

SURFER GIRLS-I  
An interview by Paul A. Dolan

February 8, 2003

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I am Paul A. Dolan, a member of the Outrigger Canoe Club's Historical Committee. For sometime the Committee has been conducting oral interviews of prominent members of our Club. Today, it is my pleasure to interview Anita Berg Whiting, long time member of the Outrigger Canoe Club and Helen Haxton Bode, a former member. Both women were accomplished surfers in the 1940's and 50's. We are in the boardroom of the Club on this beautiful Hawaiian morning.

PAD: Good morning Helen and Anita.

HHB: Good morning Paul.

ABW: Good morning.

PAD: When, where and what date did you both start surfing?

HHB: I started surfing at Waikiki, Canoe Surf, when I was twelve years old in 1945.

ABW: I started at the same place and time at 13 years old. I was one year older.

PAD: Great! You became members of the Club when?

ABW: As soon as possible (Laughter). (9/18/46)

HHB: Approximately 1945 or 1946. (3/24/47)

PAD: Do you remember the number and types of surfboard you surfed on?

HHB: I do. I had a very heavy redwood plank, which was later reshaped and named "*Kilroy*." Then I went to a very big hollow board about twelve feet long and my last board was a balsa-fiberglass, nine-foot board that came into style from the "Tarzan" film, starring Johnny Sheffield ("Boy"). He brought the spoon-shaped balsa board from California and ours were patterned after it, but shaped in a modern sleek way.

ABW: The first board I used was a redwood plank belonging to Johnny Hollinger. I received a surfboard of my own for my sixteenth birthday. I got my wish and it looked like a big wooden spoon in shape. I think it was Richard Willett of Waikiki Surf Club that shaped it down and made it a really fast board. It was 11'-6". The wood grain was beautiful, but without asking, my Dad thought he would do me a favor and painted it bright yellow—I think the only painted board at the time as I remember.

My second board was a semi-hollow (was supposed to be but wasn't) one and it was heavy. One of the beach boys said: "Hey, girl, you want me to help you?" I said: "Oh sure!"

PAD: All this time you carried your own boards—No matter how heavy?

HHB: Oh yes. Those huge hollow boards we carried from the surfboard lockers all the way to the water—about 50 yards. Even when they were full with water we would bring them in and hoist them up, undo the metal plug, and let it drain while we carried them. (Laughter)

ABW: My board was so heavy and this Puerto Rican guy came up and asked to carry the board for me. "Yeh, OK." He tried and fell down with the board. So I flipped it up and put it on my shoulders and put it in the locker.

PAD: Right on Anita! Do you remember when you last surfed?

HHB: I last surfed about twelve years ago (1991). I ventured out to Waikiki and tried it again and it wasn't that easy. I had been kayaking though which enabled me to do okay because I was a former surfer.

ABW: I went surfing off Diamond Head about five years ago (1998). I used one of Kelly's boards. I had a leash on and I hate leashes. It was shallow and I got all tangled up. Spooky! I did catch a wave and stand up, but not for long.

PAD: In your surfing experiences did you ever learn all of the names of the surfs, starting from the Ewa direction?

HHB: Well I don't recall in that directions, but I can remember Canoes – there as slide right, slide left, Queen's surf – slide right. I surfed at Publics and Populars. Then I surfed at Makaha and at Diamond Head at Kaikoo, fronting Doris Duke's mansion.

ABW: Yes, I surfed in the same surfs as Helen did.

OCC 62-3

PAD: I've been waiting for one of you to mention surf where I started. It was called "Baby Surf", fronting the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

HHB: Oh well, we surfed there too.

PAD: Do you know what the real name was?

ABW: No.

PAD: "Cornucopia." It was named because there was a wave that came from the direction of Populars surf and another wave that came from "Blow Hole" surf. When they came together they formed a peak and when it first broke it looked like a cornucopia. One would catch it at its peak for the best ride.

HHB: Oh! There was "baby surf" inside of canoes that we used to ride into the beach at the old Waikiki Tavern, which is now Kuhio Beach adjacent to the Police Substation.

ABW: I almost drown out there. (Laughter) I don't know if you were with me Helen. Like a dummy, I was parallel to the beach and it was high tide and a wave hit me and I got knocked off my board. (Laughter)

PAD: What do you think was the best ride of you life?

HHB: Well, I can definitely remember this beautiful ride. It was a first-break day and I caught a first-break wave and I went "right" into Canoe surf. After I passed Canoes I was able to sit down on the board all the way into the beach and I stepped off the board onto the beach in front of the Waikiki Tavern. (Adjacent to the present Police Substation) I will never forget that ride. That was great!

