

Wedging Dipstick - Part Two

By Clement Henriksen

Fred was waiting in the dark fog-damp parking lot when Dip pulled up. He tossed his fins and wetsuit into Fred's SUV. "Can you handle driving?" asked Fred. "Melinda and I were up late wiring cable for the TV sets." They planned to have sports videos playing continuously on several monitors throughout the store.

Dip climbed behind the wheel and Fred crashed in the front seat, using a folded shorty wetsuit as a pillow. As Dip centered the heavy vehicle in the lane his thoughts wandered.

Sure as the tide, he was going to graduate, and his life was going to change. But into what? All he really wanted to do was surf and be with Teri. And do interesting stuff, like some of his classes and helping Fred and Melinda with the shop.

Dip checked the gas gauge as he passed the Seaward off-ramp. They'd have to stop somewhere before LA to fuel up.

The trip was good, it kept his mind off his troubles, it was what surfing was all about. Surf's up, let's go, moment's notice. Fred was cool. He had a steady gig, but it didn't own him.

He and Fred had talked about that. It took as much balance, Fred said, to trade off time and money as it did to make a late takeoff on an overhead wave. You had to watch it. Not enough attention to the business and it was back to sleeping in your car. Too much, and you piss your life away making a buck. Somehow, Fred had managed to make it happen.

Dip drove past an ugly strip mall lit up like a neon whore. Dip never liked going south unless he was going to Mexico. LA beaches had too many aggro locals and he'd heard the water was polluted. North was where it was at, north to the Ranch or even farther north to Morro Bay. He was the local there. He could share a break with his buds and not have to fight over waves.

LA didn't seem to bother Fred, though. Going south with Fred felt as right as a nose ride at Malibu. Fred had grown up in Orange County and Dip knew he wasn't intimidated. And Fred had the south coast wired. Dip wasn't so sure about it himself, but if the Wedge was happening and Fred wanted to make the drive, Dip was happy to go along.

Dip steered into an off-ramp as empty and dark as the gas tank. At the end of the ramp Fred woke to the change in road rhythm. Dip turned under the generic CalTrans overpass, and Fred blearily asked, "Where are we?"

"Thousand Oaks," Dip answered.

They fueled quickly at an easy-off well-lit freeway oasis. The SUV squatted in the empty plaza, gas ticking into the tank as Fred and Dip scanned the shelves inside for breakfast. Finding something healthy was slim pickings. Fred came back to the car with a cup of coffee. "I'll drive," he said, and Dip tossed him the keys.

Settling in the passenger seat, Dip opened his package. "Newton?"

Fred accelerated up the on-ramp. "Sure." He pulled into sparse dawn traffic with the effortless familiarity born of long practice with things in motion. "Thanks for driving," said Fred, as he chewed cookie, sipped coffee and checked his rearview mirror in a constant kaleidoscope of shifting attention.

"Sure. You're welcome to it," said Dip, "I don't like LA traffic."

"Nothing to it. You just gotta know where you're going and how to get there."

"But check how busy it is. I mean, where are all these people going?" Dip waved the yellow newton box at the surrounding cars. "This is early Sunday morning, right?"

"Church, maybe? Those guys are going surfing." said Fred, passing a car with long boards racked on top.

Seeing other surfers was a depressing reminder of LA crowds. "I hope the Wedge isn't crowded."

"Don't worry," laughed Fred, "it will be. Fig me."

Fred stayed on 101 past the 405 to the 134. As the sky lightened they traveled in the valley north of the hills. When the hills tailed off into the LA river plain at Griffith Park, he turned the corner onto I-5 and headed to downtown LA. As a waterman, Fred's instinct was to follow the coast. As a native southern Californian he was leery of 405 because of the constant jam at LAX. He had reckoned right, driving straight through the heart of LA early Sunday morning was proving to be a fast roll. All of which was lost on Dip who relied totally on Fred's navigation and didn't pay attention. Instead, Dip obsessed on his problems.

Fred drove quietly in sync with the early morning traffic. Dip had been silent since Calabasas and was morosely tracking the passing cityscape. Fred glanced at Dip and broke the silence. "How's it working out at school? You pick your class yet?"

"Not yet." Dip was putting it off-choosing a major seemed so final. "I know I gotta do it and I will, but it's like I'm getting locked in, you know? I like keeping my options open."

