

Why Surfing Sunset Beach is like Dentistry

Just more nonsense, here is another surf story. I realize that this is not professional stuff, but . . . Yup, I have been thinking about it. Everyone always tells me why something that they love is like dentistry, or how it parallels something they understand about life. When I first returned from my 10 years of mainland schooling I started playing golf and tennis because, well, I was told, "that's what dentists do!" And much of the conversations centered around how golf teaches you about how to deal with your profession and life in general! "Practicing and playing golf is like practicing dentistry" seemed to be the mantra. The same went for my 10 years of playing tennis. "Practicing and playing tennis is like practicing dentistry!" And so I started to realize that any sport seems to make us all better able to handle the stresses of our profession and thus prepares us for life. Coaches of soccer, basketball, baseball players pretty much preach the same thing!

So this is my analogy of how "Surfing Sunset is like dentistry"

It is all about commitment! Once you commit to something, you must follow through. When we selected dentistry as a career, there was no hesitation, no turning back. We have too much invested. When you commit to a wave, you cannot change your mindset. You have to take the drop and live with the consequences. If you hesitate, you are truly screwed! So the bottom falls out from under you and you twist and turn to recover to make it turn out OK. Otherwise, at least you learned a lesson for the future. Hmmmmm, is that like committing to dentistry? Well, our bankers think so.

Secondly, we fully commit to our patients. True, when we get a little smarter we realize that some expect too much, but generally, we do whatever we can to please our patients and make the most of the situation. It may not be life or death - but it can feel that way. Only a dentist can know what it is like to feel the pressure that we place on ourselves once we commit. Those that don't give a damn about the patient are not really the professionals that practice dentistry. They are sharks. Gotta fear the sharks. I do.

Finally, in our business we realize that we have to have the proper equipment, and knowledge of how to use it - to make the outcomes more predictable. I also means attempting to keep up with the changes and we all take continuing ed to keep on the cutting edge. In relating to surfing Sunset, that means having a "Sunset Gun!" I certainly could not go there without one. I need the equipment and the knowledge to keep me and my colleagues safe.

So on to another of my surf stories about yesterday, 4/7/13. Because I am using a GoPro POV (point of view) camera, this story is solely about ME! Sorry.

Yes it is Sunday 4/7/13. I first checked the surf on the south shore. It was pretty small and ugly so I decided to continue onward - I'm going North! The surf report says 4-6 feet Hawaiian Style and so that means about 8-12 foot faces overall. On the internet surf cameras, some waves look a little bigger, and some were of course a look smaller, but it was hard to tell.

When I arrived at 9:30am the beach was empty!?! But people were starting to arrive. There were really only a few people in the water and it was looking really EPIC! Funny how it doesn't look that big from shore, but I know that when you get out there, . . . Oh MY! The life guards just started work at 9am, and they were just now taking down the tape that blocked off the entire beach yesterday. That must be why very few surfers are out! The yellow tape did its job keeping people off of the beach - it is empty! You can see the empty beach and the yellow tape in the

photos below. Yesterday, it was triple overhead and very dangerous. Today it is smaller. I zoom in with my iphone to get these photos. It's like watching ants surf! I watched the west bowl at Sunset (on the left side) and I liked what I saw. Nice long walls that are big and fast, but predictable. Some guys are making it, some are not. So I watch a little longer. Cars pull up on both sides of me. 5 guys suit up and head out. Then two girls, and one big fat guy. No one seems to hesitate and watch the surf like I am doing. I watch them quickly suit up and paddle into the lineup. The lifeguards don't stop any of them! But I am still cautious especially because there are stiff offshore breezes. Those can hold you up and then droooooop you over the falls. Yup, done that before, and so I watch for a while longer.

This first photo is generally how it looks from my car. Not particularly alarming. I zoomed in on the next batch of photos. Yes, those ants are surfers!



Even this SUP below is catching some good ones! These guys are amazing athletes and can do things that just a few years ago were thought unimaginable. Now they are out catching some of the biggest waves and whipping turns and even getting barreled!



So, After about 20 minutes of an internal debate about whether to go somewhere else (Lanis, Puena Point, Chuns Reef, etc.) I decided to go out. No one wanted to come with me this morning! Almost every one of my surf buddies surfed on the south shore today. Thus I have no one - no "conscience" to talk some sense into me. Both my son and my brother have been a good conscience for me on a few other occasions. But they are not here to help me reason. Sunset is alluring! Since I don't have anyone going with me, I mount my GoPro camera on my board. If something happens to me, the camera will have a record of what happened. That may sound strange, however, I want to assure you that I am not suicidal, and I definitely do not want to drown; but if something should go awry the insurance companies need to find my body and to know what happened.



