

I AM THE EYE

Late in the summer of '63 Jack O'Neil fashioned me a 9' 3" gun-shaped surfboard in his nascent surf shop at Santa Cruz. For anxious months my offiders and I waited expectantly for the board, hoping to launch the shiny thing at Indian Beach and join the fraternity of surfers, a mere handful, who paddled just offshore. Freightened to Portland, we carted it exultantly back to Cannon Beach in January roped to the roof of my '62 Corvair Monza. On a stormy Saturday morning we stripped to T-shirts and cut-off blue jeans (de riguer surf apparel in those times) and hit the heavies. After thrashing about in surf filled with logs and debris my ardor for surfing subsided. The board sat on pegs in the attic for years.

Thirty years later, goaded by my friend Knox Swanson, I resurrected the old board and slipped back into the sea. My surf work is very pedestrian. I'm more a paddler than a surfer, really, but I enjoy sitting on my board, undulating in the cradle of sea which is endlessly rocking.

Fine surfers are keen watermen whose savvy regarding the vagaries of wind, tide, and timing are splendid to behold. Locales have their legends, past and current. I would like to pay tribute to three whose styles and approach bear scrutiny.

Knox Swanson first nudged me past the shore break and into the lineup. Lanky and Nordic, he confesses to a certain awkwardness at land-bound activities. In water, he is eloquent. In his Beerman Creek hen house repose countless surfboards spanning the decades of modern surfing. When he slips his favorite - a leashless long board - into the surf line, one witnesses a synchronization of motion and form mesmerizing in its fluidity. Many surfers expend a great deal of energy propelling their boards forward to catch a wave. Knox appears to move without visible effort into waves, gliding like a needle down folds of green silk.

Dr. Hunter S. Thompson described what he terms "The Edge", "a place of definitions." At the edge "the strange music starts, when you stretch your luck so far that fear becomes exhilaration and vibrates along your arms." I consider my friend John Leiter to be a consummate "edge" man, surfing beyond the pale, where one hears the high notes sung.

John's approach to surf and wave challenges consistently separate him from the pack at the impact zone. While the gang contentedly catches a peeling series of overhead waves, John, eschewing orthodoxy, often homes in on a less promising piece of water and makes it work for him, moulding the wave to his will. In a brother-and-sisterhood of adrenalin laced riders, John's rigor is singular.

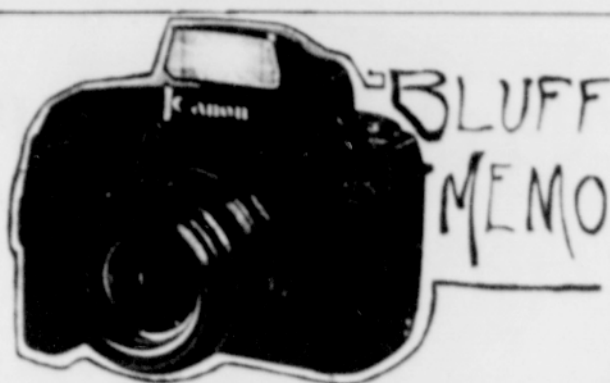
On Thanksgiving Day, 1991, a friend and I visited a local surf break. Freezing rain thrashed through gun-metal skies -- a fitting horizon for a fierce and ghastly sea. We chatted up two local surfers. No one in the water this afternoon. Too ugly.

Climbing a small promontory, I glanced northward. Several miles offshore, working through wind-driven spray, a small red speck appeared just inside the shipping lanes. John Leiter, alone, surfing the edges of the envelop.

Jack Brown began surfing at a time in his life when many people purchase Airstream Trailers, take up golf, and winter in the Arizona Desert. Faced with potentially crippling arthritis, Jack began a daily surf session that continues to this time. No surfer on the Upper Left Edge has exercised a more pervasive influence on surfing and its inherent benefits for mind, body, and spirit. His lean form cutting clean lines on the faces of waves is the envy of many a younger surfer.

