

SALLY PARRIN

ORIGINAL SURFBOARD CO

WORDS AND PHOTO GREG MARTIN

Tell me a little about yourself...

I grew up in Exeter, Devon, although I spent all my childhood summer holidays living at Porthcothan Bay, North Cornwall - where I first learnt to use the original wooden surfboards, now more often called bellyboards. I moved back to Devon in my thirties to get married. Henry and I now have two teenage sons. I was a full time mum for 14 years until 2008 when I set up The Original Surfboard Company.

Describe your average day at work...

I don't really have an average day at work as there isn't a dividing line for me between being at work and not at work. I am not good at routine. I am always thinking about my business and often work crazy hours - having my most significant business ideas at 4am!

What qualifications and experience do you have?

After school I got an HND in Business Studies and then a few years later while working in London I did a PR Diploma - but it was so long ago now I am not sure these still count! I think that the fact I have been using these thin wooden bodyboards for more than 45 years - since I was five - is probably the most useful qualification I have for running The Original Surfboard Co.

If you were to start again from scratch, what would you do differently?

I try not to ask myself this question because you can never wind back the clock - but if I could then I would have started producing the higher grade boards earlier. They are much lighter and flexible than the birch ply boards.

What is your greatest strength?

I think most people would say it is the passion that I have about preserving and reviving these original wooden surfboards.

What is your greatest weakness?

Being untidy and drinking too much

wine - not sure which is the greatest weakness.

What would you do if you won the lottery?

I would treat myself and family to a trip to Hawaii to see the original wooden paipo boards in the museum.

What irritates you about other people?

When they insist I can't call my boards surfboards! For at least 50 years these boards were called surfboards or surf rider boards and were the original British surf sport. I had no idea at the time that it would be a controversial term to use. The more research I do the more keen I am to preserve and revive this original surf riding term.

What is the most important lesson you have learnt?

That we never know how long we have to live. When I was 16 my mother died very suddenly at the age of 42 and in 2004 my sister died after a five year fight against breast cancer - aged 46. I have friends who are about to become 50 who say they don't want to celebrate being that old - but I feel really lucky to have reached 50 and still feel alive and well.

Who are your heroes and why?

Tom Wegener was the first talented surfer I had ever heard speak publicly in a positive way about bellyboarding. I was so excited to discover that he was inspiring some of the world's top surfers to try out surfing on wooden boards. I had the honour of sharing some waves with Tom the first time he ever surfed in the UK. Also Gwyn Haslock who pioneered British Ladies surfing and has been riding a wooden bodyboard since the 1950s.

Have you ever been fired and if so, what was the reason?

No, although I have been officially made "redundant" which I think sounds worse - it is like you are personally no longer



useful at work. I would rather have been fired.

Describe how you continue learning on a daily basis...

The first summer I started my company I met John Isaac (Revolver Surf Emporium, Newquay) and Christiaan Bailey (Ocean Motion pictures), who introduced me to Tom Wegener, Jack Johns, James Parry, Sam Boex and a number of the talented Newquay surfers. It has been special to have these very talented surfers ride my boards and to listen to the feedback they have given me and to learn from this. When I started the company I had never expected that my boards could be used at such an advanced level - but I think it's one of the most special aspects about these boards that the same board can be used by all ages

and abilities.

What makes you think you're the best person for your job?

I am not sure that I am... but because I started the company I guess I am the only one for the job.

Tell us about the most difficult decision you have had to make..

The more time that I spend in Cornwall the more I want to live there and move my business there full time, but my family life is very much based in Devon especially during the term times.

What is your biggest regret?

Not having the idea for my business earlier!

Why do you want this job?

I still think the most thrilling part of my job is watching someone catch their first wave - and the smile that follows.

originalsurfboards.co.uk □