

Life, News & Culture on the Cape Fear Peninsula

Snow's Cut Monthly

April 2008
vol. 3 issue 4
FREE

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Cutting Edge Art

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A Hillbilly Song

Fiction is Born in SCM

plus...

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by the Sea Oats Garden Club

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The Beginning

by Daniel Cerqueira

In the early sixties, surfing became fashionable throughout the country. Surf pioneers were traveling the east coast, showing off their sport, selling surfboards and gear, and spreading the surfing gospel. Like sun bleached Johnny Appleseeds, they'd show up in small beach communities, plant the seeds of surfing culture and then move on. Kids on Federal Point (as the island was referred to then) were no different than kids everywhere else—they knew cool when they saw it.

Herman Pritchard was 18 years old in 1963. When asked if the change from traditional beach values, during the late 50's America, to surf fashion was gradual, Herman explained, "In the beginning it was slow but from the first season in 1962 until 1965 it was as if you could imagine a dark room and then someone flips the switch on and suddenly there is light. It was just about that fast at Kure Beach. There were only a dozen or so of the local kids back then and each one of us thought we were trend setters."

Herman and his friend Sonny Danner really were trend setters. They started one of the very first surfboard manufacturing operations—DAN PRI Surfboards—on the whole East Coast in the early 1960s. Unfortunately they don't get much credit for it. This is their story.

***Editors note: The dates and facts of this story may be disputed. It's been a long time and there are limited public records available from the era.*

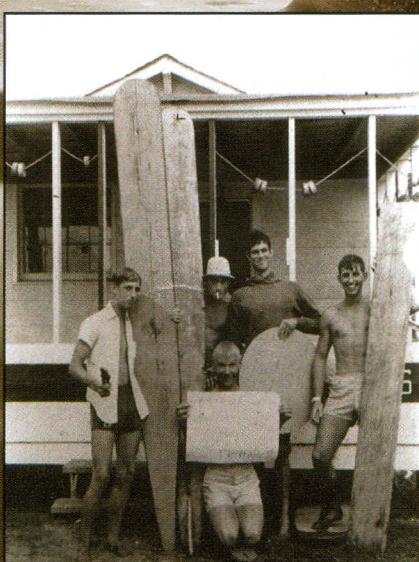
HERMAN AND SONNY

Modern surfing arrived in Kure Beach during the late summer of 1961 when Herman Pritchard's telephone rang on a hot afternoon. On the other end was his friend Linda Kure calling to tell him and his best friend Sonny Danner some exciting news. Kure Beach in 1961 didn't offer a lot of exciting news and this was big.

Linda (who eventually married Sonny) could hardly stand it. "We just checked in two guys at the motel with surfboards on their car!"

The boys were not about to miss this opportunity and they immediately drove to the motel to see and hopefully touch or hold the surfboards.

When they arrived at the motel, they took a deep breath and summoned the courage to bang on the door of the surfers' room. Nervousness and apprehension were overcome with feelings of anticipation as they waited those few seconds for someone to open the door. The door finally opened, and there stood two men who looked exactly as they had expected them to; older (in their early twenties), sun tanned and blond.



© historical photos courtesy of Herman Pritchard

Clowning around in front of the Atlantic Surf Shop. (From L to R) Tom Pritchard, unknown, Sonny Danner and Herman Pritchard. The dude with the sign - Jim Brodie.

Herman and Sonny introduced themselves and asked if they were the ones with the surfboards. Like missionaries looking to satisfy a soul longing for something more, the men quickly replied, yes and then asked them to come in to their room and look at the boards. They visited for about a half hour and the men, Jack and Allan, asked if they would like to ride the boards in the morning—they had 4 boards with them. Sonny and Herman quickly replied “Yes sir, what time?” (Kids were more polite then.)

One of the men said to meet them at the motel about 4:30 in the morning because there should be some big, glassy waves moving in front of a storm heading that way.

The following morning, Herman and Sonny met the men at their room and had some coffee together. They then went down on the beach where they carried the 36-pound boards to the water's edge. The men then explained the importance of wax, what to do in the water and how to stand up on the boards.

As the morning sun began to rise, it revealed big, glassy, overhead waves. Herman and Sonny had body surfed in all kinds of waves already and would swim from their house to the pier together for fun from time to time, but these were big waves—bigger than anything they had been out in. As they eagerly walked toward the surf, they knew their lives were about to be changed, it turned out to be an historic day for them and for Kure Beach.