Jack's dedication to the sport is an inspiration

Peter Lindsey



Not that long ago, while listening for the sound of the breeze in the branches, I heard one of those noises inside my head that signals a communication from an alternate reality -- or the onset of a virus. A few days later I was pleasantly unsurprised to receive a letter from an old amigo who now resides in Camera Bluff, Oregon, somewhat east and south of here. We've printed missives from the mountain village before, and enjoy Camera Bluff's race into space almost as much as our own. Oh, by the way, any references to the infamous Ricky Carkeys and the Vista Cruisers are to be taken with a large jug of saline solution -- or something

Dear Ricky,

Got together with Max and the Mind Patrol to play a Unified School District benefit, and your name came up as soon as we started to scratch out a set list. (We did "Sky Rat Boogie" to end the first set, by the way.)

Since the only way to keep some of the small schools out here open is to combine them, somebody figured to get all the parents together once in a while and jawbone about the school district -- what we'd like to have, what we don't want, and how to keep everybody in good spirits -- especially the kids.

When it became apparent that we'd have to give up the \$300 apiece football helmets and the band director, folks did get a little down, but then some options appeared. Jamahl, Dolly's nephew from Jamaica, had a couple of friends visiting last August. They worked haying in the valley, sneezed for a week straight, and showed some of the kids how to play soccer. It stuck, and since more kids can play soccer than American football, it contaminated most of the student body. Cheaper and safer, too, although in warm weather the kids do make a grid sweep for snakes before they take to the field.

Once it became known that we couldn't afford a standard music program, certain individuals (who shall remain nameless) from across the county got their alleged heads together and decided to invent a program based on the resources we did have.

The likelihood that this meeting took place in the cocktail lounge of the Peak Restaurant here in Camera Bluff is not general knowledge. The Peak Pit Orchestra has a reputation for wierdness that they don't deserve. Much of. So, in daylight, when they look more like normal people, some of the Orchestra members and some more respectable co-conspirators worked out a structure that gives all the students exposure to all kinds of music and to all the instruments that the district owns or can beg or borrow.

In addition to the usual bunch of brasses, drums, and reeds, there's a really neat old upright grand, and some digging around got us three violins, a viola, and the promise of a vibraphone.

Jamahl hated to see the vibes leave the Peak, but Gene the Jewel has to haul the instrument to his shop anyway to weld back the tubes for

low B and C natural, and Barney said the school could use the thing until it gathered dust.

It seems the Booney boys, Marko and Polo, were listening to the band over at the Peak one evening when some tourist's car in the parking lot thought it was being mugged and its alarm started sounding. It was a hot night, the band was cooking, and nobody wanted to shut the door.

Marko was staring at the unplayed vibraphone in front of him, trying to listen past the car alarm.

"It's almost musical," Polo suggested.

"Wrong tune," Marko grumbled.

"Wrong horn," Polo prompted.

"Maybe... maybe it's just being played wrong." Polo looked to the sound of Marko's voice. He saw the holy fire of righteous mischief in his brother's eyes and, as he has explained to the judge before, it's best if he goes along with things so that nobody, especially Marko, gets seriously hurt.

As quick as you could say "Salt Peanuts", Marko had jerked the two chrome bass tubes from the heavy vibraphone. Handing B to Polo as they flashed through the door, Marko led the way to the offending vehicle, a Mercedes, of course. Beyond agreeing that at this point the Merc could be considered a percussion instrument, the Booneys were still debating technique when the owner ran up and wisely turned off the alarm before attempting conversation with them.

"Sorry, fellas," sez the guy in the L.L. Bean jacket.

"Dee dee mau," Marko grunted.

"Drive it away," Polo translated.

"But," the jacket sez, looking over his shoulder, "I, uh, ordered..."

"Shut up," Polo explained, then he turned to Marko and convinced him that the guy was, in fact, leaving. Polo returned the tubes from the vibes the next morning, having spent most of the night on Marko's porch watching the stars rotate over the forever mountains, the only real sanctuary his brother knew.

So, Gene says he'll have the vibraphone playable inside a week's time, then take it to the school. It's unlikely to go unplayed, too, since Max has a sequencing program for his MacIntosh that will let him arrange for any combination of instruments, then print the parts for everybody. How'd you like to have Max doing the arrangements for your school band? Tunes the kids actually like!

One of the violins and the viola, by the way, belonged to Marko's wife, having belonged to her father. She left them when she left Marko, after he came back from Nam, after she'd tried and just couldn't handle it. They were all she left.

Marko gave both instruments to the school. Polo says maybe he's finally letting go of her, and Polo says that's good.

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UPPER LEFT EDGE AUGUST 1993

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