



### Remembering Hobie

“Years ago, when Grubby Clark was living in his truck, he broke his leg. So body cast and all, he moved in, took my bed, and brought a pet; a rattlesnake in an aquarium. What else you gonna do when you’re flat on your back? Besides, he was only going to be here maybe a week or two. Then six months went by.

Finally, Hobie came up with an idea. He said, “We’ll get rid of him.” So he waited for Grubby to go to the doctor, and he let the snake out of the aquarium; where, I don’t know. Then he put the top of the aquarium back on and left it just a bit ajar.

When Grubby came back and got into bed, no one said a word. Settled in, he looked over at the snake and it was gone. He moved out right away. That’s how Hobie got Grubby to move.”

—Wayne Schafer

## A Conversation with the “Hobie Cat 6”

### Part 2: The SJC Factory

by Donna Jost



*Coast Catamaran, San Juan Capistrano  
Photo Credit: Edwards Family Private Collection*

At 19 years of age, my first full-time job was at Parelco, an electrical switch factory located next door to the Hobie factory in San Juan Capistrano. I know adjusting relays



*Hobie at his surf shop.*

*Photo Credit: Bruce Davidson*

## 2016 Donations

### THE HOBIE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION RECEIVES 501 (c) (3) STATUS

Contributions to the Hobie Memorial Foundation are now tax deductible. On February 23, 2016, the Hobie Memorial Foundation received an exclusion letter from the IRS, which recognizes it as a legal 501(c)(3) tax exempt charitable organization, with effect retroactive to September 17, 2015.

To make a tax deductible contribution to the Foundation, go to [www.hobiememorial.com](http://www.hobiememorial.com) or send an email to us at [hobiememorial@gmail.com](mailto:hobiememorial@gmail.com).

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sounds beyond boring, but every girl I knew just out of high school worked at Parelco. Plus I was hired on at a whopping \$1.25 an hour. Couldn't pass that up!

Located below the Coach House, I never paid much attention to the Hobie Cat factory except when the whistle blew to go home. Clocking in at seven a.m. and out at four, both parking lots, at least a hundred cars, all poured out onto Calle Perfecto simultaneously, creating a daily traffic fiasco.

Aside from the month my Pinto broke down and I had to drive a black Ford station wagon that looked like a hearse; with side panels instead of windows, zebra fur upholstered seats, and a little tiny steering wheel, or during the gas shortage when people had to get to the gas station by 5:30 am just to fill up their tanks, one of the more memorable days in 1974 was when a rather skinny long-haired hippie "streaked" across the parking lot from Hobie Cat to Parelco. For those of you who are too young, the fad, "streaking" was when someone randomly ran naked across a street, the beach; a guy even bolted nude across the stage on the Oscars.

Part 2 of "A Conversation with the 'Hobie Cat 6'" will continue on in that same vein, with the original "6" recalling stories not about streaking, but memories about their days at the San Juan Capistrano Hobie Factory when it was just getting started.

Sandy: When Phil was off in Hawaii playing around, Hobie and I were building the plug for the Hobie 14 in the quonset hut behind the post office in Capo Beach. Basically, one of the first things I did when he took me away from the surfboard shop was to turn the hose on the inside because it had been a welder's shop for about 20 years.

Robbie: Bart's

Sandy: No, Woody the Welder, then it became Bart's. Bart's was next door, kind of across the yard. There were two quonset huts that were side by side; we were the first one and then there was some inventor in the second quonset hut.

Sandy: But that's where we built the plug. We were really very precise, but resin has a tendency to move.

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# Hobie Surf Shop Story

## 1961:

Dick Metz arrived home in 1961 after three years hitchhiking around the world on a two thousand dollar budget. In the 1950's, only so many liquor licenses were sold in Orange County, California, so it worked out well when his liquor store near the Huntington Beach Pier was going bankrupt and Disneyland was in need of a license.

“What are you gonna do now?” Hobie asked Metz when he got back in town.

“Tend bar, I guess, maybe patch dings,” he told him.