Their new friends paddled out and proceeded to ride the waves with the finesse that

generated a confidence that these guys really knew their stuff and had been doing this for a long time. After watching the men ride a wave, Herman and Sonny paddled out to join them. They rode on their bellies the first wave and then on their knees and finally stood up. As the morning went on and they began to tire, they noticed a small group of future surfers on the beach watching in anticipation.

As they paddled to the beach they quickly passed their boards (Jack and Allan had already said it was ok) to other eager soon-to-be surfers. Carl Snow and Ted Moore were the first of that group to hit the water and paddle back out to surf. As they said their goodbyes to the men, Sonny and Herman knew they had to get surfboards.

DAN PRI SURFBOARDS

Autumn of 1961 found more perfect waves breaking at the Kure Beach Pier; and Herman and Sonny desperately trying to figure how to find \$300 for a surfboard. Eventually, Herman came across an ad for surfboard kits in Surfer Magazine. At only \$50 - \$65 delivered, he and Sonny were in business. They put their money together and had two of those kits shipped all the way from California to Sonny's house. The kits contained a pre-shaped blank board, resin, fiberglass cloth, a fin, a squeegee and instructions. (No logo, no color.)

In Sonny's parents' garage, they assembled and glassed the surfboards, but before the boards hit the water, they were sold for around \$110 each. Again, they ordered two more kits and when

those boards were completed, they too, were sold before they could use them. So, Herman and Sonny took their money and ordered two California-made boards. Finally, in the summer of 1962 they were able to ride their own surfboards.

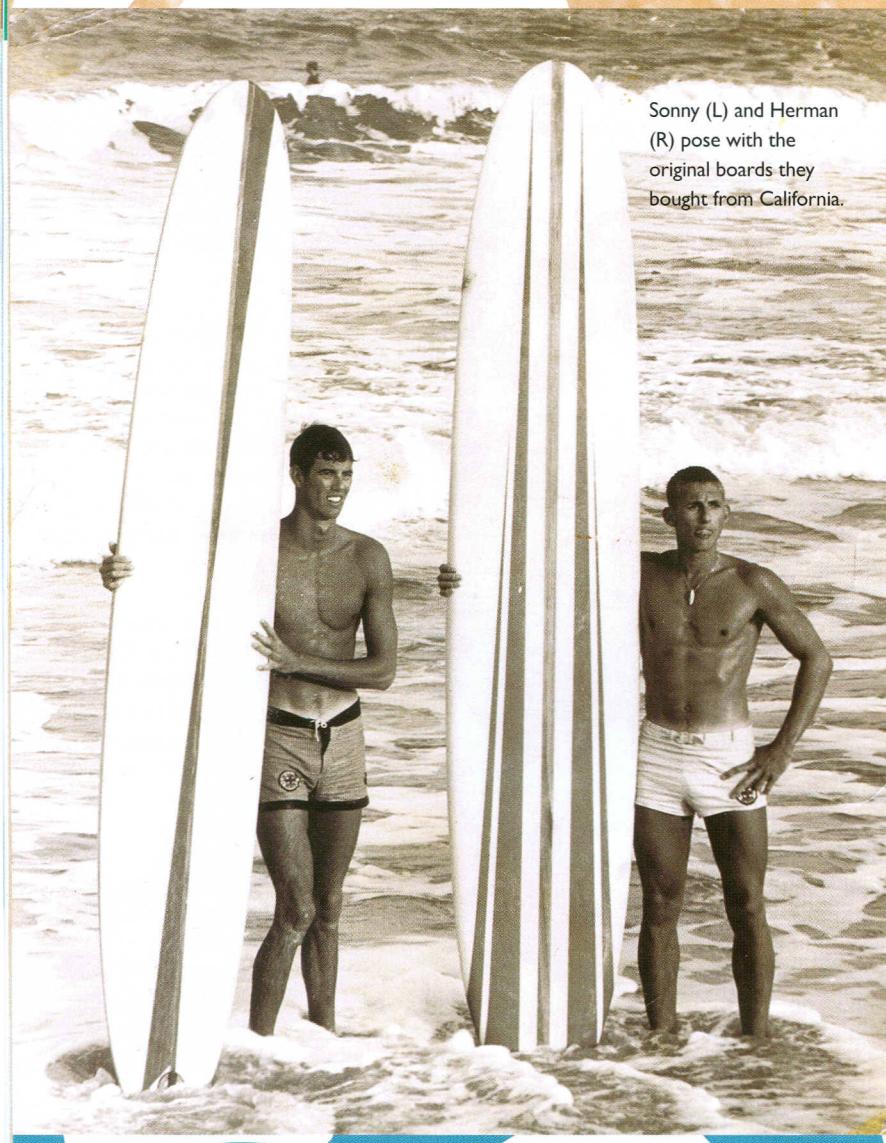
Around that time, Sonny's dad got the boys together and said “If you boys are going to go into business making surfboards you need to have a place to make them.” So he let Herman and Sonny set up their future surfboard manufacturing plant on G Avenue and Hwy. 421 (now Fort Fisher Blvd) in one of the old barracks that he owned. Thus, the Atlantic Surf Shop was born.

