

A Surfers Metamorphosis from Stand-Up to a Kneeboarder.

IN THE DOMAIN OF PERSONAL FREEDOM, RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OCEAN,
AND THE ALLURE OF RIDING WAVES IN A WORLD BEYOND WORDS.

Many desire personal freedom; few actually seize it. Those that have it, hang onto it with all their might.

Surfing is very much about personal freedom, but following personal freedom can lead through many trials such as grief, humiliation, pain as well as to the greatest of joys, the experience is always a solitary one. But no one can take the journey from us, and in the process we discover it's all about the dance and our relationship with nature, humanity and ourselves.

In surfing you need wave knowledge and wave sense. All the best surfers have that ability to see things, but also to sense them with all senses at the same time. All faculties are at call, which is just another way of saying they are totally present.

.....DAVE RASTOVICH, PROFESSIONAL FREE SURFER.

I scribe this article in an attempt to contemplate and understand with more depth, “ My metamorphosis from a stand-up surfer to a kneelo ”, and why riding waves has held me in its liquid embrace for over 50 years, but how to put into words, that which is wordless, the act of riding waves, is a non-verbal action, surfing is a healthy, fulfilling and joyous existence. Psychologically; surfing is a place to escape, a place to manifest, to express oneself, immersed in nature, being in the moment, total freedom, poetry in motion, ‘To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion all in one’ – John Ruskin, and in writing this, I find that I am philosophizing that which every surfer know, the true cliché “Only a surfer knows the feeling”.

A good surfer has a ballet dancers prowess in a cosmic dance, an artist’s sensibility, an intuitive relationship with the ocean, one with nature, you are engaged and committed on a soul level, surfing for the art and pleasure of it, patience and going with the flow, spontaneity and enjoyment is his song, being present, take the drop, read and adapt, dancing as the wave unfolds, spontaneously and instinctively to what mother nature throws at you and accepting the ride, achieving a harmony and balance with nature. The church is big and varied and the passion to worship in Gods country is deep, heartfelt and wondrous, surfing is a peaceful sanctuary, complete focus, no mind, more to the point the independent selfless Art of Zen, the Zen of Surfing.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods; there is rapture on the lonely shore;
There is society, where none intrudes, by the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man the less, but Nature more.....LORD BYRON

BEGINNING of my METAMORPHOSIS

I use to surf stand-up and I've never had the urge to do it any other way. My limited interest in other surf craft ruins my chance of ever being a true voyager into the evolutionary world of board shapes, experimenting with different surfboards and shapes. But now remembering back into the past to the 60's watching George Greenough [the first short-boarder] doing some amazing turns and tube rides and being an innovator in board designs along side, Bob McTavish and Nat Young. I now see that there is more to surfing than just riding waves.

'Each wave is a new piece of canvas to recreate yourself with the universe'

..... THE AUTHOR

MY INTEREST in KNEEBOARDING

I started to develop an interest in kneeboarding, as my curiosity has certainly been aroused. And it all started with a good friend, Jim Gustard a very capable surfer who rides a kneeboard, whom I surf with regularly, when watching Jim surf in all conditions, seeing him tuck into the waves in a very poetic, flowing rhythm, and surf each wave to it's fullest. For the first time, I am appreciating what kneeboarders can do. In some way they are the perfect vehicle for the short and sucky waves that are common on our coast. They are easier to make late drops, and you can still use your body to drive into turns generating speed like a stand-up, pulling off full arcing turns and tuck into the barrel all done in a low centre of gravity.



JIM GUSTARD – CAMEL ROCK, FAR SOUTH COAST NSW/PHOTO - ARVIND

'The freedom experienced through surfing eventually teaches us the rules of Mother Nature, the social impact of co-existing, and hopefully it helps to bring about balance in our attitudes on how we treat each other'

..... GEORGE DOWNING, HAWAIIAN SURF PIONEER

MY OWN TRANSFORMATION

My own metamorphosis started happening a few years ago after a major surgical operation, one day the waves at my local break were a perfect barrelling 5-6ft left handed wave, still recovering from the operation, but wanting to go for a surf, I grabbed my sons bodyboard and

got into some amazing waves, that experience was very exhilarating and very much a glimpse into my own personal relationship with riding waves, when I recovered and got back into riding my 6'8" surfboard, I was not getting to my feet fast enough, so I started riding bigger and fatter boards up to 7'4" to get into the waves early, but due to my age and back condition, I was messing up about 30% to 35% of the waves that I was catching, just couldn't stand up in time, ending up sliding down the face in a half prone position, so I kept buying and using different boards, but to no avail, then a breakthrough happened. Jim Gustard invited me on a surf trip to New Zealand and part of the trip we would be stopping off at the 2009 World Kneeboard Championship at Opunake, New Zealand, as Jim had entered, I did the trip to Opunake with Jim, and after watching the World title and being absolutely stoked in seeing what these guys on the original short boards were pulling off; also the surfing brotherhood and the camaraderie that the Kneeboard surfers shared with each other reminded me of the early year of surfing, it felt more like a cohesive movement of like-minded individuals that is rarely found these days in stand-up surfing as many are lost in surfing's relentless commercialised cultural expansion wanting to be the best in the water, star mentality, that the waves belong to them. That they entitled to every wave, interested in their own immediacy and desires, with little regard and respect for other surfers.

