



SURFING FOR PEACE

How the brotherhood of wave-riders is searching for a solution to one of the world's most intractable confrontations – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

BY MATTHEW OLSEN

Surfing 4 Peace isn't so much a state of being as a state of mind. Are we really going to solve the problems of the Middle East through surfing? No, maybe not. But according to the logic of this growing grassroots movement, when politicians are unable to make peace between nations, it's up to us to make peace between peoples.

When over 3000 people showed up for the Surfing 4 Peace Benefit Concert, in October of 2007, Surfing 4 Peace co-founders Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz, Arthur Rashkovan and Kelly Slater knew they were on to something. Surfing 4 Peace is an American-Israeli-Palestinian person-to-person initiative created to build

communication and cross-border cooperation between the surfing communities of the Middle East and spread the stoke of surfing, starting with the Gaza Strip, Israel's neighbor to the south.

Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz is a legendary surfing ambassador, and is credited as the man who introduced Israel to surfing in the 1950s. Arthur Rashkovan is an Israeli surf industry executive and the go-to guy for all things surf and skate in Israel. Kelly Slater needs no introduction.

Surfing 4 Peace is also the lead organization in the joint effort known as The Trinity Project, which includes LA-based Gaza Surf Relief and

Explore Corps. Together, this surf-based alliance is hard at work to help bring the joy of surfing to the kids of the war-torn Gaza Strip. Since June of 2007, when Hamas militants took control of the Strip, Gaza has been placed under an economic and travel embargo by Israel and the international community. The aim of the embargo, which limits the flow of goods into Gaza to all but humanitarian relief supplies, is to weaken the grip of Hamas' hold on power in Gaza through collective punishment. Over a year has passed and the embargo has had little, if any, affect on Hamas or their hold on power, while daily life in Gaza has become more and more difficult.



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With the end of the siege nowhere in sight, and with little or no resources on the ground for youth recreation in Gaza, the Trinity Project is gathering the necessary resources to allow Gaza locals to take advantage of the one recreational resource that is open to them: the Mediterranean Sea.

The Med may not have the waves that a proper ocean can provide, but it has plenty of waves and the precedent for surfing in the region is well established. Israel, Gaza's neighbor to the north, has a thriving surf industry with thousands of surfers in the water and a strong local manufacturing sector. Gaza shares the same

coast and the same waves but its people lack the access to equipment and the finances to purchase boards, wetsuits, etc. With unemployment in Gaza at or around 80%, surfing is a luxury that most in Gaza simply cannot afford.

Seweryn "Sev" Sztalkoper is well aware of this fact and in the summer of 2007 he founded Gaza Surf Relief to help gather donations for the aspiring surfers of Gaza. He has since gathered thousands of dollars in donations, including brand new surfboards, clothing, and related gear. While Sev prepares the donor end, Surfing 4 Peace's political advisor, and Explore Corps



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director, Matthew Olsen, has been hard at work on the ground in Gaza organizing the local surfers and helping to establish the Gaza Surf Club. The Surf Club aims to unify Gazan surfers into a defined group for the purpose of securing donations, organizing cross-border events, and engaging in an efficient dialogue with the international surfing community.

Meanwhile, in Tel Aviv, Surfing 4 Peace Director Arthur Rashkovan orchestrates the show and keeps everyone on track. In most other situations this type of initiative would be fairly straightforward but with daily rocket and mortar attacks being launched from Gaza into Israel and the constant threat of a major Israeli military incursion into Gaza, the situation is anything but. So, like a general in his own little army of surf do-gooders, Arthur directs the efforts to spread the stoke across the frontlines of war. With the first major shipment of Gaza Surf Relief goods safely delivered to Tel Aviv, the Trinity team must now engage in constant negotiations with the Israeli Army and Civilian Administration to gain permission for the surfboards to be sent into Gaza, despite the ongoing embargo.

Luckily for everyone, Arthur and his team already have experience getting surfboards into Gaza. In August of 2007, Doc Paskowitz led the Surfing 4 Peace team down to the Israel-Gaza border with 14 boards donated by Israeli surf shops. In an event that received worldwide media coverage, Doc led the charge across the border, a board under each arm, to deliver the goods to the eager Palestinian surfers waiting on the other side. The event sent a loud and clear message to surfers and professional peacemakers alike: when the politicians fail to make peace, the people must take it upon themselves to reach out across political divides.