The next step was to come up with a name for the boards—something catchy. The new Grand Prix automobile was the catchiest name they could think of, so they combined the first three letters of each of their last names to come up with DAN PRI Surfboards. After remodeling the new shop, Sonny shaped and Herman and Sonny glassed the first two DAN PRI boards. One of them had no logo, only a serial number, and the other had a logo printed with the name “DAN PRI” on toilet paper, since it would not show the paper when glassed over.

Soon they quit their jobs at Smitty's Restaurant to devote their time to making boards. Sonny began to perfect the art of shaping, and he became an absolute master at his craft. Herman glassed the boards and made fins out of redwood, balsa and some solid glass. During the summers, Sonny and Herman split their time between lifeguarding, the shop, making

continued on next page

Catching a nice wave during the glory days of the Cove. (From L to R) Ted Moore, Carl Snow, and Herman Pritchard. Sonny Danner is the rear.



Sonny (L) and Herman (R) pose with the original boards they bought from California.

boards, renting boards and teaching surfing.

THE COVE

The Kure Beach surfers tended to congregate at the Kure Pier, but when the crowds got heavy (3-4 people) they would find solace at the Cove in Fort Fisher, just south of where the Riggings condominiums stand today. While today's surfers have to go to places such as Sumatra or some unheard of banana republic to find solitude—as most surf spots on Earth have been found—the Kure Beach crew just had to go down the road a couple of miles. The Cove was fairly private and they could have a beach fire, roast hot dogs and marshmallows, and surf all day long without being troubled by others. The parties soon followed, with all the elements of a Malibu movie. The guys played the ukulele and sang and the girls were either girlfriends or just came to hang out with the surfing crowds.

But let's not forget the wave. The Cove has one of the very few point breaks in the southern United States. You could catch a north swell at the north end of the rocks and ride all the way down to in front of the Civil War monument—a huge ride by East Coast standards. The Kure Beach boys had found nirvana.

Once upon a time, the Cove was referred to as "the Rincon of the East," (Rincon is a famous point break in Santa Barbara, California), but today isn't quite what it once was. The rock groin that created the break began to fail in 1982 and Hurricane Diane finished it off in 1984. It was re-built in 1992 by the Army Corps of Engineers, but the wave just doesn't break quite like it used to.

EPILOGUE

It was during the Cove's heyday that Herman had to leave. His dad wanted him to go to a four-year school away from the beach at Appalachian State Teachers College in Boone,

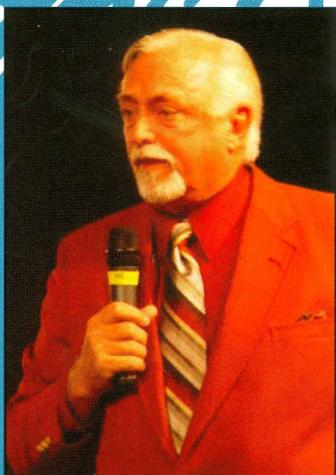
MURPH THE SURF

In the story we mention two guys named Jack and Allan who brought the first surfboards to Kure Beach. Jack turned out to be Jack Murphy aka "Murph the Surf" who was one of the most famous criminals of the twentieth century. In what would become one of the most audacious heists in American history, he broke into the New York Museum of Natural History and stole \$400,000 worth of precious stones including the "Star of India" one of the most famous jewels in the world.

He and his fellow cat burglar had unlocked a bathroom window while the museum was open and climbed back in later that night. They found the golf ball-sized sapphire to be the only one in a large collection to be protected by an alarm, which wasn't a problem because the battery was dead. Two days later Murphy was arrested (he received a three-year prison sentence) but the gemstone was gone—it would be found in a Miami bus station months later.

