

A Surfer Looks at Thirty

I caught my first waves in Santa Cruz. The east side to be specific, as it was only a short trip from home. There was always swell and plenty of breaks to surf. Low tides were a bitch though – the kelp would wrap around me and hold me tight, sometimes stopping me on the wave and sending me flying. Crowds could be brutal too – jockeying for waves with the other surfers was a challenge. Even though it was difficult learning, I didn't quit. I surfed all the time - early morning, midday, sunset, and even the occasional night sessions. Sometimes I had barely dried off from my previous session when I would be back in the water, riding the swell through the clear, cold waters.

As the water passed beneath me, day after day, month after month, I surfed better and better. In time I learned to make a snappy cutback, ride high off the top, and float over long sections. Holding trim in a barrel took some practice, but eventually I got the hang of that, too. I surfed well and I surfed often.

After a few years, I left Santa Cruz behind and moved south to the perfect headlands and coves of Santa Barbara County. While I didn't surf as much as I did when I was starting out, the waves I did get were usually much better. Sometimes I would get in a boat and speed to hidden waves where I would surf with a few lucky others. Those were special days, and I remember them fondly.

Yet my time in the water was not without peril. More than once I suffered damaging wipe outs that tested my ability to survive. But I would always surface in one piece, ready to surf again. From time to time I would sustain a few bumps and bruises when tossed about through the rocks. But I was lucky, as my wounds quickly mended beneath the healing rays of the sun.

As the years wore on, my time in the water diminished. I spent more and more time inside, my time with Mother Ocean no longer a regular occurrence. Sometimes whole months would go by before I got wet again, yet, when I did surf, the sessions were excellent. There were trips to warm, bright waters – Fiji and Mexico, and cold, dark waters – Oregon and Washington. Like an old pro, I now surfed only when the conditions were best.

“Matt, that last wave you had was epic! You surfed great today...when did you say was the last time you were in the water?”

“It's been awhile, Jon, maybe two months.”

“And is that your old Taylor you're riding?”

“Yeah, it's my favorite...it's like it knows what moves I'm going to make before I make 'em.”

“You've had that board as long as I've known you – since high school, right?”

“Aye, and today it goes out on top.”

“Grab the anchor, will you, Jon? Let's head back to the harbor and get home.”

He was right, it was time for the end; I was aging quickly. I had become soft, my wrinkles were many, and I had sprung a few leaks...I was never meant to last. It was better to go out on top and my final session was my best one; my last wave a fond farewell. I'll miss it, but it's OK, because on clear days I can just make out the ocean through the window from my place of honor and see the next generation in the water, enjoying our playground. And lately I've heard my passenger talk of a new surfer joining the family soon...perhaps he will pull me off the wall one day when he's old enough, and I'll surf again.