The momentum that it created was evident at the Surfing 4 Peace Benefit Concert, held at the Dolphinarium Beach in Tel Aviv two months later. Attendance was at over 3,000 and the festivities included a sunset paddle-out and surfer's circle for peace, followed by a live show with performances by Kelly Slater, big-wave charger Makua Rothman and local surf band Malka Baya. The highlight of the night was a speech explaining the Surfing 4 Peace initiative given by Doc Paskowitz, who has become a living legend in the Israeli surfing community.



This simple reliance on the moods of the ocean is mirrored by the local squid fishermen. We change shifts every morning, walking past them on our way to the beach. This simple reliance on the moods of the ocean.



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The winter of 2007-2008 saw the beginning of the next phase of the Surfing 4 Peace project, with the arrival of the Gaza Surf Relief boards and gear, and the formation of the Gaza Surf Club. As we go to press, the next shipment of boards has arrived and the Trinity team awaits the necessary army permits for their import into Gaza. It could be days or it could be weeks until the paperwork is approved, which is more of a political issue than a military one.

But the Trinity crew isn't just sitting around waiting. Gaza Surf Relief is already hard at work gathering the next shipment of donated goods, including wetsuits and soft-top surfboards for an

Explore Corps-sponsored Gaza Surf School. Surfing 4 Peace is working with Israeli-Arab surfers to help increase the resources for Israel's poorest Arab neighborhoods and develop sea- and surf-based alternatives for the area's kids. The Trinity team is also working on producing Arabic-language translations of classic surf films, a cross-border music collaboration project, and a skateboard donation program.

In Los Angeles, the editing process has begun for a documentary film called *God Went Surfing With The Devil*, that follows the efforts of Surfing 4 Peace and the Trinity Project to spread the stoke in the context of war, with an anticipated

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release later in the year. The title comes from a quote by Doc Paskowitz on the occasion of his cross-border charge to donate the first group of boards: "God will surf with the Devil if the waves are good".

Judging by the leadership of Surfing 4 Peace and the efforts of the Trinity Project, you don't even have to check the surf report to know that, at the grassroots level at least, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is going off.

Matthew Olsen is an American political consultant and the director of Explore Corps, a California-based non-profit that develops outdoor educational and

youth recreational programming in the context of international development. He splits his time between Tel Aviv, where is the political advisor for Surfing 4 Peace, and Gaza, where he works with the Gaza Surf Club and Gaza Surf Relief.

You can find out more at: Surfing 4 Peace: www.surfing4peace.com/



God Went Surfing With The Devil: www.godwentsurfing.com
 Gaza Surf Club: www.gazasurfclub.com
 Gaza Surf Relief: www.gazasurfrelief.com
 The Trinity Project: www.thetrinityproject.com
 Explorer Corps

SurfWise

BY NIK ZANELLA

How a doctor, surfer and family man broke all the rules in his search for a natural way of life, a path towards higher understanding, and peace among people of the sea.

"I went into the water literally ready to pull my brains out, and I came back out of the water a warrior." Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz

August 21st 2007, Erez, Israel. The Mediterranean's most contentious beachbreak lies only a few miles west from the Erez Crossing Terminal. Inside the frontier's fortress a palpable sense of fear is amplified by the 40°C heat of the southern Mediterranean summer. Qassam rocket bombings become the daily norm in this area since the victory of Hamas in the June '07 elections forced authorities to shut the frontier between Israel and the Gaza Strip. But not to "Doc"!

Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz is now 86. He is one of the oldest surfers still catching waves at the



point in San Onofre in California and he's been doing it for decades. He left the Gaza Strip 33 years ago when the Suez crisis between Egypt and Israel forced him to move his surf school and his family from Tel Aviv back to California. His facial skin is wrinkled from six decades of saltwater and offshore winds, but under his white-haired chest pulses the heart of a young lion – a lion determined to leap over that fence, or at least to help the 14 boards he brought reach the Palestinian locals waiting on the other side.

The sparks that set off this unusual adventure in surf diplomacy were a couple of pictures that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in July 2007. They showed two surfers on the beach of Al Deira, together with their only battered board.

It grew so fast, and all along I committed myself to Jack as a manager, along with his wife, Kim. It became important to me.

The article explained how some Palestinians try to escape the poverty and violence of the area by riding the waves, with any board or floating device they can get hands on.