And the kneelers that I met were all very outgoing, sharing and inviting all to understand just what they do, the mateship amongst kneeboarders is very different to any other segment of surfing and I suspect that's because only a kneeboarder knows the feeling, and watching Simon Farrer surf on his Flashpoint board, it was pure poetry in motion, I was transfixed, remembering the experience that I had from riding the bodyboard, I then decided to try a kneeboard. Getting back to Aussie. I purchased a second hand board from Rob Slater of Drift kneeboard, which I started to use regularly, but at first I was a bit insecure to paddle out at my local break, knowing the reaction that I would get, I knew I would get a bit of a roasting and would have to toughen up and accept the cripple bit, but my doubts on how I would be accepted at was confirmed after I was getting some amazing tube rides, yes surfing is surfing, and more and more I was not riding my stand up 7' thruster, until I noticed that my quiver of stand up boards were lying idle, so I started selling them off, buying and trying different kneeboard brands and shapes to suit my riding style. I was holding on to one stand-up board and telling all my friends that I will be still switching between the two styles of boards, until one day, I finally realized that I had morphed into a full fledge Kneelo, now I surf totally kneeling, praying to the Gods.

Oh what a feeling!

...The indescribable experience of riding on the edge of space & time – sliding down a wave, leaning into the wall, picking up speed, moving with the wave, total synchronicity, total enthusiasm, doing a few moves as the wave call to you, a long sweeping poetic cut back, a fast turn, as the inside section smiles at you, picking up speed and for a few seconds, being inside Gods own church.....THE AUTHOR

LEARNING to RIDE KNEELO

Teaching myself to kneelboard by watching other kneelos and putting my own wave experience into play, it all worked for me, the shift was easy, the change felt like a very natural thing, and understanding that the basic board shape was different from a short stand-up board, more width in the middle, as you are doing the same moves, but from the knees up. Now and then I hear 'stand up you cripple'.... [No one to my knowledge ever call George Greenough, one of the first kneelos and the first shortboarder....a cripple] but I just laugh at the comment, and If I say something, it would be, try it first before you make a comment, I'll lend you one of mine, or maybe you harbour some secret resentment of the fact that we can take off deeper and later than stand-up surfers.

'Surfing is the art of making spontaneous change without any negotiation. When a surfer catches a wave he chooses his approach, a direction, but the wave has a mind of its own. It changes its size, speed, position on the reef. And surfers ride those changes with their lives. And just like a bullfighter, there's no negotiation with a bull – there's no negotiation with our mighty ocean. I call it free-riding life – it breeds versatility, adaptability. I'm honoured to be a surfer in this life.

..... ROB PAGE



SIMON FARRER – OPUNAKE NZ/PHOTO - ARVIND

KNEEBOARDING NOW

Well all I can say is that in riding a kneeboard I have a big grin on my face every time that I'm in the water, the pleasure and enjoyment of being closer to the waves, and the amount of tube rides that I've had in the last 16 months has enhanced my own soulful poetic approach and outlook to surfing.

"The wave is just a minor aspect of surfing, it's not the quality of the wave, but what the surfer makes of it, and It is not how good you are at something, it is how good that something makes you feel", and now after over 50 years of surfing, the essence of surfing is so mixed up in my own innate nature, that the experience is nothing less than soulful. In riding a kneeboard, my love affair with surfing has leapt to another dimension, I now keep falling in love, over and over again, the ocean is so magnificent, peaceful and a magical teacher.

A good surfer has abilities, knowledge, style, intuition, relating with the waves, poetry in motion, and the only way I can describe this act, it is like a ballet dancer, dancing on the edge of space and time in a cosmic dance.

... Just for the dance itself!..... THE AUTHOR



ALBERT MUNOZ– WOOLLONGONG NSW/PHOTO - MICHAEL MCGUIRE

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED THROUGH SURFING : The Joy of the Dance – Riding on the Edge of Space and Time

You're in the ocean, immersed in nature, you patiently wait for the wave, it comes to you, you cannot make it, learning patience and acceptance, enjoying being immersed. Rising out of the deep ocean a wave journeys across the ocean, it takes a lot of energy for the earth and cosmos to create it. Sitting silently, eyes searching, you first see this lump on the horizon, as it moves closer, you size up the wave, it's direction, you turn your board and start paddling, the wave picks you up and carries you forward, you are now committed 100%, then it rears up, you ride the shifting path spontaneously, a surfer never really knows what they are in for when sizing up a wave, but is ready for the dance.

