

Bearers: Skateboarding Pioneers of the Palisades

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Palisadian skateboard pioneers Wendy Bearer (left) and Danny Bearer in action in the 1960s.

Editor's note: Longtime Pacific Palisades resident Patty Burns has written the following article for the Palisadian-Post. Her children, Danny and Wendy Bearer, were skateboarding pioneers.

The sport/art of skateboarding was born in the mid-1960's. A lot of us had nailed our old rollerskates to the bottom of a 2x4 and skated on our sidewalks, but the new wave was conceived by surfers when the surf was small, as a way to exercise on land and have a lot of fun doing it.

In 1963, Larry Stevenson formed a team called Makaha to compete in the new evolving sport. The wheels were such that sidewalk surfers could do more tricks than ever and gain more comfort and speed. The first members of this team were Danny and Wendy Bearer, John Freis, George Trafton, Torger Johnson, Dave and Steve Hilton and Greg Carroll. Soon, contests were held all over California and other teams formed. Don Burgess and son Don Mike made up a competitive team with Peter Berg, Barry Blenkhorn, the Keller brothers and Chris and Steve Piccilo – all Pacific Palisades kids – called the Palisades Skate Team.

Hobie Alter picked up on the new sport and the Makaha team all joined Hobie Super Surfer, adding Colleen Boyd, Suzie Rowland and Woody Woodward.

The first national skateboard championship was held in Anaheim at La Palma Stadium in 1965 and was won by the Hobie Super Surfer team. It was carried on Wide World of Sport (ABC) and Dan and Wendy Bearer were both interviewed. A tournament was held at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium the next year and Wendy was the first competitor to receive three “10s” in a contest. Her outstanding trick was to jump from her moving board over a three-foot-high jump and land back on her board.

The Hobie Team toured the U.S. with the boys only (as there was no girl chaperone), giving shows in stores across the country and down the East Coast. They were outfitted by Hobie in sport coats and slacks to travel in, and striped blue and white shirts and shorts and of course Vans shoes, which have become a part of skating.

Since all of these skaters were surfers, they named the various schools after hot surf spots: Brentwood School was Malibu, Paul Revere was Sunset Beach, Hawaii, Marquez was Bonzai Pipeline and Bellagio was Waimea Bay. They skated on the paved but uneven slopes at all these schools every weekend. Unfortunately, there were many broken bones in those days – no one wore pads!

As skating so closely resembled surfing (the moves were similar), in addition to Kick Turns, 360's, 180's and wheelies (now called manuals), they did a lot of “walking” moves to get to the nose of the board, and did a nose wheelie (hanging 10 on a surf board).

“We invented moves as we went along,” says Wendy. “We were pioneers and had only each other to learn from.”

Wendy and Dan were also on the Hobie Surf Team and members of the Malibu Surf Association. Dan was ranked 17th in the country as a 17-year-old and Wendy was one of the few women surfing in her day. They both won the first L.A. City Championship at Sunset Beach in 1968.

“Skating is fun,” says Wendy, “but surfing is the ultimate thrill sport – you are moving on moving water and there is no other sensation like it. Heaven will be endless waves and warm water.”

Some other surfer girls in the Palisades were Suzie Rowland, Nancy Emerson and Colleen Boyd.

Since the advances in technology, the whole skateboard game has changed. In the ‘70s, Dogtown and Z Boyz took skating to new levels, introducing maneuvers and tricks never dreamed possible. Tony Hawk and gang were all amazing, but the ‘60s group were the true pioneers of skating.

Five years ago, the International Skateboard Hall of Fame was formed to honor skaters who have had exceptional careers as well as those whose body of work has affected development of equipment as well as competition.

Danny Bearer was inducted into the Skateboarding Hall of Fame in 2012, while Wendy Bearer Bull was inducted this year.

There is a skateboard museum (Skatelab) in Simi Valley which features five decades of memorabilia including 5,000 vintage boards. It offers free admission and safety demonstrations and clinics teaching techniques and showcasing history.

So all you young skaters: know there is a lot of history about your passion, but please be respectful of your sport and of all of the people and places that you affect around town.