Doc was struck by this story. He was the first surfer to ride the waves along the Gaza Strip in the mid-1950s, looking for surf with a Hobie pintail under his arm, chased by army officials confusing his longboard for a rocket launcher. He spent months roaming these clean beachbreaks nearly alone, studying the Pentateuch and working towards the socialist utopia on Kibbutz farms. The surf school he opened in Tel Aviv in that same year triggered the birth of the Israeli surf community, the first to bloom in the enclosed basin of the Mediterranean. They still consider him a prophet down there and for good reason: thanks to his enthusiasm, surfing is today a hugely popular pastime along Israel's shores with thousands of devotees, many of whom also serve as soldiers along those same troubled shores.

"So I told myself, we'll go to Israel and get those Palestinians some boards," remembers Doc in an interview given to the *New York Times* after his return to the US. His first step was to contact Mr Rashkova, the Israel representative of Surfers 4 Peace, an NGO founded by the Paskowitz family and Kelly Slater to help Palestinians and Israelis share waves on the basic philosophy that "people who surf together, can live together."

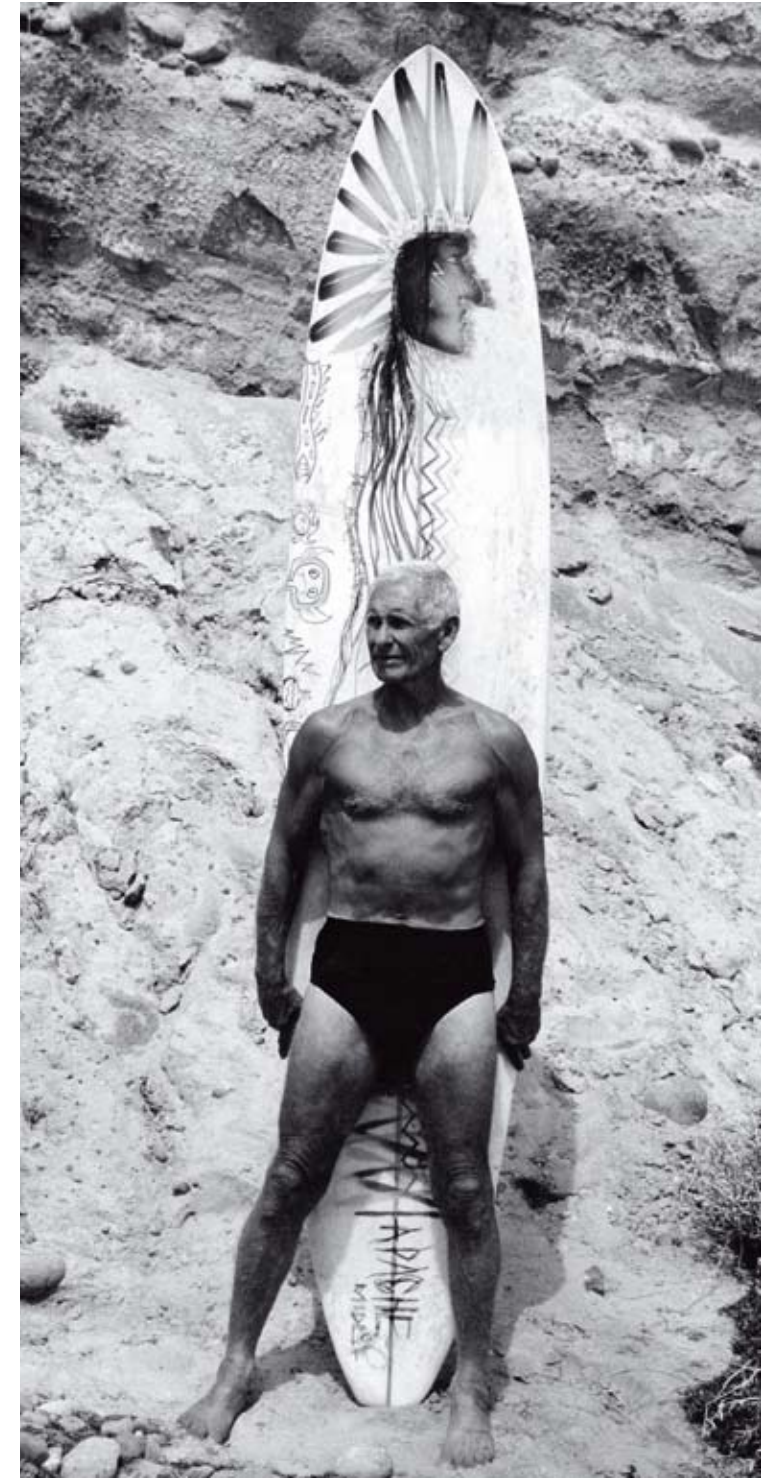
The project required help from both sides of the Erez fence but it wasn't long before, bare-chested in exploration-style kaki shorts, Dorian faced the Israeli guards at Erez with two surfboards under his arms, asking them to authorize the meeting. The first answer was, a harsh, "Lo" (that's 'no' in Ivrit), but the words he proffered afterwards made the miracle happen: "I came 12,500 miles from Hawaii to give away these boards. The guys who need them are standing 50 meters from here, and you're trying to stop me? How can you do that to a fellow Jew?" He then hugged the guards and begged them ... and the gates of Zion were opened.