PAD: Gee, you and Duke. (Kahanamoku) (Laughter)

HHB: Duke was out there from time to time. He usually went "left" at Canoes and continuing to the surf fronting the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

PAD: How about you Anita?

ABW: It was very first break and nobody was out there because of the break (white water). I was determined to get out there to catch a wave. No one was at Cunha's (between Queen's and Publics). One would paddle a yard and get pushed back a yard and a half. Took me about an hour to get out. I was bound and determined.

I caught a huge wave and I have never gone so fast in my life, like “boomed, boomed,” like in water skiing. Suddenly, I looked and the wave was breaking. I wrapped my body around the board and hung on for a while, but I finally lost it—the wave was too big.

PAD: No leashes in those days.

ABW: You don’t want a leash when the waves are that big. (Laughter)

PAD: What was the most dangerous experience you endured?

HHB: I will never, ever forget this very day. It was waves breaking at “steamer lane.” It was farther out than first break at Canoe surf and I thought I would try to get out there. As I was paddling out a huge wave broke and pounded on me, sucked me down and I didn’t know whether I was down or up. Lost my board. Came up for a breath and another wave came. Finally when it subsided I was able to bodysurf in and get my board near shore. I will never forget it because that was the closest I’ve ever been to drowning.

PAD: Wow! How about you Anita?

ABW: I almost had that experience and I did have to swim all the way in. There were huge waves and I was in shape at that time and lucky. (Laughter)

PAD: We did know how to bodysurf.

ABW: Yes! I caught a wave at Canoes bodysurfing and I thought it was going on too long. I know that the same thing happened to Pam Anderson out there. She lost her board and she was tired. Some guy told her to hold onto his board and he went into retrieve her board.

PAD: Do you remember waiting for those big “suckers” to come in and what was the experience when one big one went by you and all one could hear was the air rushing over the surface of the wave? Boy! That used to spook me.

HHB: Definitely.

ABW: You knew it was big stuff when you caught the wave. You were going so fast, especially when the water surface was not that glassy.

HHB: To this very day, once in a while I’ll have a dream and I’m down under the water and don’t know whether I’ll make it.

OCC 62-5

PAD: Did anyone tell you how to recover from that condition, especially when there are bubbles and poor visibility? My brothers told me that when you're under tuck yourself into a ball (fetal position) and when you feel yourself floating upward, then swim for the surface. Otherwise one would be swimming down to the bottom instead of up to the surface.

HHB: No one told us. It's interesting to know, after the fact.

ABW: Oh, yes!

PAD: I know that you have mutual friends who were wahine surfers. Name a few.

HHB: Well, Pat Honl, Pat Barker, of course Pam Anderson. Once in a while Barbara Kahanamoku would come out and in the early 50's; Gwen Davis, Eva Hunter, Doris Berg and Keanui Kekai would come out once in a while.

ABW: Jake Kalama. I don't know where she practiced her surfing. She was good.

PAD: Isn't that amazing. Later on all the "hot-doggers" came in with their high tech boards which are fantastic to this day.

How many boards did you have that had skegs?

ABW: None!

HHB: I did. My balsa-fiberglass board had a skeg. My hollow board didn't.

PAD: Gee, I remember several hollow boards having skegs. I think Ron Sorrell had one.

What about the latest surf rage? I mean like road rage? I know a number of guys that have had encounters and been beaten up, especially haoles.

ABW: Yes, it's very rude.

HHB: The nice thing about the times we surfed everybody knew everybody else, at least by face and many by name.

When malihini-types used to come into our area of the surf and we knew they didn't know what they were doing, we'd tell them: "Oh, you people go into the baby surf and that's where you surf in there." We didn't have half the problems they do now.

ABW: I did get angry with a movie star that had a board parallel to the wave and was blocking passage. I got real mad.

PAD: Most of us knew the unwritten rules of the surf and our kupuna (older surfers) told us: "Eh, if you don't know how to surf, get the hell inside." Now, if you tell anybody that they give you the "bird" and plus: "Eh, you like beef (fight)?" That's the sad part about it.

HHB: There were unwritten rules and you followed them.

PAD: The beach has changed so much since we move here in 1964. What were the differences between the two Club facilities?

HHB: I ceased my membership at the time of the move because I moved to Kailua and took up golf at Mid-Pac. I can't compare the two facilities.

I often yearn for the good old days at the "old" Outrigger site. The surf was right there in front of you (Canoes and Queens) and one could spend the whole day out there having the time of one's life. Surf in the morning--come in for lunch--and surf again until dark.

ABW: We had good times at the old Club site.

PAD: I think one of the best things to happen is that we became a family oriented Club. If we had stayed at the old site, we would have been overrun by tourists and lost our identity.