“You can't do that,” Hobie said. “Why don't you come with me to Hawaii? I'm going for two weeks on business.” George Downing had been renting and selling Hobie's boards on the beach in Honolulu, and well, it wasn't working out like he had hoped.

Packing the basics; a pair of swim trunks, a few shirts, and, of course, his surfboard, Metz headed for Oahu with Hobie on a DC-4 from LAX to Honolulu via Oakland.

Once settled in a rooming house on Liliuokalani, Metz grabbed his board and went out surfing across the street while Hobie rented a car to take care of business with George, and to scout locations for a possible surf shop.

Metz couldn't believe his luck. Who would've thought he would be out surfing in Hawaii after his recent travels. Hitchhiking to Central America, bribing the French Embassy \$80 to hop a French Legionnaire's ship to Tahiti, chasing girls for five months around Quinn's Bar on the waterfront in Papeete, known as the ‘Toughest Bar in the World,’ even mingling with the Masai in Kenya; the memories ran through his brain as he sat outside at Queen's Beach.

While Metz was catching waves, Hobie was all business. Leasing an empty storefront near Ala Moana Beach, he started setting up shop; building a counter, installing racks, Hobie kept plugging along at record pace, not wasting a minute of his time in the Islands.

“I couldn't believe it,” remembers Metz when Hobie brought him by to check it out. “I don't know how he did so much in such a short time. The least I could do was paint the walls.”

At the end of two weeks of hard work, Hobie told Metz, “I gotta go home.”



*Hobie Surf Shop Plans drawn for an assignment at Chaffey College in Ontario, CA; Photo: Hobie Archive*

Figuring the vacation was over, Metz started to pack up when Hobie added, “But I want to buy this store and I want you to run it.” Knowing Metz knew how to manage a liquor store, even though it didn’t turn out so well, Hobie left him in Hawaii to run an empty surf shop. “Don’t worry,” Hobie told him. “I’ll send you some surfboards and you don’t have to pay me until they’re all sold.”

Before Hobie left, he opened a checking account, gave Metz money to buy a car, and three days after he left for California, seventeen boxes were delivered on the grass outside the Honolulu Hobie Surf Shop.

Although each board came with a worksheet, Metz was confused. He didn’t know whether the prices were retail or wholesale. It was all very vague. But as he opened the boxes, kids began surrounding him and shoving money into his pockets. At the end of the day he sold all seventeen boards before he even got them in the shop.

“I sold all the boards, Hobie. What do I do now?” Metz said over a very staticky long distance phone call. Three or four days later, Hobie sent five more boards, and to keep up with the new demand, he started stockpiling.

Hobie already had dealers around the country; Sears & Roebuck, the first was a ski shop in Santa Monica that didn’t sell a lot of skis in the summer. With the “garage” on PCH in Dana Point being basically a factory at first, the Hobie Store in Honolulu was the first retail surf shop on Oahu.

Everything changed when foam came into the equation. Girls started buying boards where before they couldn’t carry the 100-pounders, and surfing took off. Hobie went from selling 200 boards to 6,000 surfboards a year.

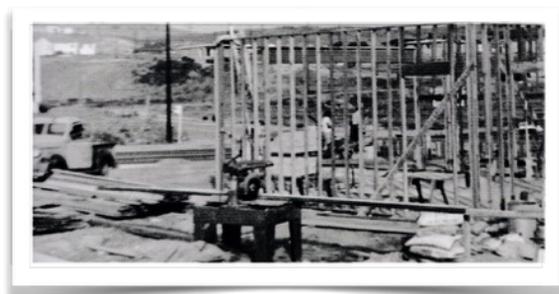
The surge in sales earned Metz \$35,000 a year in the Honolulu store, and prompted him to open a second in Haleiwa on the North Shore. There was never a contract written up, just a gentleman’s handshake between he and Hobie.

Over the years, Metz opened more surf shops; Santa Monica, Santa Cruz, San Diego, and ended up owning 22 in all. They were all bought with the money he earned selling Hobie’s surfboards and products.

“Then one year,” Metz remembers fondly, “I sent Hobie a \$100,000 check at Christmas, and I sent a check every year after that.”

