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DAN MALLOY: FROM VIDEO STAR TO GO-SLOW PRO



Dan Malloy finds solitude © Chris Burkard

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Surfersvillage Interview

Few have experienced the extremes of a surf career like Dan Malloy

Surfersvillage Global Surf News, 1 January, 2016 – We're fascinated with pro careers. I mean, what's it take to make a living surfing? How much of your personal integrity does one have to compromise? If you're Kelly Slater you don't have any issues with what you do. If you're Rob Machado your career evolves to match your personal growth and sometimes it's in harmony with your sponsor, so that's great.

But what if you're not really sure and you're still feeling things out? That's the interesting stuff.

It all started by calling Dan Malloy a soul surfer. There's a process in the surf industry where pros no longer rely on contests and videos to deliver exposure for their sponsors, and for lack of a better term we tend to call this next phase soul surfer.

Dan says that at age 12 someone handed him a stack of stickers and it was all downhill from there. The following interview is a wonderfully honest trip (thank you Dan) through his career.

So join us for a wonderful, rambling conversation with Dan Malloy as he comes to grips with making a living from surfing.



Dan Malloy © Chris Burkard

So how would you describe what it is that you do for a living?

I work on book and film projects for Patagonia. Technically it falls under marketing but I really hate what marketing has come to stand for. If it feels like “marketing” I get really bummed and antsy. Luckily Patagonia doesn’t sell snake oil or cool, so I can almost sleep at night.

I also work with the Research & Development and Design departments to refine and develop gear.

You had a successful video career, starring in several Taylor Steele movies. What was the transition like from video-pro to soul-guy?

“Soul guy”? Classic! I have been sponsored for over 20 years. I think it would be more apt to describe myself as a sold-soul guy.

But yeah, getting to work with Taylor Steele and that whole crew was amazing. Being from a smaller town north of the orange curtain and feeling really disconnected from the industry as a youngster made me really smitten by it all. I took to surfing at a really young age and all of my progression was in large part a translation of the videos

we watched (and unknowingly studied) day in and day out.

Emulating videos is how we learned to surf. So getting to be around the guys that I had grown up watching in videos was a huge deal to me. And then to work on the next generation of videos was like a dream come true. Working with Taylor was great. It was so simple, if you rode a wave on the level that he was looking for he would use it. If not, no matter how good of friends you were, you were scraps on the cutting room floor.

And the trips were amazing. To this day when I get to travel with guys like Shane Dorian or Kelly I feel really lucky and I try to absorb every last thing that I can while we are in the water. Its not often that I get to cross paths with people so gifted and connected. I think we glean little tiny fragments of that when we are around them.

Of all the things that I learned from that crew I feel the luckiest about how they introduced me to big waves. They knew a few spots that were amazing and empty. We would fill up a truck full of 10-foot boards and go surfing. No cameras no floatation no nothing. They pushed the heck out of each other but the machismo was played way down.

To this day I feel like its bad luck to put decals on my big wave boards because I can still hear Todd Chesser screaming “photo slut!!!” It was healthy peer pressure. He set the standard for ethic and taught us to check each other’s motives. It was a healthy camaraderie that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I feel incredibly lucky to have been riding on their coat tails for those few years.



On the Central Coast © Kanoa Zimmerman

As far as the transition from being a video guy to a soul guy?

I quit surfing competitively early on because an injury helped clear a few things up for me. The media and myself translated that as me being soulful, but ten years have passed and I see it differently now.

Contests can bring great things out in people. I watched first hand how competition turned Andy Irons into one of the greatest surfers of all time. It was an amazing transformation to witness and it was completely cultivated by raw competitive angst.

Conversely for me, the format at the time, combined with my nerves, seemed to stifle my progress and enthusiasm. And on the other hand I noticed that my surfing seemed to evolve quit a bit when I was on the road filming, so from that point on I have continued to work on films.

Working with Thomas Campbell was part of the transition. Working with him was a total blast and challenge and I learned a lot from him. He was looking for something completely different than Taylor, which was great timing for me because I couldn't do what Taylor was looking for anymore. The next generation had superseded me.

That was a big shift and it was the beginning of a less conventional surf industry based relationship with surfing but it was far from surfing purely for re-creation.

I have piled a ton of crap on top of the pure surfing experience and I think it will be another 20 years before I can peel it all away and consider myself a soul surfer again. I say again because I think the last time I was a soul surfer was probably around 1983 when it was just my two buddies and I and our Mach 77's in the shore break at Emma Wood.