ABW: Yes, remember the time we put black jack gum on our teeth (laughter) and we surfed across from the Union station moving in on some kids. They left us alone. The area was all coral and wana (sea urchin), but it is now a sandy beach (brought in by the State).

PAD: The boys knew that your 2-piece bathing suits hampered you surfing, especially the tops, causing chafing and rashes. Did you ever go bare?

HHB: Yes, one time when we cut school we went out very early in the morning. We untied the back strap and surfed happily until some guys came out!

ABW: Yes, when you're racing and you stretched to paddle you got cut and that's when the T-shirts became popular for the girls, and we would untie the back of the bra.

PAD: Did you enter any competitive surfing events?

OCC 62-7

HHB: They didn't exist in our day. There were paddleboard races and limited paddleboard competition among the women themselves.

ABW: There were no surfing events in our day. I did paddleboard racing alone and tandem. One time in the Natatorium with you Paul, then parallel to Kailua Beach and to the beach fronting the Club. The surfing competition came in the early 1960's.

PAD: Is there any other funny things that happened like big smash ups?

HHB: I think there were so many smash-ups. It wasn't unusual to see boards "pearl diving," then shoot straight up into the air. The big hollow boards were especially dangerous as they were so heavy. I got hit in the head once by my own board.

ABW: Like little smash ups. I remember Helen surfing and she gouged me in the stomach. She doesn't remember it, but I do. We didn't get seriously hurt.

PAD: What or who influenced you the most in learning how to surf?

HHB: I believe my brother, Bill Haxton, got me out surfing one day when I was in sixth grade and then later on as I got to love surfing. I got Anita to come out with me and from that time on we were so hooked that we went out almost everyday for years.

ABW: Yes, I was definitely hooked. When she wasn't around was out.

PAD: What do you think—Were we brought up in the golden years of Waikiki?

ABW: Definitely! People were really nice—No bad manners.

HHB: The times were good. It was a wholesome time.

PAD: Now it's a moneymaker for many in the business. Also status—People walking around with these expensive boards with covers, traveling all over the world. Wow!

HHB: Well, we surfed because we loved to. We loved being out in the ocean and the environment.

PAD: Being keen observers—Who do you, think were some of the top beach boys in our era?

HHB: Oh yes, there were many. “Turkey” Love, Harry Robello, “Rabbit” Kekai, Jama Kekai, George Downing. We used to confide in “Sally” Hale (Mgr. For OCC Beach Services) for the conditions of the waves. “Sally” Hale had in his office what he called a “Kawila Stick” (laughter) and he used to bring that thing out and tell us when the waves were going to be good. We’d ask him what the conditions would be before our canoe race and doggone if he wasn’t correct.

PAD: What did it look like—A Hawaiian war club?

HHB: Yes, kind of.

ABW: Also there were a number of guys who were great beach boys who belonged to the Hui Nalu.

PAD: I remember “Curly” Cornwall and Earl King as being very business-like in their dealings with the tourists. They kept regular business hours and saved their money.

Weren’t those Christmas parties under the hau tree fun?

HHB: Oh yes.

ABW: They were all very polite. Another thing that I remember was surfing in the evening around dusk. It was so beautiful with the different shades of color at sunset—The Ko`olaus emerald green that turned to purple.

HHB: The water was usually smooth because the wind dropped and the lights of Waikiki were reflecting on the water. There were just the two hotels at that time—The Royal and the Moana. It was peaceful and calm.

PAD: Do you remember the “dusk patrol” where the beach boys would go looking for the rental board that hadn’t been returned? They would find the service men on them way offshore, sunburned and tired, unable to make it to shore.

HHB: I do want to recall this one time in Canoe surf. We went out at 8 a.m. and there were five of us sitting out waiting for a wave. All of sudden these fins started coming toward us. I had my redwood plank and we paddled for shore as fast as we could. Low and behold, it was a pod of dolphins. They stayed all day long offshore and played.

ABW: I remember that day. I’m near-sighted and it didn’t bother me. I was told there were sharks, but I stayed out there (Canoe surf) with them.

OCC 62-9

HHB: Another recollection comes to mind. When the waves were large they created a huge backwash off the seawall of the Moana Hotel. We used to have a ball surfing into the backwash and then turn around and surf back out.

PAD: I think the fun part was getting catapulted off your board when the wave and backwash met. It was also fun diving off the seawall and bodysurfing on the backwash. (Laughter)

HHB: Oh yeah! These are the things we miss.

PAD: Then sand sliding came into vogue. We got ‘cherries’ on either ‘chones’ to prove it.

ABW: I used to do it on my opu (stomach)—never got hurt—had abdominal blocks.

