

where the general store used to be. My grandparents would walk the beach and collect coffee shells. I remember jars of them at home. Our family had a house at Sleepy Hollow on the inland side of the (dirt) highway. Then they bought a lot at Oak Street for \$5,000 over where my parents' house is now, which had a hundred-foot frontage (now reduced to 25'). We have an aerial picture of the house taken in 1922. My brother-in-law and sister live there today.

When you think about how we get into stuff, well, there's a lot of luck involved. In my case, I picked good parents. If there was ever a spot where you wanted to be: I had Brooks Street right here and Oak Street there, and Thalia down at the other side of us. I mean, that's it! That's surfing in Laguna. Dead center. Best bodysurfing of anywhere around there. That's what we did. A group of us kids grew up bodysurfing and skimboarding and belly boarding. One of them was named Bar Chafey. He had a twin sister named Bardine. Their family rented a little room every summer. Bar was a skinny redheaded kid. After 1941, we were the only ones there because all the older guys had gone to war and pretty soon we were running the show. I figured I was the second best bodysurfer of our whole group. Bar was the best, and if that would have continued on, he probably would have been the best surfer, but Bar died of polio when he was 13 years old. He and his sister both got it; she survived and he didn't.

Anyway, we bodysurfed and picked black abalone at low tide, spear fished, and on my 15th summer I wanted a surfboard. My dad intended to buy it but we couldn't find one, so he went to Hoagie Sporting Goods in L.A. and found a 12-foot paddleboard. A couple of my other friends had their own boards too. One had a shorter one he'd cut the end off of. We paddled around on them. We had Owen Churchill swim fins, but you couldn't get rubber during the war so they were made of black synthetic rubber that wore holes in our feet. We'd wrap cloth around them, tape, everything. There were even some wood ones on the market then, but they didn't look like they worked very well.

At low tide the waves would break out a little farther and we could ride them, but we had nothing to go on. If there were surfers around in Laguna, I never saw any. Keyhole and that group of older guys went to Doheny, Salt Creek, and San Onofre.

Early boards

Everyone in our group came to Oak Street. That was the surfing place. There were the local kids and then our group who all lived inland and came down with our parents. We went in the water more than the locals because we were more on it. One day, I was out by myself riding my

paddleboard at Brooks Street; at high tide you'd get a shoulder. Out comes this big guy; it's Walter Hoffman, and he has a Simmons' foam board with plywood decks and balsa rails with a black border outline on it and the word "Malibu" on the nose. Being typical Walter, he paddles right up to me, "I used to have one of those. You ought to have a real surfboard. Here, try my board." This all just happened—bam! So I got a ride on his board and, wow, that was too easy. (He did spinout on my paddleboard when he caught a wave on it.) He told me, "I will make you a board or I'll tell you how to make it." I'd been making models, so I said that I'd like to try making one myself. I ran home, got a paper and pencil and wrote down what he told me: Thalco Fiberglass on Hobart Street in L.A. (I always remembered that name) and General Veneer in South Gate.

Roger Bellknap was another friend of mine. He also bodysurfed and had a paddleboard that he spear fished from. He got a 75-pound bat ray once. There was this older guy called the "Question Man" who would ask us kids questions, and if we could answer it he'd give us a quarter. He offered a prize for the biggest fish and Roger won. Roger wanted a board too. He knew what I was doing and he didn't have the money right then, but he had a job. I told my dad and he said he'd loan him the money, so we went up and bought wood for two boards. Back then it cost about \$45 for all the material for one board. I sold them for \$65. I was making boards in the garage and it felt like I had a \$20 profit, but when the chain broke on my Maul planer it would cost me \$20, and that happened about every fifth board. That thing had a chain drive and was heavy, but it worked. I glued mine up and Roger glued his up; we did everything down at my house. I decided I'd take mine down to the lumberyard because they had a big planer and a big sander and I figured I'd run it through them once; start off with it mowed down a bit. Walter had told me that if I got it glued up he'd come down and let me copy his board. His folks had a summer cottage above Crescent Bay [North Laguna]. As it turned out, I couldn't get Walter's board for a day or two and Roger was impatient, so I said, "OK, let's do it." We bought a drawknife and a jackplane and he started hacking. Roger wasn't much of a craftsman, but we got the outline hogged down—he did most of the work—I helped him a little, and it was pretty ugly. Then Walter finally came by with his board. Roger was still getting his roughed down and Walter told him, "Oh, you're not using your drawknife right. Roger said, "I'm bringing the back down." Well, on the Simmons board, that [the aft deck curved down to the tail bottom] is what you'd get, but the blank was on the sawhorse upside down! In today's world, that tail rocker