

Reflections of an Aging Surfer Dude

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I am proud to be one among an elite, highly select group of Unificationists: First Gen Surfer Dudes. There are many surfers now among our younger generation, including several among my own flock. But the name list of legendary surfing pioneers among the elder generation is brief, including Jack Ashworth, John Hessel, John Modesett and myself.

I received the request from Carol Pobanz to write this short article the day after returning from an extended surfing trip to Kauai (northernmost island of Hawaii). This was my only surfing trip this year, thinly disguised as a destination wedding trip for my wonderful nephew Jakob and his bride Alyssa. Other than the two days of wedding events, we paddled out into overhead surf at Hanalea Bay (North Shore of Kauai) once or twice each day. To say the least, I now struggle to catch my share of waves in a crowded and competitive line-up. Even more challenging than muscular exhaustion, my biggest fight is trying to shrug off a deep sense of discouragement and sadness, that the "glory days" of my surfing career are behind me.

We started surfing when I was 13, in the irresistible era of the Beach Boys and The Endless Summer. At that time, the sport was in its infancy, perhaps a couple thousand surfers in each of a handful of surfer communities: in Southern California, Florida, Hawaii and Australia.



Surfing was a solitary and rugged adventure back then. I learned to ride waves, wearing a thick scuba diving wetsuit, in the cold waters of Southern Maine, New Hampshire and Cape Cod. My small group of high school buddies were obsessed with the sport. We surfed year-round, and took unforgettable surfing adventures to Virginia, California and Mexico.

Becoming a Unificationist at age 19 radically transformed my life including my values and passions. I put away my two surfboards, with the expectation of never riding waves again. Then one day, at least 15 years later, my two sons found those two dusty surfboards buried away in a basement closet. In a moment that we will never forget, they brought them before me as I was sitting out on our front porch. It was as if they were presenting hard evidence of the secrets of my past life, seeking to force a confession regarding my misspent youth.

That conversation with my two sons was the starting point of Phase 2 of my surfing career - surfing as a family sport. I taught my two sons to surf and showed them the best "breaks" in New England. Eventually, we started taking adventurous surfing trips together - Southern California, Northern California, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Hawaii, Barbados, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and more.

Surfing, along with skiing, is now an integral part of our family culture and identity. Paddling out to a point break; being surrounded by the breathtaking beauty of the sky, moving ocean and shore; experiencing the muscular power of ocean swells; paddling into and connecting with the invisible power of that wave, the power of God's creation, for just a few quick turns, to me is a holy experience like no other.



Absolutely, some of the most physically challenging but also holiest experiences of my life have been while surfing. I am grateful to God for every surfing trip, every surfing session, and every wave that has been part of my life. And also to John Hessel, who has been my surfing partner on trips to El Salvador and Nicaragua during what now seems to be Phase 3 of my surfing career.

Thanks to massive amounts of information about surf breaks that is now available on the internet, and the celebrity status of 11-time World Champion Kelly Slater, surfing has been promoted to become a fully commercialized mainstream sport. Now there are many millions of surfers in the U.S. and all over the world. Every single surf break is overcrowded. So, the sport has fundamentally changed. But, at the same time, surfing now has a more profound context for me than during my teenage years. I always pray before paddling out into the line-up, inviting my Heavenly Parent to please enjoy His magnificent creation through me. After kicking out at the end of a ride, I always say "Thank you Father!" out loud, at least once, three times after a really good wave.

I am the founding father of surfing in my family. However, last month in Kauai, I was completely outperformed by my younger sibling, my son, and my nieces and nephews. Very discouraging! However, I am comforted (and I am being 100% serious about this) by my expectation that even better waves, much less crowded line-ups, and countless glassy point breaks, await us all in the spiritual world. As a devoted student of Dr. Yong, I am making spiritual preparations for that now.