

Carlsbad, the Chrysalis of a Dream

JOEY BURAN'S MEMOIR, "BEYOND THE DREAM," IS
A QUINTESSENTIAL CARLSBAD STORY.

Written By WENDY HINMAN



Joey Buran has written a book, and what a Carlsbad story! He was dubbed the "California Kid" in his 1980s heyday when he was upstaging Hawaiians in the brave new world of pro surfing. In the '70s, Carlsbad locals called him "Sandcrab." Little Joey always made a big noise with his ever raspy voice. At Tamarack, this upstart had a funky wide stance and gamboling fluid style. He told anyone who would listen, starting with his mother, that he was going to be a Pipeline Master. In 1984, Sandcrab manifested his dream. Buran won the biggest surf contest in the world at the time. That's when his story grew bigger than he could imagine.

The Chrysalis

The Burans were a Marine family and ping-ponged around the East Coast until the early '70s brought his dad to Camp Pendleton and his brood to Carlsbad. Buran arrived in wide-eyed wonder. After seeing "Endless Summer" and the "Gidget" TV series, he wanted to get out of the competitive swim pool and into the sea of surfing. On the trip down from LAX, Buran grew ecstatic with every palm tree, every sight of the ocean.



a) 1999. b) Carlsbad Little League, 1973. c) Buran family, 1975 (photos courtesy of Joey Buran).

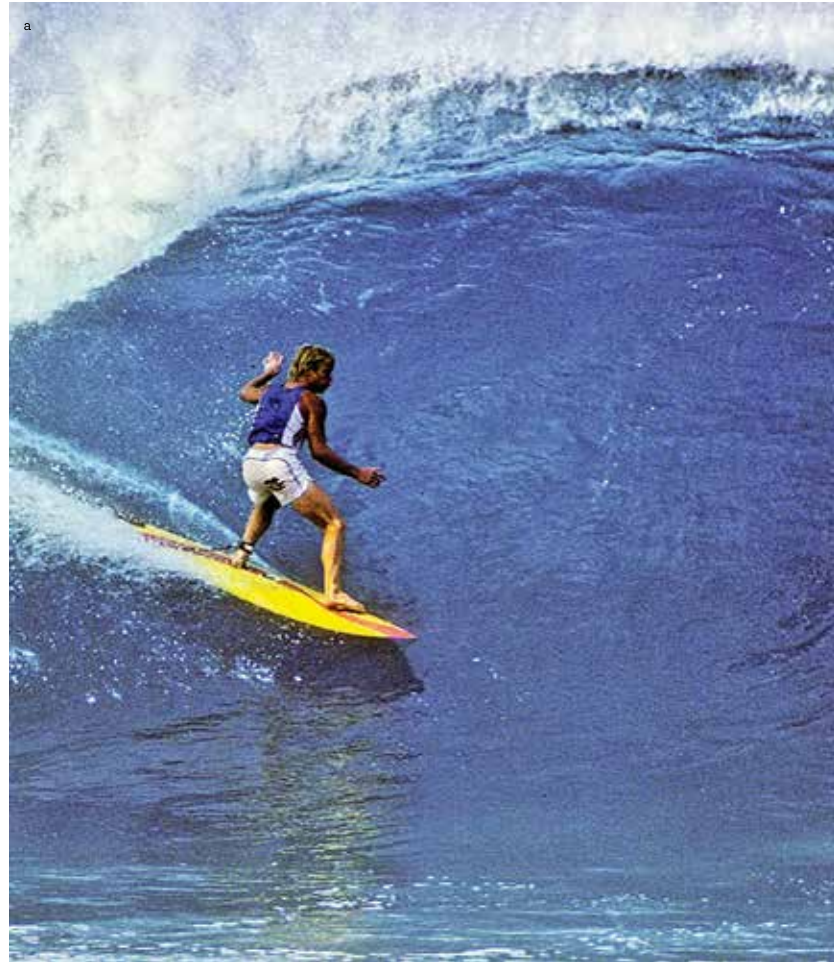
“Carlsbad was an amazingly cool place to grow up,” he writes about his childhood living on Westwood Avenue. “Our neighborhood and those adjacent were filled with kids around our ages, the schools were nearby, there were fields, farms, ranches and avocado groves, and a village-like downtown area—and eight miles of coastline. Beautiful coastline.”

When Buran started school he quickly learned that surfers “looked cool and talked cool.” Dude, he learned to be stoked and bitchin’ before he even learned to surf. “I was going to be a surfer! I felt so sure about that decision, the strongest choice I’ve ever made. I didn’t merely want to become a surfer, or even a good surfer—but the best surfer in Carlsbad!”