Murph the Surf was a national surfing champion, concert violinist, tennis pro, movie stunt man, world class playboy and genius according to some psychologists. His life was so exciting that a movie, Murph the Surf, was made about him in 1975. His sidekick in the movie was a man named Allan Kuhn. Was this the other surfer on that fateful Kure Beach day?

Murphy was later convicted of murder as well—he served 18 years in prison—and is now, in a twist of fate and redemption, a prison evangelist. Little did Murphy know that he had been a surf evangelist also, many years earlier, by teaching two boys from Kure Beach how to surf.



NC. With a heavy heart he packed his '62 MGTD and drove nine hours inland to start life as a landlocked surfer that fall day in 1963.

He was able to spend the summers of 1964 and 1965 in Kure Beach, but he had dropped out of school and wound up getting drafted. He didn't know it at the time, but it was the best thing that ever happened to him. He went on to have a long and successful Coast Guard career and spent years stationed in Hawaii and the Outer Banks. During his time in Hawaii, he became friends with Mike Doyle, one of the great surfers of the era, and surfed Sunset Beach, Haleiwa, Makaha and Pipeline (which remains one of the most dangerous waves in the world).

Meanwhile, Sonny continued to run the shop and produce DAN PRI surfboards until 1973. He went on to work in wholesale plumbing and raise two daughters. He still lives on the island, but he stopped surfing around 1995.

Herman has not been surfing in years. Although he and his wife Shirley moved from Kure Beach several years ago, they now live south of Monkey Junction and visit the island almost daily. He continues to be as stoked about surfing today as he was that first time he surfed in Kure Beach.

"When I travel across that bridge I feel a certain

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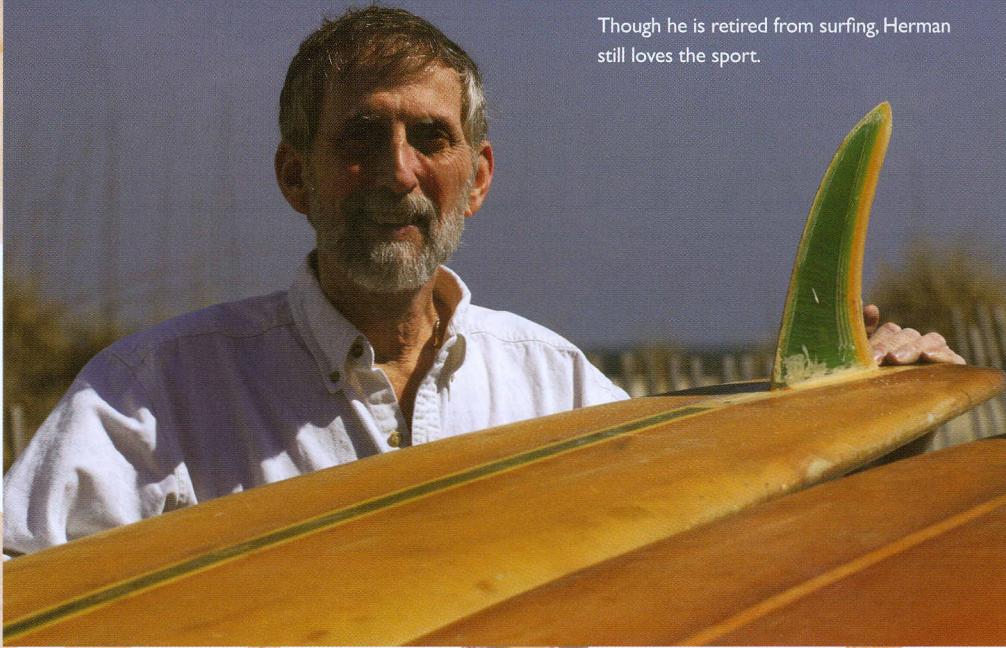
458-8622
421 S. at the stoplight in Kure Beach

© Jack Andros

peace within myself," says Herman. "When I stop and set my feet on the ground at Kure Beach I am immediately at peace with self and God. It is like a culmination of past and present—an idyllic state of mind and presence that most people never ever are able to achieve for themselves. And although I felt we had to move closer to

town for the time being, to me Kure Beach will always be that place on earth as close to heaven as it can possibly be."

SCM



Though he is retired from surfing, Herman still loves the sport.

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