

A Morning on the Beach

By Mark Plummer



THE STREETS are quiet at this hour. The only sounds are the scuffing of my zoris along the sandy sidewalk as I scooch toward the cove.

Behind me the Pacific Coast Highway emits the low roar of light early morning traffic while two blocks ahead of me I hear the rumble and hiss of surf. Someone has left their air conditioner run-



ning to cool an upstairs bedroom at one house in this block. At the end of the sidewalk I step out of my sandals onto the cool sand and cross a hundred yards of open space to the edge of the slope down to the surf wash. Kneeling beside my board I turn my attention toward the incoming waves. Not counting the large groups of gulls and pipers foraging along the sand and washed-up kelp, I'm the only person on the beach right now. The waves are all green glass...three to four feet and friendly today. I scrub an old chunk of wax on the blank spots on top of my board and consider whether or not to hang onto this little piece of wax or scrap it – I'll probably need it later so it goes back in the pocket of my shorts. I turn my eyes back to the incoming waves.

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There is a long sandy ridge running out into the water just to my left that sets up both left and right breaks where the incoming wave meets its underwater slope. I like the left because they hold up longer before closing out. Still no one else on the beach so I guess I'll have this little break all to myself for awhile, at least until the other sleepy heads wake up and have their Fruit Loops. Leaning back on my heels I pull a small piece of folded foil from my pocket and unfold it slowly and ceremoniously. There cradled in crinkly aluminum folds lays a small piece of perforated blotter paper with a colorful design printed on its surface. Four chunks. These four squares are the last of a whole page of blotter a close friend brought me last winter when she came to visit. I raise the small square paper to my forehead and hold it there a few seconds in an offering before placing it on my tongue. Expectantly anticipating I contemplate for a few seconds: what secrets and wonders will this magical object unlock in my mind today...what lessons, what mysteries, what revelations? I put the paper on my tongue and

recognize a familiar bitter taste. I chew it slowly until the paper has dissolved and released every molecule of its contents into my saliva. I swallow it, strap the leash to my ankle and picking up my board walk slowly into the incoming water. This early in the day the water and the air almost feel the same temperature. When the water is knee deep I drop my board on the water and when it becomes waist deep I slide my body onto the surface and push off paddling toward the white incoming foam... "It's going to be a wonderful day," I say aloud to myself, "I can just feel it." Then I sing out "Om namah shivaya" several times to both calm my heart and say a prayer to the Creator/Protector/Destroyer for giving me this day and these beautiful waves.

Just beyond the break I wait in the sweet spot and scan the horizon for an incoming set. Waiting patiently I let several large swells pass until finally a darkening on the face of an incoming swell seems to indicate a wave with special promise. Turning, I scratch a few strokes and the incoming wave picks me up and I slide down the face of a smooth green wall of glass.

I kick left and drop... just as I kneel into a bottom turn the sun peeks over the coastal hills and lights up the water like a spotlight has been pointed in my direction. Almost at that moment too I notice the familiar and unmistakable tingling in my nervous system that says the unique molecules in that blotter have crossed the blood-brain barrier and snuggled up with millions of receptor sites. Synchronicity or coincidence? I ask myself before deciding it's probably both and still terribly inconsequential and move on to the next fleeting thought. I kick over the top of the closing face and start paddling back toward the line up. The exertion has accelerated my heart rate and I can feel the effects of these elusive molecules in my system now. Soon I know I'll forget myself completely and become simply another sea creature enjoying a brief moment of life under this blazing star as we spin through the blackness of an infinite abyss.

Meanwhile something...

Back in the zone I resume my waiting for another friendly wall and find myself diving down into some deep thinking about the many special gifts these small pieces of blotter paper bring: Oh sheesh! Great! Just what the world needs! Another stoner raving poetic about his trip? Who cares really, man? Are you going to regale us with an unending string of new age sounding pseudoscientific language all decorative and sophisticated sounding but ultimately meaning next to nothing when it comes to actually describing anything? Let's just get that out of the way right now and be done with it. Let's take all the buzz words borrowed or translated from quantum physics and ethnobotany and get them out of the way now so we can be done with that and get down to some real business. We've already got one (did you see that go by?). Quantum, hologram, multidimensional, transdimensional, extraterrestrial, tunneling, trans temporal, kaleidoscopic, non-local, state-specific, and the ubiquitous "I learned so much" (except I cannot articulate word one about the lesson).

Culture is a trance. We are all deeply embedded in it. We literally cannot see that proverbial forest for the proverbial trees because we cannot awaken from the trance enough to grok the proverbial existence of it. Our so-called "civilization" is but one in a series of civilizations and world views which have developed and thrived for a time (sometimes thousands of years) and successfully held large numbers of us in a complete transfixed (trance-fixed) stupor.

Most of what we think we know boils down to rumor, opinion, innuendo, propaganda and outright lies. Very little of what we think and believe has much basis in actual verifiable fact. Don't get me wrong: the development of the scientific method been a wonderful tool which has provided us some important knowledge from time to time. Is is generally accepted that the Earth is a small being in orbit around a minor star on the edge of a spiral galaxy in a cluster of similar galaxies we call "the Local Group." Here we are. Most of us have a vague understanding that

gravitational forces exerted by the proximity of or own moon drags the oceans around the planet causing the tides and surf! And we're beginning to understand how similar tides on the sun ebb and flow causing changes in our weather patterns here on the earth and civilizations have prospered and perished because of these immense forces happening on a ball of hot gas 93million miles away. We're beginning to understand how electromagnetic radiation affects the weather patterns here on our home planet and these weather patterns (hot/dry, hot/wet, cold/dry, cold/wet) have determined the growing seasons which led to the rise and demise of entire civilizations throughout recorded history and before. We think we know that some diseases may be caused by micro-organisms. We think we understand...

Shaaaaaark! Shark! Someone is screaming in a panicky voice. I look up from my ruminations. Where have I been? There are several other surfers in the line up with me now and a gremmie about thirty meters to my right is screeching "shark" and pointing toward the horizon. My eyes follow the direction indicated by his outstretched arm. Sure enough several dark dorsal fins break the surface of the water there about 120 meters away. But in less than a second I find I know these are not fish but mammals. "Chill out, junior." I call back. "Those aren't sharks." He shouts, "Then you stay here!" as he does a quick turn and scratches out a lift on the first little wave passing us. I duck my head and paddle hard toward the incoming fins. I pull myself toward a spot where I think I'll be able to intercept these passing shapes and a little out of breath I arrive at a spot where I find myself surrounded by a small pod of dolphins. There must be several dozen in this group. Some of them seem as curious about me as I am about them and as they pass me several come to the surface to look me over with their large dark, curious eyes. I can't resist the temptation to touch one, while from somewhere in the back of my mind comes a questioning admonition would touching one constitute "molesting a marine mammal?" I reach out as one passes close to the nose of my board and let my fingertips caress the smooth gray side of this graceful swimming being as it passes me. It's over in a flashing moment. First there was a large smiling face and a large dark eye looking into mine. Then a smooth gray side sliding past my fingertips. Then without even a flick of the tail a dive. The power and strength contained in this body are humbling. They've gone and I watch their fins as they move past toward the open water. I spin my board toward shore and look for an incoming wall to hitch a ride.

Once back at the line-up a girl on a short board asks me: "Did you get close to any of those dolphins out there?" "Yeah" I answer, "I made some new friends." She turns her board with one quick kick and scrapes past me on the face of an incoming. "Cool!" she says as she slides past. I think: "It is going to be a lovely day. I'm alive on this planet. I'm alive in this ocean and this ocean is alive in me..." •