Do you remember the yellow ones with the smooth orange bottoms? In a lot of ways those things are at the essence of surfing for me.

In a way, The Fall for me was the moment I stood up. That's when I became self aware as a surfer. It went from (boogie boarding) grinning ear-to-ear sliding on waves to (standing) "look at me look at me." When I was 12 some guy asked me if I wanted to be sponsored and handed me a pack of stickers, a whole pack with the wrapping and everything. It's been all down hill from there.

I am still a glorified t-shirt salesman. But it's pretty nice to help sell stuff for Patagonia because their stuff lasts. I like them because they are the first company that has treated me like a real employee (health care and everything). The surf industry companies tend to treat you like "part of the family," which to me seems like an unhealthy trait for a corporation to emulate.

What would you point to as your biggest career mistake?

I took a few modelling things when I was 20 or so. I was never looking for it but the opportunity just kind of landed on my doorstep. To this day thinking about it makes me cringe. The whole experience was just strange and unsettling. I don't really know why. I guess because I thought it was a big deal and maybe I was a little too young and thought it meant something.

I should have listened to Bob and Paul. Lucky for me, since then, my board hit me upside the head and I have a nice little scar that prohibits those kinds of opportunities.

What did you learn from that mistake?

I learned to stay north and to work with people that have similar vision and values. I have also found that tangible work leaves much less room for insecurities.

What has been your biggest 'Rocky Balboa' moment in life?

It was, without a doubt, my wedding day.



Malloy in Mendocino © Kanoa Zimmerman

Tell us about doing the Slow is Fast project. What did you learn besides a bicycle opens up heaps more of California than you see from the car window? | [Check out the book here](#)

I learned that it is possible to communicate a decent story even when the images and content gathered are second priority to the adventure. Virtually all industry based trips these days are the other way around. The tail has been wagging the dog for a good long while now.

What was the saddest thing (other than all that road kill) that you saw on your journey?

Kellen got severe food poisoning at a biker joint and he thought he was going to die. When I went to check on him in the morning he was nowhere to be found. I could only find his shoes and they were covered in shit. Shitty shoes are a pretty sad thing to see.

Is the Slow is Fast movement available to everyone? I mean, what if I suck at growing vegetables or canning leather?

I love that “canning leather.” I too suck at farming and canning leather. I don’t really think it has anything to do with that. I think maybe a few folks took that title as us telling them to slow down and to get chickens, overalls and a banjo.

“Slow is Fast” was the theme of the trip before it was the title. It comes from the Spanish vaquero term poco a poco or little by little. Cowboys from the Spanish tradition have the opposite philosophy from the Texas get’r done Cowboys. Vaqueros say, “slow is fast” as a sort of mantra to remind them of how to get good work done.

It means that slow is the way to work well so that you don’t spend all of your time fixing haste-induced mistakes. On the trip we used it as a reminder to ourselves (mostly to myself) to slow down for a second.

I can be super antsy and always in a rush and its starting to wear me out. Even right now I am typing like a lunatic and I have a list of shit to do, and when I really think about it my list could blow away and my computer could explode and pretty much everything would be just fine. And at that point I would probably get up and do what I should be doing right now which is checking in on my mom and sister or something like that.

This total mess of a rush that I get myself in is at least 87% self-imposed bullshit. On that trip, we tried really hard to self-impose limitations that would force us to slow down.

Share with us one of the more colourful confrontations you’ve had while doing this project. Angry drivers? Locals? Cranky livestock?

I honestly don’t remember one angry drive in 58 days. The only thing I remember were tons of stoked honks and mega shakas. As for angry locals, we avoided every localized surf spot because we had a camera.

I kind of think its neat that people really care about their home breaks. Locals understand well how powerful photographs can be. One picture can change a place forever. I am not in support of the bitter, crusty, drug addict that fights all day, but I also don’t support the lack of understanding on the photographer’s end.

Surfers and photographers rarely seem to have a grip on how much a photo can change a place. It’s not fair in my opinion and many photographers and surfers are completely blind to how much our actions can change an environment. I’ve seen and

been a part of that change first hand and I'm not proud of it. So we did our best to steer clear of those situations. No livestock mishaps either.



Keene, Malloy & Zimmerman on the road 'Slow is Fast'

If you weren't a Patagonia ambassador, what would you be doing?

