



home by the sea

they are mythological figures, the so-called “dudes”: big lebowski, jeff spiccoli and kelly slater. you don't know much about them, about their indifference towards the mundane things in life – about the depth of the ocean in their eyes. when we set out for our expedition we had no idea what we were going to find out. we didn't even know exactly what we were actually looking for. what we eventually did find was surfer novelist **allan weisbecker** ... and a few split seconds of eternity amidst the waves outside costa rica.

“i used to be easy to find”, writes allan weisbecker. “lived on the last left on long island, new york. there i was, first house, last left.” the directions to his current home sound even easier: “costa rica, end of the road”. but it was a stony path to get there. weisbecker lives and works in povones, in the south of costa rica, right at the border to the central american state of panama. it's a three and a half hour drive beyond the last paved road, at a place with a “cantina” and a “mercado” (supermarket) – and the longest wave of the northern hemisphere. if weisbecker has ever associated something with the concepts of home country or home in general, he rather means a psychological than a geographical state. the state that extreme athletes like to call the absolute zero. a moment between heaven and earth, between here and now – he has been trying to catch up with that moment for all of his life. when during the 60ies the waves of montauk in the east of new york no longer seemed to be enough for him, he moved on to hawaii's north shore, the mecca of surfing. back then, surfing was in a critical phase: in hawaii, southern californian pop culture mingled with thousands of years of “waterman tradition”. it was a pretty explosive mixture and the period was called the psychedelic revolution. “there was nobody on the planet who was like us, we were something like a hippie elite unit.” the surfing pioneers got their kicks from the mighty waves. and it was one of these gigantic breakwaters that literally washed weisbecker off the island. and that's how it happened: in the legendary winter of 1969, the weather report had forecast extremely rough seas. in combination with the high tide, the entire kam highway was in danger of being washed away. all inhabitants of the coastline had to be evacuated, including weisbecker, who rather preferred to smoke a joint and “watch the show from the roof of the house”. however, not for long: a gigantic wave practically washed away the house beneath his feet. weisbecker did survive the wave without major injuries but nevertheless wanted to leave the place. the destination of his journey: morocco. the purpose: business. weisbecker had successfully read the signs of the time: “in the night before leaving we'd been smoking moroccan hash, so we figured there was some symmetry in that. you could buy 80 bucks worth from the berbers and sell it for \$2000 stateside. we didn't even think about getting a job. it was a whole lot of money for a bunch of 20-year-olds, it kept us in the water for another five years.” in the late 60ies, selling hash was a sort of “standard procedure” for many surfers. “back then, there was no money in the surfing business, there were no sponsors. the only advantage that really good surfers had was that everyone wanted to buy their weed. but that didn't make anybody a rich man.” a zero-sum game:” if you take care of your surfing, surfing will take care of you.” a big, universal equation: cosmos, cash and karma. and it even got better: by the end of the 70ies, weisbecker had become a veritable “wholesaler”. his “operating field” was the northern atlantic between colombia and new york. “but only weed!”, as he likes to point out. his “green fingers” easily earned him lear jets and luxury yachts. until... the whole fuss had eventually become bigger than the actual cause – jet set instead of “dude-ness”, so to speak: “we betrayed our faith”, says weisbecker, “we lost

our perspective. we just flew somewhere and left our boards at home.” one could say: a clear case of treason – and the ocean is an incorruptible judge. he diagnoses guilt, fear or simply bad feelings in a matter of seconds. they didn’t have to wait long for the day of reckoning: a gigantic storm sent weisbecker’s smuggling yacht ensenada down to the bottom of the northern atlantic in 1978. on board, he and his business partners had stashed 50 tons of weed worth a street selling value of 200 million dollars. weisbecker managed to escape with his life: a fishing boat saved him. when he expressed his thanks to the crew, the captain, who had got wise to weisbecker’s profession, replied: “a man who is born for the noose doesn’t need to be afraid of the water.” weisbecker recognized the irony in the statement but also understood the message: he retired from the “business”. and only just in time: “everybody else died or went to jail in the following two years.”

weisbecker landed on the sunny side: however, weisbecker’s subsequent years in hollywood were always characterized by an endless series of quarrelling. in his memoirs, “why can’t i get along with anybody?” he settles up with the dream factory. his aversion seems to have had more profound reasons: somehow, somewhere he still had a score to settle, with himself, with the ocean, with the ideals of his youth. weisbecker still was – and maybe even more than ever before - an “angry young man”.

so one day he loaded his ford pickup and left montauk to set off on a 9.000 mile journey to costa rica. the reason for his journey was the search for his former business partner and surf buddy patrick, who went missing somewhere in the silent woods of central america. this search also inspired weisbecker’s “in search of captain zero”, his novel that will be turned into a film version starring sean penn in the future. however, when weisbecker eventually found patrick on the caribbean coast of costa rica, he found a drug wreck. patrick had chosen to take a walk on the dark side of life, he didn’t even own a surfboard anymore. disillusioned, weisbecker moved back to the pacific, the home of surfing, more precisely to povones, a remote village in the south of costa rica right at the border to panama. on good days, the waves in povones break over a mile and allow several minutes of “rides”: gentle waves that look like they have been drawn with a ruler...

we thought weisbecker would make a perfect ending for our surf-journey-film shoot: allan weisbecker, the personification of the surfer dude myth and also an author ready for press. he would be able to tell us quite a few things about the sublime psychological sensations of surfing. after three months in central america and a couple of epic surf sessions, we finally found him - “at the end of the road”: an elegant gentleman in the prime of his life, a “nobleman of dude-ness”, a stylist on the board as well as in life.

“there is one point on the wave”, he says, “ where everything is as it should be. a meditative moment. you loose your sense of time, your brain suddenly feels completely empty.” the technical term is realization. “to live for the moment is to live forever.”, said wittgenstein. weisbecker’s home is not a place but rather a state, a space in time: a moment of complete harmony, synchronized with the cycles of nature.

“there is nothing that can be compared to surfing in that aspect. a bundle of energy travels for 10 days, just for your pleasure. it comes, you enjoy it, and then it is gone forever.” we shared some of these moments with the old master and in these moments we realized what our expedition on the secrets of surfing actually had been about. “we have to be silent about things we cannot talk about”, wittgenstein again.

“i don’t want to sound like an idiot”, says weisbecker, “there are things that should be better left unsaid. what can you say about a moment where nothing happens in your brain? the magic, like with so many things, lies with acting: it’s a mindless kind of bliss ...”

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