What we are doing gliding along nature's undulating waves, is being totally present, the here and now. In this total acceptance comes enjoyment and enthusiasm, you are free. I have been awoken to this great truth every day that I am in the ocean, Yes, life is a dance and the ocean is a magical teacher.

To me surfing is more Art than a sport, a personal connection with the waves and ocean. Poetry in motion, this dance, results in an intuitive spontaneous relationship with nature and myself. Surfing has transformed my life, this energy, this ecstatic, esoteric state of riding nature's waves, has vibrated through my work as a filmmaker, photographer, family man and environmentalist. I am not trying to be idealistic or spiritual, but this truth is more to the point of our existence, not the greed of wealth or destruction of our planet to accumulate more and more, nor the distractions, that infects nearly every area of western life. Freedom and being present to the dance is more to the point of our existence.

'The ancient yogis of India, they were pretty much focused on life as the evolution of the spirit, and what they learnt was two of the keys to that were intuition and spontaneity. So that was what the ancient yogis practised – any opportunity to use spontaneity and intuition was an opportunity to evolve your spirit... Every time a surfer paddles out and takes off on a wave, that wave is brand new, it's never broken before, it's never been surfed before. By them just taking off and riding that wave they're giving their spirit an opportunity to evolve because they have to tap into their intuition and spontaneity just as the nature of being a surfer. Every surfer, whether he knows it or not, is practising almost a Zen art, where they are tapping into those two things, the key elements of wisdom.'

.....CHRIS LANE, MUSICIAN, FROM THE FILM, LIFE LIKE LIQUID.

A GLIMPSE INTO A WAVE EXPERIENCE ON A KNEEBOARD

Here is a little glimpse in a moment of time from a ride I had a while ago: We had a very unusual amount of rain and the river mouth opened up and carried a lot of sand out to the headland and created this magical left hand bank, I was surfing on the out-going tide, getting some amazing barrels, on one ride I cut back for the inside section, as I turned into it, the back wash hit the wall and create a large cavern, I instinctively knew that I wouldn't make it, but at the same time instinctively went for it, well the wall hollowed out even more, and through itself totally over my head, I was in this cave, this amazing colourful sparkling iridescent emerald cathedral, and the opening at the other end was getting smaller and smaller and finally closed, at the same time the whole mass of water hit the shallow sand bank, the bottom fell out of the wave and the whole roof caved in on me and I got buried, all this happened in a split second, but it is embedded in my cortex as an amazing glimpse, for that split second I was in gods own church. And it was a rapturous experience.

CONCLUSION

For over 50 years that I spent on stand-up boardriding and loved it, I am very passionate about surfing, but now I am a devoted kneelo, it has changed my surfing outlook. Reflecting on what I have accomplished and where I am heading, the challenge for me now is Kneeboarding in radical surfing conditions, riding a kneeboard in 'deeper, longer tube riding and sensations that I have never had really experienced standing up', also I have rekindled a passion for the hollow parts of waves that was not really possible in my older years. I have had some of my best sessions with deep barrels conditions where surfboard riders would struggle to fit inside.

'There is beauty in everyone's style and how you surf a wave is indicative of your personality...sort of tells something deeper about you. Surfing is surfer's art. Surfing is a way to express yourself and a lot of people don't think of it that way. Sometimes that sounds deep and silly, but essentially it is true.

..... KELLY SLATER

And as Jim Gustard once said; a kneeboarder is closer to the waves face, the optical view is 180 degrees; so much more information is being captured, that's imprinted, enhancing the experience and enjoyment.

I absolutely love kneeboarding and the great people and personality's associated with it, and I thank them for sharing the experience. A special thanks to Rob Slater, Jim Gustard, Simon Farrer, Baden Smith, John Clingan, Bruce Hart and Michael McGuire for direction, innovation and manoeuvrers.

And as the earth turns, the oceans roar, and the waves move towards the coast, somewhere, someone will be riding them. I feel blessed to have the freedom to ride this planet's waters and experience my own poetry in motion....Have fun and enjoy the dance.

Writing this essay has inspired me, it's late afternoon a fresh light southwesterly is blowing, the sun is warm. Enough of me indulging in my own self-importance, I'm off to one of my favourite back beaches for a late one, **TO GLIDE IN GOD'S OWN BACKYARD.**

A surfer's life is a life of riding illusions... But exactly how far that illusion might stretch varies from individual to individual, what we know for certain is a wave comes across the ocean, it is here one minute and gone the next, and this is what we choice to do. When you are riding a wave it reveals who we are, and the other certainty is that I will be looking seaward for the next illusion for as long as I can.

.....THE AUTHOR, AGE 64, SURFING SINCE 1959



ARVIND – GOLF COURSE REEF, ULLADULLA NSW/PHOTO - JIM GUSTARD