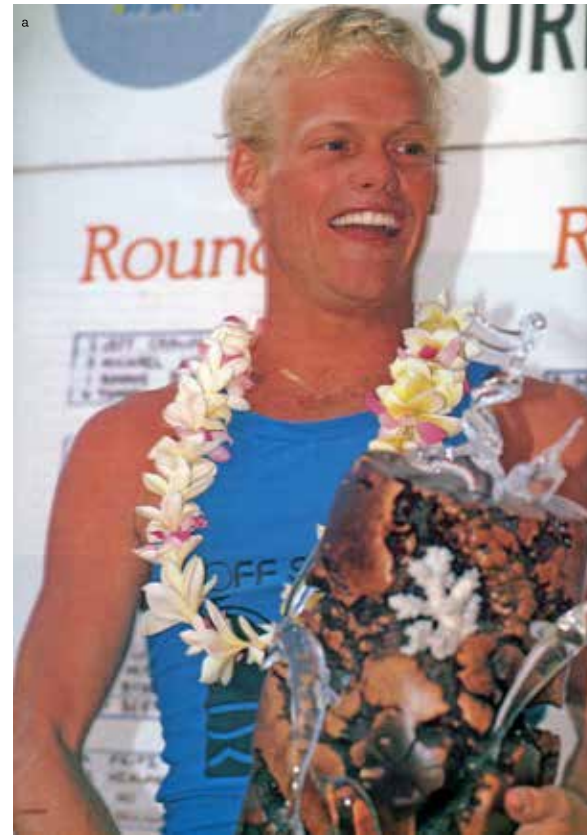
On his 12th birthday in 1973, his mom took him to Offshore Surf Shop and Barbie Baron sold them a Mike Gilligan board. Thus began Buran’s 10,000 hours of work on the journey from novice to Pipe Master. By autumn of that year, Buran met his best friend/rival, David Barr. They pushed each other, they helped each other. The book is a who’s who of Carlsbad’s surfing world of the ’70s and ’80s. But looking back, Buran writes of Barr, “I see one of the most important people to ever enter my life. I believe a lot of things would not have happened without his constant presence during those formative years.”

“Progress came fast,” Buran remembers. By the summer of ’75 he was bagging local contests and by that September he’d moved up the WSA rankings and was invited to the USA Surfing Championships. It’s a wild ride in the book after that, full of the highs and lows of surf competitions and acronyms, that finally land him on the north shore of Oahu for his first Pipeline competition in 1978. It really is a good story, with Buran playing a pipeline padawan to Carlsbad’s Billy Stang’s Jedi knight.

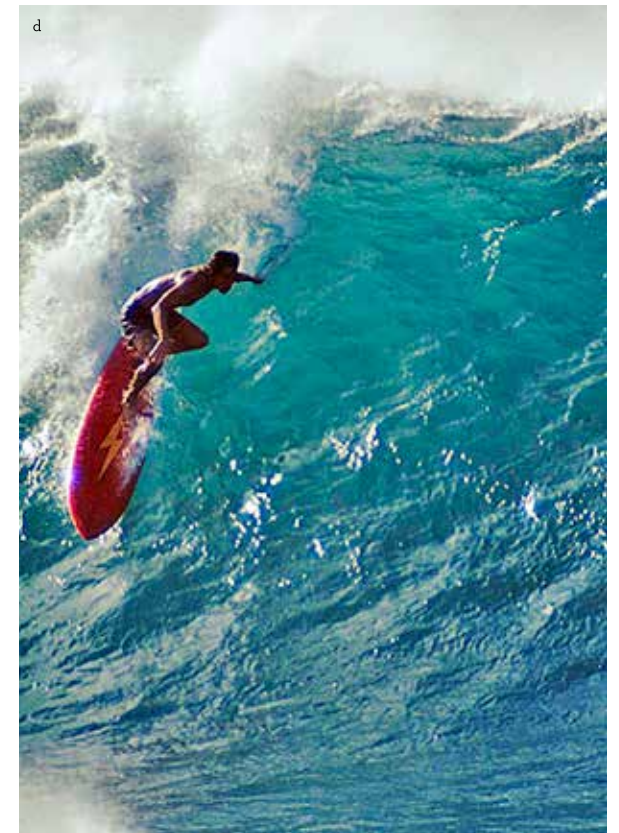
His first Pipe at 17 had him dropping in with his surf idols Rory Russell and Gerry Lopez. Buran didn’t win, but he made a big noise. That is where he was dubbed the “California Kid” and was flung into the dynamism that would set up 1984.



a) Pipemasters, 1978. b) Pipemasters, 1984 (photos courtesy of Joey Buran).



a) Victor. b) With Greg Marshall. c) Padres win the pennant, 1984. d) Gerry Lopez (photos courtesy of Joey Buran).