PAD: That’s great! It’s been a blast to interview the two of you whom I known for years. The women have sure come a long ways into their own in all the sports activities and you were some of the first. Aloha!

HHB: Aloha!

ABW: Aloha!

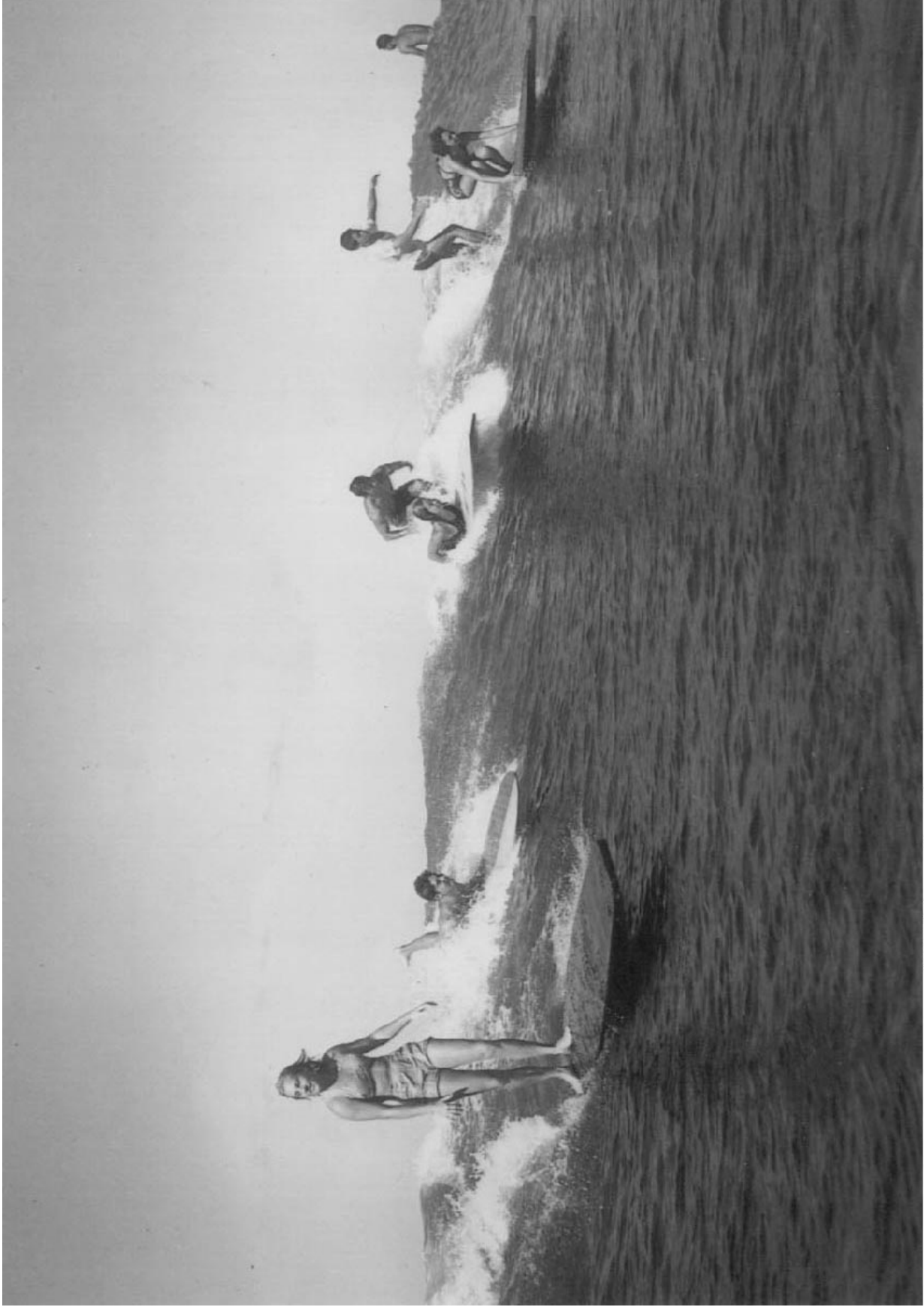
PAU!



**Outrigger Canoe Club - 1950  
Helen Haxton (Bode) & balsa board**



**Outrigger Canoe Club Wahine Surfers- 1950  
(L-R) Gwen Davis, Eva Hunter, Helen Haxton**



Wahine Surfers at Canoe Surf - Circa 1948-49  
(L-R) Helen Haxton, Dr. Dorian Pascowitz, Anita Berg, Russ Takaki, Coogie Tai & 'Sister'.



**Helen Haxton Bode**  
Feb. 8, 2003



**Anita Berg Whiting**  
Feb. 8, 2003