"Decisions are funny. You know how you line up a section, surf your line, then line up the next section? Decisions are like that. You make one and it seems like the end of the line. But what it really is, is the starting place for a bunch of new options. Can you relate to that? More of a beginning than an end?"

"I guess." Dip mulled the thought. "And what if it's closing out?"

"Then you catch the next wave. Always a next wave."

Dip sadly looked at the billboards, power lines, and blank apartment walls fencing the freeway. The American dream wasn't going to make him happy. Surfing made him happy, like the last time he surfed Rincon, two weeks ago.

The point was peeling nicely but the waves were barely shoulder high and the light crowd was strung out from Indicator's to the freeway. He'd just pulled out of a wave and was paddling back when he found himself perfectly positioned on a secondary peak. He buried the tail, turned, stroked once and dropped in effortlessly. After the bottom turn, maybe just to see how long he could hold the line, he decided to stay locked motionless in the pocket.

As he crouched in the incredibly even Rincon wave, he looked at the thin vertical lip trembling not more than two feet away. The water surface danced in the chaos of each

moment, but from moment to moment the energy and shape of the peeling Rincon wave was constant. The water molecules changed but the energy didn't. He had stared at the lip, became absorbed in it and forgot himself, losing track of his point of view.

Finally, it was more than he could stand and he snapped himself out of the hypnotic moment. He tried to bounce off the lip but fell clumsily into the water. When he surfaced, his head felt as big as the ocean, as if the waves were passing through him instead of past him. He must have had a good ride though, because another surfer hooted at him as he clambered back on his board.

He could still get high from the memory. But the memory wouldn't help him graduate.

Dip crawled back to the present and answered, "I know I have to choose a major. I've narrowed it down to Business Economics or Geography." But what did Fred care? Years ago, when Fred started winning a few surf contests he'd quit community college and never looked back.

"Fred, think I ought to just chuck it? You never finished school, right?"

Fred looked at Dip like he was insane. "Are you kidding? Chuck seven years of your life?"

Not wanting to be thought insane, Dip back-pedaled quickly. "Just a thought."

"I'm not you. And times have changed." Fred went on, "Oh, and by the way, how much did your folks put into your education? A hundred grand?" Fred grumbled off to himself. Dip didn't say anything, sometimes it was best to let Fred pursue a topic on his own.

Dip tried the radio, couldn't find anything he liked and turned it off. They silently drove through one faceless suburb after another. Finally, Fred turned on the 55, angling straight to Newport. At the end of the freeway, they waited for the light and looked across Nineteenth Street at the round dome of Triangle Square. Traffic was in full swing now and Newport Boulevard was as busy as a school of tuna.

“So what's with you and the Wedge, Fred? I didn't know you were into body surfing.”

“Headdip! Dude! It's my place! I used to come down here all the time when I was a grommet. And the Wedge is more unique than practically anywhere.” The light changed and in the excitement of the moment, Fred beat the plumbing truck next to him off the line.

“Yeah?” Dip started to pick up on Fred's enthusiasm. “Is it really that radical?”

“For sure. You've been there, right?”

“Right.”

“You may not know this, but the jetty points 170°, practically due south. A west swell hits the jetty, and reflects back onto the original wave. It makes an insanely steep drop.”

“Cool!”

“And dangerous. The Wedge breaks in really shallow water,” said Fred. He was excited but serious and Dip began to forget his problems. This was going to be good.

Fred moved with early morning traffic through Costa Mesa, across the Pacific

Coast Highway, and past the Newport shipyards. They moved into the quieter residential streets of the peninsula. In the last block of Ocean Boulevard a restored woody left the curb as they approached. “Unreal!” grinned Fred and swooped on the parking space like a seagull on a french fry.

On the Beach

The central coast surfers changed clothes in the car and scanned the sidewalk for broken glass and dog shit as they barefooted to the beach. Urban surf skills, once learned, were never forgotten. Just before the harbor channel, Dip turned past the last house and looked past a big palm tree down the line of the jetty. Just next to the jetty, across fifty yards of sand and the lifeguard tower, he saw green water hump and spill with a cracking roar like the train at Jalama.

“Awesome,” Dip breathed, talking to himself. Excitement hovered in the pit of his stomach like a wave passing over a sandbar.