I love the thrill of a Sunset wave. It has so much POWER! My son, Steven, re-introduced me to Sunset 2 years ago in 2011. POWER! You can feel it. Now that I have gone there a few times I have learned a lot of things. As the waves increase in size, the current starts to rip. Whirlpools and eddy's form. Water that you normally float in can be forced downward through the reef (water pressure) and you can get sucked and held down in that current. Scary thoughts. During my first few sessions there I noted that there seems to be a constant rumbling of a distant thunderstorm threatening to roll in. I kept looking around at the distant clouds and it finally dawned on me that it was the roar and the shaking from the WAVES! It is a low rumble and like the shaking of a train going by. Really! To me it sounds like a distant thunderstorm and the air around you is pulsing rhythmically. It gets your pulse racing! Traditional Shaka to start the session.



I talked to one of the surfers nearby, and he said that the wind held him up and he went "over the falls" and took a beating! I make a mental note that he is still alive, but yet . . . I paddle like hell because I don't want to go over the falls. Been there, done that!



Below is a common pose that the GoPro gets of me. It becomes repetitive and a little boring so I will try to be a little selective. I have so many shots like this.



In my mind, the above photo just gives you a glimpse of the action and cannot express the exhilaration and as I try to dodge the tons of water that is about to come down on my head. I turned down the face onto the flat water and it thundered behind me. Then another bottom turn to try to get ahead of the foam. By the way, the sound is quite impressive. Fffthhwhoomppp!!!



Prepare for the next section . . .



Sometimes when you can see that you are not going to make the next section, you gotta bail. The section in front of me was about to close-out. What you can not see is what a close-out is and how fast it can happen. But you get a feeling in your gut and so you bail. I almost made the mistake of turning down the wave, but I saw what happened to others when they did that on a close-out. They got buried by 6-10 foot thick foam.



The wind was fierce today. Here is what it does with spray - blasts you in the face. You really cannot see anything sometimes as you make the drop. You kind of have to do it from muscle memory. And at Sunset - a drop it is, as the board falls out from under you and time seems to slow down. Wow! Exhilarating! Making the drop alone is something to celebrate!



The following is a sequence of my last wave. I got some nice shots. One that may be suitable for "framing!"



Gotta love what you can do with the GoPro camera! Time to paddle in cause I am now exhausted.



Ok That was a great surf session. Notice the waves breaking behind me on my paddle in - no one in sight. I was literally alone in the west bowl for the whole session! Only one short boarder sat about 50 yards in front of me and I noticed that he did not catch anything! When I got to my car he was waiting for the rest of his gang at the truck parked next to mine. We talked. He had a

6'5" board. He agreed that he should have brought a bigger board like mine. Yup! Me and my BIG RED 10' SUNSET GUN! It was such a great day that I was tempted to go back out again for more, but I don't want to push the limits. That's how you make stupid mistakes and I make plenty of those. But when you are fresh with energy you can get yourself out of some pickles. If you are beat then . . . well, then . . .

So, especially at Sunset, I always want to save a little energy for the paddle in. Sunset has a very mean rip current and it can be hard to get in those last 100 yards. Well, unless you are willing to take a chance over the sometimes very shallow Val's reef! Not me!



The beach is filling with people and it is time to move on. Anyway, it is now 11:30 and after lunch Susan and I are going to a nursery in Waihole/Waikane. I got home an hour later at 12:30, and were at the nursery an hour later at 1:30pm! How efficient is that! A bang up perfect and fun day! Much better than I anticipated!

In the picture below, Sunset is the wave on the right, Kammieland is the wave on the left. Funny how it doesn't look very big. But looks from here are definitely deceiving. It makes me totally respect the guys that surf the big stuff! I'm too old and weak for that. Too bad we can't grow younger and stronger!



Addendum: The following is an excerpt from Surfline online about Sunset Beach. Interesting reading! These next two photos are very dated! But I could not write a better description of the Sunset Wave.



Sunset Beach

Sunset will fool you. From the parking lot, just off the Kam Highway on Oahu's North Shore, it actually looks fun -- like a big, fluffy righthand point. Shoot through the shore break, stroke through the channel, wait for a set -- and crap your drawers as the entire Pacific Ocean rears up to unload on your head. At least, it seems that way.

"Challenging" is an understatement. Sunset Beach combines every facet of big-wave surfing -- late takeoffs, deep fades, committed bottom turns, big carves and gaping barrels. To link them all is the test, especially with so many other factors. Crowds, winds, freakish rip currents and a ferocious Inside Bowl make simply connecting a wave from start to finish a task.

Photos and video don't show the real picture; it's easy to watch someone surf Sunset and wonder why they aren't killing it. What you can't see is the volume. Nothing has more impact on first-timers or is more difficult to express than the volume of a Sunset wave. The whole ocean seems to rise into each wave. It turns an otherwise impressive surfer into a struggling kook, even on today's modern equipment.