lessons From Learning To Surf**

### **Fitness, Spirituality, Passion**

Few sports have been more romanticized than surfing. Few neighborhoods have captured the world's entertainment 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 epitomized by existing 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 climbing 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 a beginner board through the waves.

(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 boogie 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 that was 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 8 foot mini long board.

A 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 because all breaking waves are bringing in the foam to the shore.

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 source, 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.

I got rocked so many times as I tried to get out into the waves. 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 it 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 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 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 or 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 incidental 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 or in between 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, each time, that you alone are 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 in, I noticed he was lying way back on his board and the nose was propelled 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 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 the feel.

The defenses to pearling are either sliding back on the board to keep the nose up or catching the wave at an angle so that the straight down plummet is avoided. If the wave is steep, but not a close out standing with the weight on the back foot will sometimes prevent it from pearling. Short boarders can catch and turn quicker to get past the lip in the first section. If it is a close out wave, the longer boards don't have as much defense. (more later)

Nonetheless, if you sit too far back on your board as a habit, you cannot paddle fast enough to get the good waves. Even if you are going to angle on a wave, you want to be 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 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. The next important factor is to ride foam that has enough speed and power to push the board and not waiting too long where the momentum dies. 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 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 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 friend after their session when they are all amped and 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 also waiting.

If the surf is up and rough or rippy or a combination of both, there is a real effort to paddle out, avoid getting caught in the impact zone of breaking waves, catching the good ones and avoiding the close outs, watching and avoiding other surfers in the line up who might be coming your way on a wave.

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.

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 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 and 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 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 are never the same, 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 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 may hurt 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. This is the stroke I use mostly now and like it. I can get a lot of power using my whole arm and open hand.

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 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 of "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 having 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 longer 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. It is easier to paddle than my short board and I can duck dive it like a short board. It catches waves like a short board and not as easily as a long board in small surf.

When I jump on the soft board, I can paddle like the wind, but I am starting to equal the paddling and wave catching with my fun board and so I am pretty happy at the moment.

Different factors will influence your choices. Of course, having a quiver of different boards is fun and gives one relief from the same paddling routines. I also learn different technique 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 room.

So 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 discriminate 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, loyalty, and bonding.

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 to provide ecstasy.

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 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.

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 or risk becoming an outcast in their favorite spot. 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 parallel 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 physical conditioning. 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 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 they 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 they 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 and far enough from shore to give you a good ride. 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 fight this foam.

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.

For real thick or powerful waves, there is an advantage to just diving under the wave and letting your board trail on the leash. 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.

There is a little wall of water like a mini wave in front of the foam and when you get there, pop up on your board in a low position and enjoy the ride in.

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 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 hands 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 fast, 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 no leaning over toes, go for a ride. 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 it 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. What has been 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 power of Mother Nature and the community of the line up.

There are lots of tests and steps. How about other endeavors on which you have set your sites. 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. A few stories of how scuba divers drowned with air in their tanks because they gave up before they were really out of air amazed me.

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 obstacles? What other activities are we engaged that will test our commitment?

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 came 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?

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 or found new topics. What is the difference between someone who continues and someone who quits?

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 would give it second thought to save a stranger if we risked losing our own lives. 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.

## **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 for a wave.

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 take off when the swells are resting 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 should 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.

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 nice 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 rotary 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.

They were almost in a frenzy as they swam around and back in forth with some pursuit in mind. They were not just playing. It was amazing to be so close.

Another incident I will never forget as long as I live showed my 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 in Oceanside.

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 and had to weigh over 400 pounds.

I could tell how much he weighed because his body volume was at least three times my 175 pounds. He was huge.

### **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. 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. Its 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 for 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.

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