“The Wedge is indeed wedging,” said Fred, proud to show off his spot in such fine condition.

Fred and Dip walked across the wide flat beach to the lifeguard tower. At the foot of the tower wave action had formed a steep wet beach, the water sloshing a dozen feet below. Foamy white water went thirty yards seaward where just outside the break line a half dozen heads bobbed in green water.

The lifeguard eyed them carefully for signs of incompetence. They must have passed muster since he said nothing and put his gaze back to the water. Dip sat on the edge of the steep wet beach and eagerly pulled on his fins.

“Wait,” said Fred, “watch this set.” A group of waves lined up like green corduroy. Moving in at a stately pace, the first wave hit the irregular boulders of the jetty and whitely sprayed some of its force. The remainder of its power reflected smoothly off the jetty at an oblique angle symmetric to its approach. The energy of the reflected wave moved smoothly and silently along the parent wave until both touched bottom. Its liquid passage now blocked, the wave energy sought release. The point where the waves coincided formed a peak, reaching high where it could no longer go deep. The wave drew water into itself, sucking water back from the beach to feed its storm-born need. The waiting body surfers were now either diving deep to escape the wave's grasp, or swimming hard in front of the peak to catch it.

Suddenly, the green wave popped up to an unsustainable height, violently throwing its top forward and out in a curving heavy lip that fell free to the base of the wave. A boogie boarder skidded down the face next to the curl and raced it to the wave's shoulder. The race was close and when the boarder finally escaped the wave threw him away like a dog shakes off water.

“My guess is that was an eight foot face breaking in five foot of water,” observed Fred as the wave's last energy pushed up the beach to peter out at their feet.

“Not a good place to go over the falls,” agreed Dip. He didn't mind the advice at all. The water at their feet rushed back down the beach to feed the next wave, repeating the sequence.

“Try to get your body on top of the water, not in it, or it'll take you right up the face. And even though you're body surfing you don't have to take off right at the peak.” The wave was so strong that even a poor hydrofoil like the human body could catch the wave

without having to seek the most critical starting point.

When the set finished they used the lull to quickly walk backwards down the beach in their webbed feet. One step into the water, a flat dive and they were stroking hard through the impact zone for the safe green water.

Before he reached the foam line Dip could see he had not been fast enough. A wave loomed and broke in front of him. Dip dove to the too-close bottom, grabbed sand, and waited for the wave. He felt it lifting him off the bottom and kicked hard to escape. He surfaced, having time only to take a breath and repeat the maneuver with the next wave, and the next. He reached safety breathing hard and swimming with determination. He had been lucky and knew it.

Keeping an eye seaward, Fred greeted Dip's arrival with "See what I mean?"

Dip's flutters disappeared with the exertion and the intimate contact with the wave. The near escape had concentrated his mind wonderfully. He was excited; the Wedge was living up to its billing. He'd been in bigger surf, but never body surfing or in such shallow water. The thrill was real and so was the danger, as everybody in the water knew. The small group of body surfers was quiet and alert, waiting their turn, watching to see how the next wave would set up, and positioning to stay outside the pit.

The waves were consistent, formed by a strong single west swell that peaked predictably. The body surfers ahead of Dip caught waves, leaving the next one to him. Dip and another body surfer took off on the same wave. Dip thought he had better position closer to the peak but he misjudged the speed and power of the doubled wave. It picked him up like an elevator and Dip suddenly knew he wasn't going to make it out of the bowl. He fell straight down out of the curl, three tons of green and white water plunging with him. A moment of calm in the vortex then chaos as the wave energy exploded into the pit and slammed Dip against the sandy bottom. Dip curled into a ball with his arms wrapped around his head. He focused on keeping his mouth closed and waited for the tumbling to stop.

He popped up in fizzy aerated whitewater like a human Alka-Seltzer. He gasped for air but sucked in foam as he looked frantically for the next wave. He knew it would be there, over him like a truck on the freeway. Without breath he dove hard beneath the wave. He opened his eyes underwater and saw the wave curve over him, felt it suck at him while he continued to kick for the few feet that would keep him safe. Then he was safe in green water. He surfaced and struggled to get his wind back, alert to oncoming waves. Dip knew he had to go directly into the lineup again or risk losing his nerve.