### **1998:**

“I came into the picture in 1998,” says Jake Schwaner, part owner of the current five Hobie Surf Shops. “I met Mark Christy two years earlier when he was in the process of acquiring the stores. Then in the latter part of 1997 when he was in need of someone who knew the beach lifestyle business and understood



*The Dana Point Hobie Surf Shop under construction;  
Photo Credit: Hobie Archives*

how specialty retail really works, we had discussions throughout the year. In March 1998 I came back to the Hobie Surf Shops to help him take it to the next level.”

During Schwaner's time working with Metz and Hobie Surf Shops in 1987, there were thirteen stores; six in Hawaii and half a dozen more in California. “I started in Maui when Dick sold the stores to an investment group headed by Peter Siracusa of Rusty Pelican fame,” says Schwaner. “I moved back in 1988 with Tony Mardian, then President of all the stores. In 1991, they were split. The Hawaii locations were sold to a Billabong group and the California stores to an investment guy from Park City, Utah, who personally drove them into bankruptcy in five years’ time.”



*The finished Hobie Surf Shop;  
Photo Credit: Hobie Archives*

Seeing the writing on the wall, Schwaner left the company in 1991 until 1996 when Christy acquired the five surf shops. Coming back as a partner in the business, the pair ran the five brick and mortar Hobie stores plus one e-commerce site.

Wondering the reasoning behind keeping the surf shops at a minimum and not expanding nationally, I asked Schwaner his thoughts. “That one is simple,” he explained. “Hobie Cat was always a separate entity of the Hobie Surf Shops, and Dick Metz really just liked to keep it simple and controllable right here. When Pete Siracusa took it over, they had big plans to go nationally, but the timing was not right and the industry was going into a tailspin. Currently, the plans that both Mark and I have are to keep our shops real tight and very local to South Orange County.” He adds, “There might be a time that Hobie Cat might want to expand on its presence throughout the USA, but that would fit into their world and not the Hobie Surf Shops.”

*It was the great pleasure I had to play golf with Hobie at Pelican Hills. In the game of golf, it's a very peaceful and inviting world that brings out the true personality of those people you are with. He was just a very peaceful, kind, and easy-going human.”*

*—Jake Schwaner*

### **(The SJC Factory - Cont. from Pg 2)**

Sandy: The foam we made it out of was glued together with one-inch thick pieces. You had lines in it so you could measure it to make the right side and left sides the same. We got it all done then when we came back from Thanksgiving after a long weekend, the hulls were different from one another.

After we thought about it for half a day, we took a meat saw and cut into it every two inches down the whole thing. We propped it all back together exactly right and measured it all. We filled all the cut marks with some sort of filler, then ground it all down, glassed it, and brought it all back up to a mirror finish again. We did this twice. Taking a piece of fiberglass in raw form with 40 grit sand

marks in it, to where it was like a mirror; I mean, you wouldn't think it could be done, but we did that twice with a Hobie 14 plug. Then we made the master mold off of that. I imagine it's still around someplace.

Robbie: The master used the white epoxy and there were big runs in it. Remember that? We used to make the 14 molds off of that plug.

Sandy: Yeah, what we made is basically... imagine a set of molds off of that.

Robbie: Yeah, those 14 plugs survived for a long time. I think they're probably still down in Oceanside.

Sandy: So we did that and when we had a set of molds, we started making parts even before we had anything else done. We started making hulls and decks and gluing them together.

That's when we hired Teddy Birkman and some of that crew. I was kind of in charge of them and every day they'd go down to Henry's for lunch and I'd have to go drag them back.

Mary: The old Olamendi's.

Sandy: "When you guys gonna come back and pull the parts?" I'd say. They were basically done for the day, but they had to pull the parts out of the mold and then spray the gelcoat for the next day cause we liked it to cure overnight. They just drove me crazy.

Paul: Teddy Birkman, the guy that ran the factory, was actually the person who got me involved with Hobie Cat. Carol Hill was my secretary at Kawasaki, and boy, I just saw this little 14 and I said, "I gotta have one of those." "You're lucky," she said. "I've got a friend who I went to school with back East that's in charge of the factory." So she called Teddy Birkman up and got me a deal. That's when I met him for the first time in probably 70 or 71, right in there.