Gaining the World

Buran describes that “greatest of days” on the north shore of Oahu. “December 17, 1984, was my absolute destiny. In a universe with trillions of galaxies and all that makes the universe work, somehow, it had to work perfectly for me on that day. Every movement of the entire Pacific Ocean, the upper atmosphere, the direction of the swell, the cells in my body, the neurons in my brain, the data in my subconscious, the fiberglass and foam under my feet, the rain, the rainbows, and all the elements of my universe had to align with my board, my knowledge of the wave, my desire to win. In some ways, it’s a blur, yet in other ways, there are moments and pictures in my mind that are so clear I suppose I could never forget them.”

Yet what’s to be done when you fulfill a lifelong dream? What do you do when you are 24 and everything you have lived for, hyper focused on, sacrificed normal life for, is now behind you? These are the hard questions every elite athlete who has stood on the top of the podium must answer. Turns out, winning the Pipeline Masters was just the beginning of Buran’s real journey.

In 1984, at the Mecca every surfer makes a pilgrimage to, at the contest every surf ego must attain, Buran stood on the podium and lifted the coveted trophy. TV cameras, print media photogs, cheering fans, ABC’s “Wide World of Sports”—it was all he envisioned come to life. This was the pinnacle of his conjured glory. Then the rains came.

“I held the trophy for about 15 minutes,” Buran writes, before everyone ran for cover from the worst Hawaiian squall he had ever seen. In less than an hour after that triumphant moment of proving his mastery to the surf world, Buran sat alone on the beach and the loneliness was thick. “Why do I feel such profound emptiness inside in what I’ve just accomplished?” he asked himself before spiraling into depression.

Saving his Soul

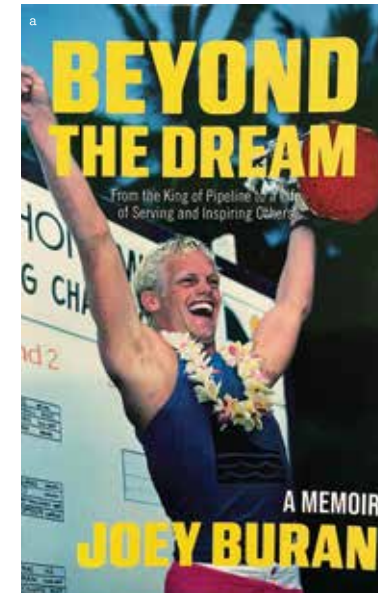
David Brooks, in his book “The Second Mountain,” suggests we all climb our first mountain of career achieve-

ment, material wealth or social recognition. There is usually a valley of suffering in between. Then we see a second mountain. That mountain is about finding deeper meaning and a greater purpose in life. It is a shift from self-centered ambitions to a life of commitment, community and service to others. Buran came home from Hawaii and began to climb his second mountain, to live beyond the dream.

He details how embracing the Christian faith helped him uncover his real identity and purpose. He is not just a surfer, no matter how good. He is a child of God, called to do great things. Buran became a reluctant pastor and the adventure of responding to Jesus’s calling has as many intense paddle outs, drop-ins, crash zones and hallelujahs as his surfing.

Buran experiences a seismic shift in “Beyond the Dream.” After winning it all sent him into what could’ve been a death spiral of depression and flailing about with life’s big questions of who am I and why am I here, Buran settled into his true self. Brooks describes this experience this way: “The people who have been made larger by suffering are brave enough to let parts of their old self die. Down in the valley, their motivations change. They’ve gone from self-centered to other-centered. At this point, people realize, Oh, that first mountain wasn’t my mountain after all. There’s another, bigger mountain out there that is actually my mountain.”

For athletes, “Beyond the Dream” can be read as a primer in how to create their mindset and ground grit toward their goals and life afterward. For Christians, it’s a good read to see how Buran achieved his dream and then became a dream-catcher for others like Jeremy Camp and Phil Wickham. For non-Christians, Buran’s learned pillars of life can help set their aim in climbing that second mountain. And for Carlsbadians—with the forward by the late Carlsbad writer Bob Yehling and the introduction by Carlsbad filmmaker Ken Kebow—it’s just a great Carlsbad read in the endless summer of good Carlsbad stories.



a) Book can be found on Amazon (photo courtesy of Joey Buran). b) New caption (photo by Ken Kebow). c) New caption (photo by CaitySimmers).