Everything worked on his next wave. He positioned closer to the shoulder, focused on lying out and swimming as it built up under him and, just like that, he felt the wave lift him up. Hanging out of the wave up to his waist, he easily moved up and down the curving face, part of its exhilarating power. Just before the wave closed to block his escape route, Dip flipped under to exit underneath the core of its power.

Dip swam back to the lineup with a grin on his face, pumped for the next wild ride. You had to adjust your timing for the Wedge, but you could get it wired.

The sun climbed higher in the sky. The water twinkled in the sunlight above and glowed green and transparent beneath. This might be LA but the water seemed clear and clean as a load of laundry drying on the line.

A crowd gathered on the beach to see the show. A lifeguard truck parked behind the tower, just in case. Waves traveling under Dip lifted him so he could see the beach stretching north punctuated by lifeguard towers, large beachhouses across the sand and tall palm trees against a clear blue sky.

The lifeguards raised the tattered yellow flag with the black ball and Fred told Dip it meant that the surf was now open to body surfers only. The tide was rising and so was the swell. The wave face had increased to fifteen feet of vertical sucking drop. More body surfers arrived and the lineup got more crowded. As competition increased for the waves, the body surfers lost the quiet unstated respect of the morning. It became each surfer for himself as the waves became scarcer, harder to catch and more dangerous.

Fred was well outside the foam line and looking out to sea. Dip swam over to him and said "I'm done, how about you?" He didn't want to say it, but the increased wave size was making him a little freaky. And the crowd was getting to be a hassle.

"Yeah, I got what I came for," said Fred.

Dip came in first, ending a good ride by letting the white water push him to shore like a plank from a shipwreck. He put his hands down to touch the sand and the wave passed over, leaving him to struggle to his feet. The hydraulic power of the backwash pulled at him like water over a dam. He leaned against the weight of the rushing water while the it dropped from his waist to his knees, finally allowing him to stagger up the beach beyond its grasp. Fins in hand, Dip waited for Fred on the wet sand at the front of the crowd.

Fred ate it big-time on his last wave.

Fred and another body surfer caught the wave. The other body surfer dropped in late, lost his hold on the face above Fred and fell heavily on him with a soundless impact that Dip felt in his guts. Fred seemed lose control and Dip watched with horror as Fred was sucked up the face and sent over the falls like a rag doll. The crowd gasped. The lifeguard charged the surf immediately, there was no question Fred needed rescuing.

Fred surfaced face down in the impact zone. The crowd went quiet in the roar of the surf, watching the lifeguard do his job. The lifeguard struggled keep a grip on Fred and another lifeguard entered the water to help. They dragged Fred's limp body up the beach while Dip looked on wide-eyed. The lifeguards laid Fred on the sand and were clearing his airway to start mouth-to-mouth when he turned his head, coughed up seawater and started breathing again.

Dip felt more relieved than making it outside on a big day. Then he noticed Fred's broken upper arm, the displaced bone bulging oddly against the skin. When they moved him to dry sand, Fred thrashed and moaned in pain. The lifeguards kept the crowd back until the Newport paramedics arrived, their red ambulance truck slowly parting the crowd to where Fred lay in the shade of the lifeguard tower. The paramedics got right to work, pulling a body board out of the truck and laying it next to Fred.

"Dip," croaked Fred through gritted teeth.

"I'm here," Dip, stricken and unsure, stepped out from the surrounding crowd.

"Keys. Car keys. Here." Fred fumbled awkward at the waistband of his trunks with his good arm.

“Take it easy buddy,” said the paramedic, took the keys out of Fred’s pocket and gave them to Dip.

“Call Melinda.” Fred forced out the words.

“Sure. OK. I will,” said Dip, trying to sound reassuring.

The paramedic put a neck collar on Fred. “Where are you taking him?” asked Dip worriedly.

“Hoag. Don’t worry, it’s the best around,” said the paramedic. Dip stood by uselessly, watching the paramedics work on Fred. They strapped Fred to a board, then injected him with a syringe.

“What was that?” said the lifeguard, eyeing the scene with professional interest.

“Morphine. Bye-bye,” said the paramedic.

“Wow,” said the lifeguard.

