

"Let me see. Nail down the lid; caulk the seams; pay over the same with pitch; batten them down tight, and hang it with the snap-spring over the ship's stern. Were ever such things done before with a coffin?"

Everyone who has read Moby Dick knows that Ishmael is the lone survivor from Captain Ahab's epic battle with the white whale. The Pequod sinks and the coffin, originally made for the cannibal Queequeg, surfaces to save Ishmael who narrates the story to us all.

"Journals from the Edge" is based on my family's saga with war trauma. One of my metaphorical coffins in this story is a literal floating object—a surfboard.

Herman Melville, the author of "Moby Dick," visited Hawaii in the late 1800's. This was his impression of surfing.

"Past the break in the reef, wide banks of coral shelve off, creating the bar where the waves muster for the onset, thundering in water bolts that shake the whole reef till its very spray trembles. And then is it that the swimmers of Ohonoo most delight to gambol in the surf."

"For this sport a surfboard is indispensable, some five feet in length, the width of a man's body, convex on both sides, highly polished, and rounded at the ends. It is held in high estimation, invariably oiled after use, and hung up conspicuously in the dwelling of the owner."

"Ranged on the beach, the bathers by hundreds dash in and, diving under the swells, make straight for the outer sea, pausing not till the comparatively smooth expanse beyond has been gained. Here, throwing themselves upon their boards, tranquilly they wait for a billow that suits."

"Snatching them up, it hurries them landward, volume and speed both increasing till it races along a watery wall like the smooth, awful verge of Niagara. Hanging over this scroll, looking down from it as from a precipice, the bathers halloo, every limb in motion to preserve their place on the very crest of the wave."

“Should they fall behind, the squadrons that follow would overwhelm them; dismounted and thrown forward, as certainly would they be run over the steed they ride. 'Tis like charging at the head of cavalry; you must on.”

“An expert swimmer shifts his position on his plank, now half striding it and anon, like a rider in the ring, poising himself upright in the scud, coming on like a man in the air.”

“At last all is lost in scud and vapor, as the overgrown billow bursts like a bomb. Adroitly emerging, the swimmers thread their way out and, like seals at the Orkneys, stand dripping upon the shore.”

The first European explorers to the Hawaiian Islands witnessed surfing in the late 1700's and it continued as a favored pastime in Hawaii all through the inter-war years of the 1920-30's when the Waikiki beach boy lifestyle, personified by Duke Kahanamoku, was in full swing. After WWII, surfing became popular in California. Hobie Alter was born in the 30's and led baby boomers into the sport by creating a surf shop. He pioneered the shaping of balsa wood boards—much lighter than previous redwood models. It became apparent that lighter was better and in 1958 Hobie made the first foam core surfboards with chemistry help from his good pal Gordon “Grubby” Clark.

These were boards that a kid could carry, strap to their car roof and maneuver easily out in the waves. The popularity of surfing exploded but unlike traditional baseball and football, it was not a team sport. Riding waves became a sanctuary of individual expression and attracted many kids who felt isolated from mainstream activities. Surfers became known as rebels and reveled in the live-for-today attitude born from the atomic threat. They had their own music and an image that was comfortable and attractive. Hobie reportedly had started making surfboards to avoid traditional forms of employment and wearing dreaded hard-soled shoes. Young people working in surf shops wore slippers and shorts and their schedules depended on whether or not the surf was up. Many prioritized riding waves over showing up at any job. Earning just enough to get by meant working minimum wage jobs and getting plenty of water time. Time in the water turned converts into well-tanned athletes, easily recognized by

their casual dress, long sun-bleached hair and patches of peeling skin on their noses. Girls loved this carefree fun loving image despite their irresponsible behavior.

My inadequate eyes couldn't focus on a baseball pitch so childhood dreams changed from wanting to become a fighter pilot like my father, to being a surfer. There were many like me. The numbers entering the sport kept growing. Line-ups became crowded with experts clashing with beginners. Limited supply of waves in known areas and growing demand instigated a search for more surf spots. In California, guys loaded up cheap surf wagons and drove south of the border.

That was simple but a global search required a flight, passport and a well-padded board bag. The movie *Endless Summer* came out in 1966 and planted the seed of surf exploration in a few adventurous souls.

Outside of the **Vietnam War**, the world was a safe place to explore. But even though the world was relatively peaceful from the end of WWII until the late 60's, traveling was much less common than it is now. Many kids grew up, never leaving their hometown until they went off to school. After college they often returned home to begin work and marry their high school sweethearts. Toeing-the-line was rewarded and stepping outside the lines of normal behavior was frowned on. The life path of parents from the depression era was structured around a traditional point of view. But there were a few post-war young people who didn't conform. Jack Kerouac had drifted across the U.S. in the late 40's at a time when drifters were considered suspicious or even worse, communist infiltrators.