*Coast Catamaran, San Juan Capistrano  
Photo Credit: Edwards Family Private Collection*

Robbie: Teddy would go outside the office almost daily and there would be 20/30 people applying for jobs. He would ask, "Ok, where do you live?" "Uhhhh," if they hesitated even for a second, he'd shout, "Out!" He wanted local people with wives and families.

Wayne: There were hardly any full time guys at Hobie's, cause when the surf was up, everybody disappeared.

Paul: When I lived here in Capo Beach, my kids were in grade school, and when the surf was up, they'd shut it down and let the kids go surfing. It was wonderful.

Wayne: If the surf was up, some guys would come and go, some guys would never show up, there were even some divorces over surfing. So Hobie decided he'd only hire married people. He called them "married dependables." They HAD to work.

Robbie: That's why Teddy Birkman never hired surfers; only Mexicans with families.

Mary: It was terrible. I was working in personnel, and I did the paperwork on hiring and firing cause the hippies would also come and go, "Oh yeah, great, a job," they'd say in the morning, then they'd work and quit at the end of their first shift. It was like 100 people a week.

Paul: Boy, that's turnover.

Robbie: Talk about turnover, it was interesting watching the new presidents and vice presidents of manufacturing come and go. It would take them about six months to learn how to build a Hobie Cat, and all along they'd be thinking about what they could change. Then for the next six months, they'd make the changes. It usually never worked, and that's why they'd only last one year.

You know, the Hobie Cat was so well thought out. You could only do certain things in the fiberglass, and I think the only good I saw in all of that was after the molds were gel coated. They took hot air blowers and blew it down over the molds so it cured quicker. That really sped up production. But it was never-ending; these guys would come in and change it then it'd go back to the way it was.

It was funny, back when the Hobie Cat factory was going, there were no homeless people cause they all had jobs, for a while at least.

Mary: Well, back in 1970-71, you were either a lifeguard or you worked at Hobie Cat. There was nothing else.

I was there about 13/14 years. I have a gazillion photos. I started out as the tramp lady, punching grommets on trampolines, but ended up in advertising, kind of Paul's old job. All the advertising we did was with friends. You just pick somebody that was available, kind of like you did to me, Paul, "Oh, go get that girl out of the trampoline room and let's get her out here." I mean it was just all friends and family that did the ads.

When did you go to work there, Paul? Didn't you come after the 16s or was it before?

Paul: I think just before.

Mary: You must have been there in 71. Remember when we went to Hawaii? We went over to the North Shore where Phil and Mickey Munoz were going to surf Sunset Beach on a 16.

Paul: We wanted a 16 on a big wave. That's what we were after.

Mary: And whoever you hired, flaked out, and at the last second they got some photographer that said, "Oh this is way better than shooting weddings." Most of the footage was far away cause Phil and Mickey were way outside. But the waves were over the top of the mast, I mean, they were huge.

Paul: It was a big one.

Mary: Poor guy never got any shots except for waves coming in close to shore. I also remember that Hobie wanted Phil and Mickey to go back out the next day, and they both just looked at you, Paul, and said, "No way! No way!"

Paul: We got some good footage of that, though.

Phil: Isn't there still a picture of that in Donut World?

Robbie: Donut World, yep. We were talking to the Dana Point Historical Society, trying to get copies of all those pictures, and the owners were afraid to take them out of the glass cause there's so much grease in the place.

Mary: Oh, they'd just rip up.

Robbie: Yeah, so in '71, Mary was working in the office and Paul, and my wife worked there for probably three or four months, remember, in the front? I couldn't get any work done cause I was always cruising into the office looking at the beautiful brunette. And Phil was always checking out Mary, the pretty blonde girl. Well, Phil got the pretty blonde and I got the pretty brunette.

Paul: You lucky guys!

**Coming Up in the June Issue:**

*A Conversation with the "Hobie Cat 6" - Promoting the Hobie Cat  
Artist, Lance Jost  
The First Look at the Hobie Memorial Rendering*

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