The paramedics pulled off Fred’s fins and threw them to Dip. They lifted Fred, his eyes closed, into the ambulance. Dip flinched in with Fred’s pain. Dip and the lifeguard watched the truck pull away slowly through the crowd, its roof light flashing blue in the glaring sunlight.

“He was doing good until that guy dropped in on him,” said the lifeguard.

“He’s a local,” said Dip and ran across the sand, past the mansions to Fred’s SUV parked on the shady residential street.

Dip drove to the hospital and called Melinda from the waiting room. She sounded shook up, insisted on driving to Newport and called Dip twice on the way from her cell phone. But when she arrived at the hospital and saw Fred joking with the staff, her sympathy hardened.

“You’re lucky your neck isn’t broken,” she said. Fred was immobilized in a day-glo fiberglass cast over his arm and shoulder, his upper arm stuck out from his body like an action figure in mid salute.

“I’ve seen the Wedge do worse,” said the ER resident. “I’d count a fractured humerus and a separated shoulder as lucky, all right.”

“And your timing sucks,” Melinda continued, ignoring the doctor.

“No problem.” Fred was still not all there.

“Big problem. We have all our ski inventory coming in this week, remember?” Melinda looked ready to cry.

Dip broke in. “Don’t worry Melinda. I can handle it. Just get Fred home and we’ll figure it out tomorrow.” He felt as purposeful as he had in Wedge lineup, ready to do the right thing.

“Thanks, Dip.” Melinda touched Dip’s arm then turned to Fred. “OK tough guy,” she sighed, “Let’s go.”

The doctor spoke again. “Don’t let tough guy screw with the cast. It stays like that for four weeks, then get it gets checked. If he lets it heal, maybe he can graduate to a sling.”

“Just slide me in the back,” said Fred, “I want to conk out.”

When Dip and Teri came by the Full On shop the next morning to drop off Fred’s keys, Melinda was at the counter, amidst store-full of undone and

half-done tasks.

“Melinda, I’m so sorry to hear about Fred,” said Teri.

“Thank goodness it wasn’t worse,” said Melinda. Anxiety lined her face, and she slid a clipboard back and forth on the counter to no purpose.

Dip glanced around the store, as unfinished as a raw surfboard blank. Fred’s vision was evident but wiring hung from the television monitors and surf gear was stacked in loose piles. “How’s Fred feeling?” he said.

“Pretty wrung out. The arm is bothering him. He’s going to be home for awhile.” Melinda pushed her hair out of her face and looked morosely around the store.

“I know you’re worried about the store,” he said. “But don’t. Teri and I are here to help. What do you want to do next?”

“You mean that?” said Melinda with slow hope.

“It’s the right thing to do,” said Dip.

Teri nodded her agreement. “I’ve got a few days before classes start,” she said. “I’d really like to help.”

“I looked at my schedule,” said Dip. “I can take a business class that meets Tuesday-Thursday and work here the rest of the time.”

“Is that the right choice? I don’t want our problems to be your burden.” Melinda looked honestly concerned.

“It feels good to me. I’ll get the degree in Business and cover the shop. No problemo.” Dip said firmly. “So what do you want to do first?”

Over the next two weeks Dip made the shop his mission, and had as much fun as a trip to Baja. School was still a hassle, but his one class, a mickey called ‘Small Business Marketing’ would be easy to handle. All he needed was the units and a ‘C’ to keep the Dean happy.

Dip surprised himself and his friends with how much he got done. Being depended on made him work harder, with a purpose. He and Teri got the snow sport inventory in place on their own, leaving Melinda to mind the store and deal with vendors and customers. She pursued Dip’s drink case idea and got a distributor to deliver and install the case. Fred started to get antsy from inactivity, which translated into lots of good ideas for Dip to do. Dip was his go-to guy and Fred grew to rely on him more each day.

Teri started classes full time so Dip brought in Fuzzy to get the shop finished. It turned out Fuzzy’s welding skills translated well into in-your-face industrial decoration.

“Yo, dude! Check the slag.” Fuzzy was happy that Full On had a place for his art. “You only get that if you cut with a torch.”

Dip steadied the metal piece while Fuzzy bolted it to the wall. “Hear that Fred? You’re getting slag thrown into the deal.” Fuzzy’s metal depiction of a hapless surfer made Dip laugh.