No clue. But a dream job would be traveling the country and a bit of the world documenting and comparing large scale industrial agriculture and how it affects community to small scale community-based agriculture. There are so many amazing people to meet, hang out with and learn from and all of our histories and languages are completely steeped in agriculture, so I feel like it's an amazing lens to see the world through.

I don't know exactly how but this weird farm bug has bitten me. Call me crazy but I actually think that industrialized agriculture is a huge part of the human/environmental problem.

OK, you get to drop into five moments in history – surf or otherwise. Please

name them and why.

Do I get a translator? If so, I guess its cliché and cheesy but it’s the truth all the same. I would love to hang with Jesus for a day. Buddha might be rad to chill with too.

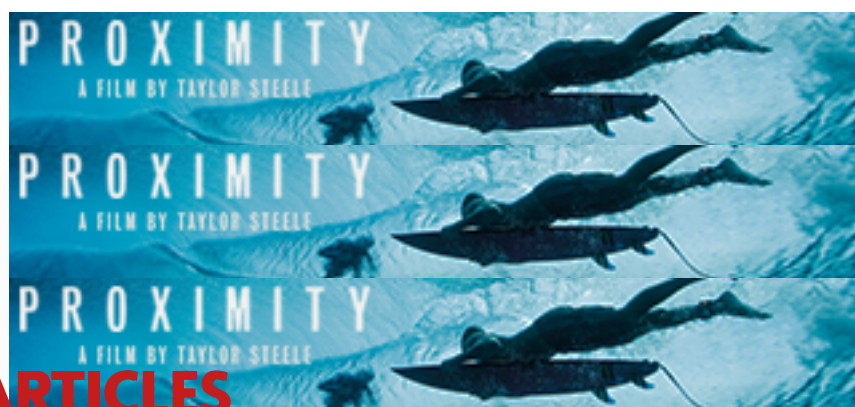
If I could sacrifice a few of the other history visits for a hang with Jesus and Buddha at the same time that would be the ultimate. My guess is that they were both talking about the same shit and that they would be high fiving the whole time. Who knows though, maybe they would just argue for five hours straight.

I would also love to hang out with my grandfather at the racetrack and to play baseball with my great grandfather in Mexico. If I could be granted the ability to surf well goofy footed I would go surf the early days at G-land with Gerry Lopez on acid.

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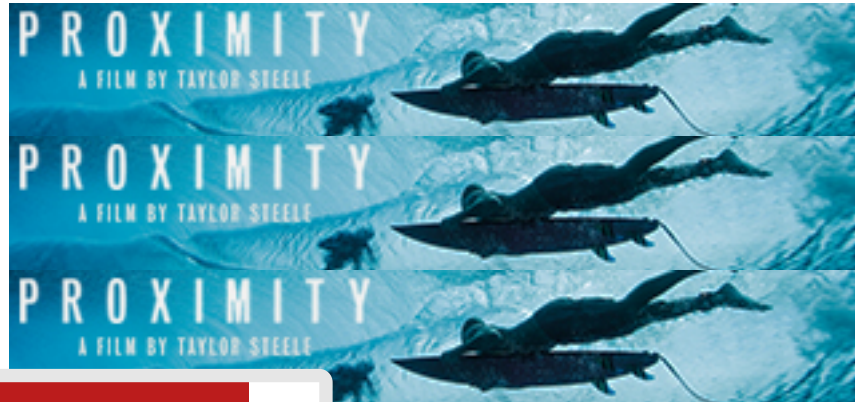
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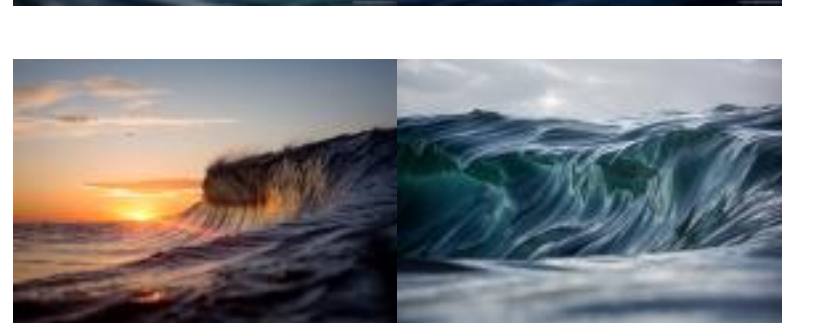
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