**Norman Akel**

1. When did you start surfing?[[1]](#footnote-2)  
   I think it was 1964 but that aura seems to have taken on a life of its own as some think it was 1963, etc etc etc. Just say 1910.
2. What’s your earliest surfing memory?[[2]](#footnote-3)  
   Going out at Fayetteville St. with Charles Sutton on a 10 or 12' Raleigh pop-out board that was 6" thick and so big we both had to carry it to the beach. There was about a 1' shore break and that's where I thought we took off at. Charles told me "no, we go out to the sand bar to catch them.” Charles was my backdoor neighbor. So we went out to the sand bar and I stood up on my first wave. How hard was that on a ship?
3. What was your first surfboard?[[3]](#footnote-4)  
   I'm not sure of my first board. It might have been a Dewey Weber but I'll try to find out since I think I have a picture of it. I do remember Charles' first board that I we both used. It was a red Styrofoam board with metal tubing in it to give it shape. Mike Spencer and I took it out one day and cracked the nose in the shore break. We took it back to my house and put some resin in the crack to fix it. Mike made the comment that the crack looked like it was getting bigger and after giving it a serious look I told him "no, that's just the thickness of the resin making it look like it was getting bigger.” About five minutes later there was no doubt it was getting bigger! We used the wrong kind of resin for that kind of foam and it was eating a hole right through the nose. We freaked out, wiped the resin off and took it to Lank at Carolina Beach to fix it, the whole time wondering if Charles was going to have a conniption or not. I'm not sure what he had to say.
4. Who did you go surfing with back then? Do you remember if there was a surfing crew on Wrightsville Beach at the time?[[4]](#footnote-5)  
   Charles Sutton, Mike Spencer, Jim Sullivan, and Mike Watters were the ones I mostly surfed with along with Robert and David Hardin. The next tier was Mike Deep, Mike Curry, Robert Parker, Gene King, Jerry King, Tommy Thompson and others I just don't remember. It's surprising sometimes when you'll be talking to someone who you never even thought knew what a surfboard was and they begin to tell you they were surfing in those days and they weren't lying! I'm not sure what you mean by a surf crew, but as I recall Robert Parker, Gene and Jerry King and a friend of Robert's started the year before Charles, Mike, Jim and I did, whatever those years were, and many others started the same year I et al did. Like Billy Hegelman and brother, Gene Cannon, tip of the tongue, and I can't remember. We would be out surfing together and at times hang out socially but I don't think I ever saw it as some kind of a unique group or so. We just surfed. Some people drank, some people took a dump (I guess all people did that), **some people played golf,** and some people surfed. We surfed. Along with everything else we did in our lives. But it was a very enjoyable time in my life.
5. How old were you in 1964?[[5]](#footnote-6)
6. Do you recall if you considered yourselves “surfers” at the time or was that something that came later?[[6]](#footnote-7) We did.
7. Do you recall bumping heads with or meeting resistance from individuals who didn’t care for surfing?[[7]](#footnote-8)  
   In the beginning we were very disliked by the fishermen on Johnnie Mercer's pier because there were no laws and we would surf by the pier when a lot of people fished there. They would actually cast treble hooks on lead sinkers at us. At least that's what Gene King told me one day happened to him. I do remember them casting at us. Next came the town of Wrightsville Beach when they decided they didn't want us surfing where people swam (or id that swum...swim, swam, swum) whatever. So they moved us up to where the inlet (Moore's) used to be where the Holiday Inn is now. I will never forget one day when I was going out up there and I was walking by the old sign on the beach that was just before the inlet that read:    
     
   NO SWIMMING BEYOND THIS POINT!  
   DANGEROUS UNDER TOWS, OFFSETS, AND CURRENTS!  
     
   and there was a crew from the town that was digging it up. When I came back by they had replaced it with a sign that read: SURFING AREA  
     
   I couldn't believe it. I thought it was funny at the time. Seems like some battle fronts never change. Eventually we were able to surf up to 10 or 11am and then after 5pm anywhere except near the piers and then I think later on we got one surf zone that migrated I think on a daily basis. I think that in part may be why Jim was fighting the surfing/swimming mix when the red flag is out. That if anything happened, they would come after us again. You would have to ask someone else but maybe at one time they considered banning surfing on the beach and compromised and sent us to the inlet with the sharks.
8. Do you remember getting your hands a surf magazine, and if so, where did you get it? Anything stand out about that?[[8]](#footnote-9)   
   We used to get *Surfer* magazine and I think Jim still has some old copies. If I recall correctly, he would get them but I don't know how. We just thought they were cool. Not rad, not hip, just cool.

1. Email interview with Norman Akel. 19 March 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)