Fred was supervising from a seat in the shoe section. “Great slag, Fuzzy. Looking good. Finish that up and come down for a crew meeting.” Over Melinda’s objections, Fred had trimmed away at the cast. The day-glo cast was still on his arm, but the arm was in a sling rather than stuck out from his body. But she still drew the line at any exertion stronger than supervising.

With Melinda, Fuzzy and Dip gathered around him, Fred announced, “We need a Grand Opening as a way to advertise Full On, it’s new location, and our new line of snow gear.” He outlined his vision for an event that would spill out of the store into the parking lot.

“And just how are we going to pay to advertise this grand opening?” asked Melinda. “Some unexpected medical bills have put a hurting on our cash.” She looked significantly at Fred, who was about to answer when Dip spoke up.

“I’ve been reading ahead in my marketing text. There’s a lot we can do without having to pay the big bucks.”

“What do you have in mind?” said Melinda curiously and Fred leaned in to hear what Dip had to say.

Dip explained what he had learned about grass roots advertising. As he explained some of the things they could do, the others started to get excited. Dip made it all sound very possible.

The Full On marketing plan was one part Che Guevara and one part P.T. Barnum. They would get a permit to allow food sales and get the mall involved. Anything that would bring customers to the mall would get cooperation from the other stores. Then, they could get their favorite Carpinteria taqueria, La Playa Seguro, to set up a booth. “That’ll be easy,” said Fred, “They like me, I’ve eaten hundreds of burritos over the years and I know the owner.”

Dip went on. “We’ll raffle off a Full On board. Fuzzy, if Fred buys the materials, can you donate your time to make it?”

“Sure.” said Fuzzy. They were on a roll and Fuzzy grinned with excitement.

“And can you get your band to play?”

“Yeah, I think the guys’ll go for it.” Fuzzy played bass for a Ventura bar band.

“Melinda, if we get a buzz going, can you contact the gear manufacturers to see if they want to donate to a raffle? Maybe they might want to have a booth.”

“Sure, we’ve got good relationships. And with others it’ll be a chance to make a relationship. They’ll get their name out there for sure.”

“So there’s a lot we can do without spending too much. But we still have to get the word out. We can do fliers and we’re gonna have to buy some ads. Do we have a budget for that?”

“Get the costs to me, Dip, and we’ll take it from there.” Melinda was cautiously optimistic. A lot of it sounded doable if they could stretch their resources far enough. Most of it depended on Dip making it happen.

Fuzzy recruited his friends to put flyers under windshield wipers in beach areas from Lompoc to Port Hueneme. In return, Fred offered the dudes a 10 percent discount on any purchase made at Full On over the next six months. And hey, they were going surfing anyway.

Dip provided a press release to local papers and he bought ads. The buzz was underway and picking up speed.

Then Dip had a brain wave. He concocted ‘Surf Tales from the Pit’, to be presented at the Full On Grand Opening, wherein a notable local surfer (Fred) would provide oral history and video documentaries of outstanding surfing feats. Dip recorded Fred’s very

funny one-minute account of the acquisition of his broken arm and provided the clip to the alternative Santa Barbara radio station. The DJ bit and aired the clip, plugged the opening and even mentioned the Full On Web site. Dip and Teri digitized the clip and posted it on the Web site as an MP3 download, along with a funny picture of Fred in his cast, some cool Wedge shots and details of the opening, which was getting more elaborate day by day.

Unfortunately, only three days before the opening, the budget was finished. Dip, Fred and Melinda met to discuss the situation. They still needed hard cash for Porta-Potties, a freeway balloon, stage rental and other day-of-event expenses. Melinda refused to get in any deeper, citing Fred’s medical expenses and the already large startup costs of the new store. But when Dip shared his idea of how to score some cash, she and Fred had to laugh, and okayed his plan.

“Dipini, if you give me receipts I’ll pay you back some day,” Melinda said, “I can’t promise when, but you have my word on it.”

“And I’ll tell you what,” added Fred, “If we have a good Christmas we’ll be looking for a full time employee. Are you interested?”

Dip was.

Dip took a day off and drove to Ojai.

“Hi, Mom.”

Dot Sevich turned from packing dishes. “Arnold! You startled me! What are you doing here?”

“I’m sorry I didn’t call, but I’ve been really busy and something came up.” Dip hugged his mom and sat at the kitchen table.