Post WWII started the baby boom but **war trauma** had afflicted many young military families in ways they were not equipped to handle. As the sixties wore on, a growing number of boomers didn't want to repeat their parents' emotionally repressed lives. Kerouac wrote the novel, "On the Road" in the late 50's and within ten years it became a popular bible for rebellious boomers. Runaways from all over the country flocked to meccas like San Francisco and out of the way mountain towns like Aspen.

By the late sixties the Zen-like focus of riding waves dovetailed with the be-here-now philosophy of the hippie movement. Many surfers adopted the counter-culture life-style that included the path for

escaping their parents' limited perspective with the mind-expanding substances of marijuana and LSD. Surfing hippies migrated to small beach towns like Laguna Beach and Lahaina, Maui.

The mind-expanding properties of lysergic acid Diethylamide were discovered in the 40's and by 1947 acid was a legitimate psychiatric drug. The CIA conducted experiments with LSD on their employees and the general public in the early 50's. UCLA medical school also conducted experiments to determine the psychotherapy value in treating repressive disorders and specific problems like alcoholism. But it was Timothy Leary who was famous for overseeing the Harvard psilocybin project in the early 60's. He and went on to become the leading advocate for LSD experimentation. His phrase of turn on, tune in and drop out caught on with an alarming number of young people and in 1968 the government declared LSD illegal. That didn't stop anyone who wanted to experiment from trying it. Acid could be placed on a dot of paper or transported easily in any number of ways. But even among enthusiastic users, there was no doubt about the intensity of LSD. Only the brave or unsuspecting took it. Despite being labeled as such, LSD was much more than a recreational drug. Acid trips lasted for hours and the substance removed all the selective function of the brain, resulting in an avalanche of previously unrecognized information. However much mind expansion occurred, it came with a price of sensory overload.

Alcohol use was a widely worn path and had been the way most people relaxed or got high in post WWII America. Even though booze was outlawed during the same period as cannabis was in the 1920's, that law was repealed in 1933 while the cannabis laws remained.

But despite the ban, marijuana became the go-to recreational substance of choice for hippies in the late 60's. The high from cannabis was much easier to handle than LSD, yet it had the same introspective characteristics. For hippies, alcohol made a person too much like their parents; moody, repressed and mean. Pot was mellow and non-confrontational. Make love, not war.

There were many different grades of pot. Mexican weed was the lowest and easiest to obtain. Some of the surfers going south of the border to discover empty waves found that they could also purchase cheap Mexican pot. Even though these guys might have been having problems holding down a steady jobs, that didn't mean they weren't

creative. That creativity resulted in many ingenious methods to smuggle marijuana back over the border. It was easy at first and soon many others got into the business. Networks grew with the exploding demand.

Affluent travelers had been taking advantage of cheap labor in Asia for many years, buying items that would be priceless in the west. One of those items was the artistic Afghan rug, which had been highly valued since the British began bringing them back to England in the 1800's. Works of art in their own right, the rugs represent the diverse artistic values of the country as a historical melting pot of Asian cultures from Persia to China. These pinnacle pieces of craftsmanship often take a half a year or more to complete. Afghanistan is a rugged country but by the mid-sixties one of the reasons young westerners visited the country, was to buy rugs. The rugs represented the glorified symbol of a nomadic lifestyle. Enamored with the rush of a different culture, some began to envision themselves as worldwide nomads, belonging to no country and answering to no one.

The other reason to visit was to buy hashish. The demand for connoisseur quality cannabis had grown in the U.S. During the late 60's, cannabis was not only legal in Afghanistan—the King openly promoted its trade. This mountainous landlocked country had the best cannabis on the planet, in the form of hashish.

Hashish is the concentrated residue collected from marijuana flowers and has had a long history of use in the Middle East. Arab warriors at the height of their empire used hashish in battle to enhance a single focus of activity. Back in America, baby boomers also found the hash high more intense than most marijuana, but easier to handle and with a shorter psychoactive cycle than LSD.

In the sixties Afghanistan wasn't war torn and it was on the map for the adventurous traveler. Air travel was made more affordable by half price standby rates and even cheaper discounts like the United Airlines student 12-21 card. A trail of hippie backpackers stretched from Kabul to Kandahar as early as 1965, my 21-year-old sister among them. They came for many reasons and some smuggled hashish on their return. (not my sister)

Like guards at the Mexican border, customs officers at major international airports across the country in the late 60's and early 70's

weren't initially prepared for the onslaught of young travelers dreaming up clever methods of smuggling contraband into the U.S. This was a time before security checks, computers and instant information on each passenger. But air travel was still relatively rare for most Americans. Young people who did fly were often the ones who grown up in military families.

Military families have always been faced with movement but during the years after WWII that travel accelerated with the post war military prominence of the U.S. My father was a Naval officer and I never grew accustomed to moving and losing friends. Adapting meant I needed to discover a way to cope. Navy families were often stationed throughout coastal California, and with the huge growth of surfing in the early 60's, many of those kids took up that sport. Surfing became an answer for me in a world I couldn't understand. The consequences of Vietnam, War trauma, mind expansion, smuggling and the long road to G-Land—these are some of the elements in "Journals from the Edge."