Doc Paskowitz's flirt with the Gaza Strip is only one chapter of Paskowitz's extravagant surf

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saga which is summed up in Doug Pray's documentary, *Surfwise*. Pray specializes in making films about American subcultures (Hype! and Scratch) and *Surfwise* tells Doc's story using interviews with him, his immediate family of eight sons, one daughter and two wives, using plenty of original super-8 family footage.

In the '50s Doc was a successful Jewish-Californian physician, regularly surfing in Hawaii and totally integrated in the America's post war economic dream. But Doc was looking

for something more than money and a career. Attracted by the newly-born promised land of Israel he quit his first wife and the safety of his job to "embark upon an odyssey" as he often says. Suffering from anxiety and in dire need of a spiritual rebirth he moved to Tel Aviv in '56 where he linked back to his Jewish background and a growing an obsession with maintaining the human body for optimum performance (in 1998 he published a book titled *Surfing and Health*). He developed a strict kosher diet of no pork, sugar, fat, alcohol or drugs of any sort – a





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diet he rigorously imposed on his whole family.

When he went back to the US in the '70s, the social conventions dictated by American capitalism had lost any meaning to him. He married Juliette Paez (a stunning Mexican beauty 40 years younger), customized a 24ft camper van and started to live "like a family of gorillas in the forest," as he says, governing his drove with the authority of a monarch. He home-schooled his nine kids, moving up and down and across the American continent from Northern California to Costa Rica to New York, giving medical consultations for a living, honoring Shabbat every Friday and catching a lot of waves in the process.

Surfing has played a crucial role in Doc's didactics and discipline. "Most parents say 'Go to school. Don't go swimming with sharks, that's dangerous,'" recalls Salvador, the seventh Paskowitz son in a touching interview recorded for the movie. "Our parents said, 'you can go swimming with sharks, but you're not fuckin' going to school—that shit's dangerous!'"

Critics of this lifestyle at the fringe of society came from inside and outside the family. His daughter Navah (born in '69) was the only girl in the crammed van. Her memories of those days show a love-hate relation with that outcast life: "We were just like puppies," she remembers. "There'd be three or four people in that little lower bed thing, a couple of guys on the side couch bed, there would be at least two or three on the floor, mum and dad would be up above and I was on this weird board-thing that we made at their feet – which certainly

disturbed me sexually, because mum and dad were doing it every night!"

The world famous Paskowitz Surf Camp, is what perpetrates the family creed nowadays. In 1998, Dorian gave his fourth-born son, Israel, ownership of the famous school. Izzy and Danielle have three children, including Isaiah, who is autistic and is shown in *Surfwise* at home with his father. Inspired by the positive results of tandem surfing with Isaiah, Izzy and Danielle founded Surfers Healing, a successful nonprofit organization that offers free surfing day camps to autistic children and their families in Southern California, New York, and Hawaii (www.surfershealing.com). It is supported by the wider family – who all now live in real houses – and by numerous pro surfers who volunteer their time.

Meantime, Doc Paskowitz has his hands full again, this time trying to bring some of his radical positive philosophy to bear upon a conflict that desperately needs some aloha.

You can check out more on the Surfwise and the Paskowitz story on these websites: www.surfwisefilm.com Surfer's Healing on:



www.surfershealing.org
Paskowitz Surf Camp on:
www.paskowitz.com

Nik Zanella is editor of Italy's foremost surf magazine *Surf News*. A fluent Mandarin speaker

and avid explorer, he probably knows more waves in the Mediterranean and China than anyone on Earth. Nik lives, writes and surfs in Ravenna on the Italian NE coast.