

## The Longest Ride

More *paipo* magic at Waikiki

The biggest swell in decades woke me from a sound sleep with an enormous roar. It was the summer of 1965, and I was living in a cottage behind Kapiolani Park, across from the Outrigger Canoe Club. Further sleep was impossible, so I called my surfing partner, John Waidelich, gathered my things, and with a thermos full of coffee headed for the beach. A small group of South Shore regulars were waiting for enough light to begin paddling out. The speculation was that the swell was big enough to generate surf at Steamer Lane. Few in the group had ever surfed there, and the anticipation of this rare opportunity was electrifying. It was still quite dark when some board surfers began to paddle out the Outrigger channel. We could not wait another second and stripped to our Speedos, securing our swim fins with nylon line. Getting out had never been so easy, with the rip running so strong it made swimming almost unnecessary. Porpoising under the whitewater added to our speed.

The conditions were perfect, a light offshore trade wind massaging the ocean glassy smooth. Surfers were scattered around waiting for the first set, and since no one knew the location of the lineup, the first phalanx of waves vacuumed the ocean clean, leaving only John and me. We avoided

being swept away by repeatedly diving under a serious series of waves, then took advantage of a lull to position ourselves for the next set. When the breakers arrived, they were as smooth as *poi* but big—very big and very steep. John was the first to take off and got sucked up a giant wall and swallowed whole. Fortunately, when he surfaced his *paipo* was only 20 feet away, but we had several more disasters that morning before discovering the secret of catching these giant combers. By trial and error we learned to let the wave lift us up then kick as hard as humanly possible when we were near vertical. If our timing was perfect, we made a free fall; a successful landing would catapult us on the longest, fastest rides we ever experienced. The speed was tremendous. Minute adjustments to the trim reduced the wetted surface of the board to a few square inches at the tail, and rocketing across with our faces mere inches from the surface felt like going flat out on a motorcycle.

Back on the beach, Joe Quigg climbed to the roof of the Outrigger Canoe Club to watch the action with binoculars. He thought every takeoff we took was a wipeout until he spotted us seconds later zooming toward Public's, where, on really big sets, we passed dozens of yards seaward of the surfers waiting at the outside lineup. To end a ride, we turned across the reef at the Queen Surf Restaurant to the beach and walked back to the Outrigger for another loop. The surf kept building, and at about noon John and I found ourselves together once again grooving along in the direction of Public's on

a really big critter. But this time, instead of turning into Queen Surf, John kept trucking with me glued to his fins. We passed Public's on the fly, shot through Cunahs, then pulled up at Canoe's in front of the Moana Hotel. We could not believe what we had done. We made the longest ride of our lives on wooden boards of our own design, not that much different from those used by the ancient Hawaiians. We didn't know how far we had ridden but were too elated to care. We coasted to the beach, walked to the Queen Surf, and celebrated with a couple of Cokes and two of the restaurant's famous burgers.

The surf has not been big enough since then for anyone to do a repeat. However, when Steamer Lane breaks again, I'm quite certain others can accomplish the same feat. I am equally confident it will be on *paipo* boards, as surfboards can't maintain enough momentum to cross a long, flat section fronting the Natatorium War Memorial. Barring some kind of miracle, only surfers riding cheap pieces of plywood will share our experience.

—JIM GROWNEY



GROWNEY COLLECTION

**Three-quarter ply, tear-drop outline, steam-bend, and wail!**

## POETRY SLAM

### Barefoot Days

Hobbling across hot pavement  
no shoes  
to suffocate asthmatic feet

minimalist clothing  
baggies hung low  
on hips  
hip bones gleaming in the sun

Feeling all multi-dimensional  
barefoot days

could go here or there,  
this way or that

no worries  
but the sizzling of my charcoaled feet

Gliding across time,  
suspended in play  
barefoot days

carefree yet not careless  
big white smile  
blond locks waving in the salty breeze

barefoot days

content to cruise  
a forever horizon,  
a season of perpetual youth.

—UNKNOWN

### Haiku

Faint moonlight on glass  
Riding black humps before dawn  
Not even first out

—RICHARD HAMAR

### Sick Surfer

The booger-barnacled hull of my nose  
Drains ocean-salted snot, a fever rain.  
I splatter the bathroom floor  
With a kelp-filled sneeze.

Outside,  
A gull cries,  
A windchime rings;  
On pavement puddles the traffic  
splashes.  
Through the open window morning  
brings  
Blue light  
And a rumor of the sea.

We surfed early today.  
The ocean's bowl slopped overfull  
As the moon tugged brine  
To the high tide line.

We paddled past the break  
And sat astride swells  
Who rolled their girth, and spilled  
In one long snore on the shore.

—LANCE LANGDON

### tuesday morning church

the dome of the nuclear power plant  
shadows the brown-skinned man  
kneeling in the sand, with toes  
pushing against a cluster of rocks  
for support; the crown of thorns  
traces where the shoulder becomes  
a ball and socket and Jesus looks a  
bit foolish—green ink doesn't do him  
much justice; he blesses himself and  
though he has no loved ones to kiss,  
he brings his thumbs to his lips before  
he dips his nails in saltwater; touching  
the imprinted eyes, now rolling further  
into his skin, he tests his faith in a triune  
god and attempts to resurrect the fear  
that erupts when water meets rock and  
cheeks puff out in hopes of exaltation.

—WEINER

### june surf

how's the water?  
in the flat gray morning light,  
does the layer over the sand still mirror  
the sky,  
the cool wet on bare feet send shivers  
from your sole up the back of your leg?  
does the 'smack' of fiberglass on that  
first layer  
moving ankle-high, inexorable,  
the smallest first on a shifting staircase

culminating in the undulations past the  
whitewater  
still sound the same?  
sex wax smells unchanged  
kneeling, while with quick strokes  
you lay a diagonal pattern  
of bumps on the deck  
the musty grip of the leash around the  
ankle,  
looking hard in the too-soft light of 5 am  
past the march of waist-high soldiers  
—they push past you, a ribbon of  
*Phyllospadix*  
(OK, seaweed)  
wrapped around a calf, undiminished.

do you take a breath, hold it  
fall forward into the next,  
having reached that critical depth,  
back arched and tight, anticipating?  
the first strokes, are your shoulders  
sore and skin feeling  
paper-thin and tender?  
push-up, the board goes under  
a quick breath and new life  
floods the world in a wash of turbulence  
cool, not cold, clean and deliciously salty  
you come up a new man  
muscles strong again, pulling hard  
for the outside  
and the first of another day

—PETER A. NELSON