“Is anything wrong?” Dot looked at her son worriedly. He was still her baby even if he was full-grown.

“No, I just came up to handle my stuff.”

“Oh, good. I was thinking I’d have to deal with it. We got an offer on the house.”

“That’s great! I want you and Dad to know that I think your move to Portland is a good thing. If that’s what you want, then you ought to do it. Really.”

“Thank you, Arnold. It is a big change and it’s a lot easier knowing that everyone is OK with it.”

“It’s cool. The family isn’t in Ojai anymore anyway. I’m the only one left in the area.”

“Which is why it is particularly nice to hear that from you.” Dot smiled brightly at Dip, the corners of her eyes crinkling like the texture of the ocean in a Santa Ana wind.

“Anyway.” Dip prepared to say what he had to say. “Anyway, I came up to get my stuff. And ask a favor.” Dip had asked a lot of favors in the past and Dot waited to hear what this one was about. “I need some money.” The usual favor. “I need a loan. I can pay you back in a month.” Dot raised her eyebrows; an offer of payback was unusual.

“Why do you need money?” said Dot carefully, “And how much?” When Dip was asking for money it was best to be careful.

“The Full On shop needs some cash for the grand opening. I said I could come up

with it and I can, by selling my comic book collection. But I need a couple of weeks to inventory it and find a buyer, and I need the money now. The comics are worth at least three grand. Can you advance me two grand against it? I can pay you back as soon as I sell it.”

Dot absorbed the proposal and spoke slowly, “Arnold, the first thought that occurs to me is why are you paying Full On’s bills?”

“Fred had an accident and hasn’t been able to work. I’ve been helping out a lot and he and Melinda offered me a job when I graduate. So I have a stake. We need the money for the opening, and I’ll get paid back.” Dot still looked doubtful and Dip continued earnestly, “They’re my friends. I need to do this.”

“You are graduating?” With Dip, Dot had learned to probe for the facts before making promises.

“You are looking at the holder of a BA in Business Economics, come Christmas. I’ve got the one class I need, ‘Small Business Marketing’. It’s actually come in pretty handy.” Like a strand of kelp around a diver, Dip slowly entangled his mother in his story.

More to herself than Dip, Dot mused, “Well, this is the first time you’ve offered to pay us back. And the comics are worth two thousand dollars, God knows I’m aware of that! How about if you put it down on paper?”

“Sure!”

“I need my money back in a month, and I mean it Dip. We’re not made of money and we have a lot of expenses too, with the move.” Dip’s head bobbed in happiness at her assent, hardly registering her last comment. Dot sighed, and pulled pen and paper from a drawer.

The day of the Grand Opening was glorious. The sun shone brightly on the rocky coastal hills, lemon groves and tidy homes of Carpinteria. The mild breeze matched an even milder swell. Great weather, and every reason for the surf community to be there. The parking lot was festooned with pennants Fuzzy had scored from a used car dealer. A balloon flew high beckoning freeway travelers to the event. An inflatable soda can towered over a low stage in front of the store and across the lot kids jumped around in an inflated castle. The crowd was a happy mix of students, residents, beachgoers, surfers and skiers enjoying music and cheap tacos. The snowboard and sunglasses manufacturers were giving away decals like mad in their booths. Over it all, Fuzzy’s band, Maverick Santos and The C Street Band, played surf rap, North Coast ska and Dick Dale covers.

Inside, Melinda was making music of her own on the cash register. Everyone seemed in a buying mood. Sunglasses and Full On T-shirts were hot today. People waiting for the snowboard raffle checked out snow gear and the shoe section had a lot of looky-loos. In a corner under a video monitor, Fred had a crowd of rapt grommets enthralled with stories of horrible wipeouts, complete with visual aids.

Dip and Teri sat in the back holding hands, enjoying a quiet moment in a busy day. Out of nowhere Dip said, “This is what I want.”

“What?” said Teri. She had been watching Melinda ring up another sale.

“This. I’m gonna do this. Surfing and this.” Dip was as emphatic as if he had just

aced a test.

Teri looked around the store, at Melinda and at the crowd outside. “You are the man, Dipmeister.” She hugged him so hard he lost his breath. That was one of the problems of having a surfer chick for a girlfriend.

“Oof. That’s OK with you, then?”

“It works for me,” she said, “Now get back to work.”

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