

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 54: Surfing with Zeke Rodrigues Thomas

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week, I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! I hope everyone's having a lovely holiday season. If you're still looking for a gift (maybe even for yourself), we have some sweet merch at the *Love What You Love* store. There's t-shirts, mugs, stickers, the works. You can check it out at [Society6.com/LoveWhatYouLovePod](https://www.society6.com/LoveWhatYouLovePod). And if you're looking for a good deed to do during the holidays, don't forget to check out the show notes for every show where we always include links to incredible nonprofits. You could also rate, review, and subscribe to *Love What You Love*. That would be absolutely delightful.

You know what else is delightful? Talking with this week's guest! Zeke Rodrigues Thomas is a director, producer, actor, writer, and editor. In fact, he worked his editing magic on many of the early episodes of *Love What You Love*. He's a multi-talented, super, super nice guy. He's also absolutely passionate about surfing. In this episode, we talk kook boards, heart rate regulation, dolphins, sharing the stoke, surfing at Costco, *Point Break Live!*, and so much more. So find out why Zeke loves surfing and why you might learn to love it, too.

Julie: Hello, Zeke. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Zeke: Thanks so much for having me.

Julie: I'm so stoked to talk with you. I've always been totally fascinated with surfing. Where do you surf and what are the waves like there?

Zeke: Sure, absolutely. I currently live in Santa Monica, California, which is basically as far west as you can get of Los Angeles. And for me, I surf any number of spots up and down the coast. Being in Santa Monica, if I'm short on time, I will surf at Ocean Park, which is the closest spot where the waves are okay, depending on what's going on in the conditions.

When I have plenty of time, I love to go down to San Onofre State Beach, which is in San Clemente, California, right near Camp Pendleton; some of the best longboard waves that you'll find on this coast. And if I'm still trying to stay local, Sunset Point, where Sunset Boulevard and PCH meet is, sort of, what I would consider one of my home breaks as well. And yeah, I try to go there whenever I can, whenever the tides cooperate and the wind cooperates, and my work-life schedule cooperates. Those are, sort of, my main breaks. And then, of course, whenever anybody else has a great idea or a destination, I'm always game for something new.

Julie: You've got a home break, but do you have a preferred break type?

Zeke: I do. Currently, I've been on a longboard kick, so a longboard, or a log, is usually a board that's like 8, 9, 10... even bigger than that if you're on very crumbly waves in Hawaii. That sort of defines, like, a longboard. Those waves are typically slower, more

forgiving, more crumbly, and allow you to, sort of, walk the board. The expression, hang five, hang ten, that's where that comes from. Five toes on the nose.

So, it's sort of a fun carving-like experience. It's less aggressive, and it's a little bit more being in tune with the wave and reading it, but at the same time, still imposing your will and having some sense of agency. But your ability to control a 9 or 10-foot board is greatly reduced, just due to physics compared to a shortboard, which is typically in the 5 or 6-foot range. And that's a little bit more of an aggressive, slashing, skateboard style. So for me, I've really been enjoying, over the last couple of years, longboarding, just because I find it so incredibly relaxing and I feel most in tune with the ocean when I'm riding longboard.

Julie: The origins of surfing, is that longboard surfing?

Zeke: Yes. It famously started in Hawaii, and you know, I don't want to crush or misspeak about Hawaiian culture or the origins of surfing, but it was definitely a much longer board. And the boards were made out of wood, compared to today's fiberglass, or epoxy, or foam boards that we typically ride. So, it was a much longer board; it was a much heavier board. Which, you know, if anyone has ever had the opportunity to surf a big, heavy board, the amount of power it takes to paddle is just incredible, which is why surfers usually have amazing physiques. As I like to say, surfing is 90% paddling and about 10% surfing.

I always try to manage people's expectations whenever they pick up the sport and just be like, "Listen, you're going to get in amazing shape but you're also going to be very, very tired."

Julie: Right. So, what's the purpose of doing a hang five or hang ten?

Zeke: To show off to your friends, let's be honest. It's basically performing tricks if nothing else. What's also happening though is you're managing your speed. When you're further back on the board, you tend to slow down. If you want to speed up, you move your weight to the front of the board. So if you reach a section of a wave that, as it's breaking, you feel it start to slow down, then you'll shift your weight back or you'll walk towards the back end of the board. If you're trying to make a section that's breaking too fast and you're trying to generate more speed, that's when you'll generally either walk or shuffle your way up further towards the front of the board so that you can, sort of, maintain that speed moving forward down the line.

Julie: Got it. So, of your breaks, which one is the best for longboarding?

Zeke: San Onofre State Beach is probably the best one. It's probably the most well-known one in Southern California for longboarding outside of Malibu, Surfrider Beach. For me, it's a little less crowded down there. They limit the amount of cars. And I tend to make an entire day out of it if I can. And it's just gentle but big, consistent waves, rides in excess of 40 seconds if you take them all the way in. But of course, if you take it all the way in, then you've got to paddle out. So, there's definitely a tradeoff for that.

But yeah, for me, there's probably four or five breaks within the San Onofre State Beach system, surf park I should say. Old Man's is probably my favorite, as it's typically known. You know, I just love it out there. It's very relaxed. The waves can get very big, but I am never scared because the waves are... even though they're big, somehow they are gentle and crumbly enough, as opposed to some of the breaks by me. For example, Ocean Park, or El Porto, or some of these local breaks where they might have

smaller waves but they're a little bit more hollow, they're steeper, they break a little faster. And that's typically where you'd want something a little shorter out there so you can make the wave with a little bit more ease.

Julie: You've used the term crumbly a couple of times. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Zeke: Sure. So, if you've ever seen some... I'll do a little compare and contrast. If you've ever seen surf videos where you see these giant waves that are hollowed out, where people are, you know, getting into the barrel... Getting barreled. The term barreled, or pitted, or getting covered up, where people are literally in the tube of a wave. Those waves are usually fast-moving, they are steep usually, and they are fast in order to create that tubelike effect so there's actually a place where somebody can get covered up.

With slower waves or crumbly waves, that's not going to happen. The waves are slow breaking. So, literally the top of the wave crumbles, almost like a pastry, if you will. Even though you might have the size of some of the other faster-moving waves, the wave itself is not moving fast enough to create that barrel effect.

Julie: Now, is there a holy grail longboard break that you would love to go to?

Zeke: You know, there are many spots on Oahu that are tremendous longboard breaks. I see them on Instagram all the time, and you know, it's hard to be... I'm so grateful living by the beach, and obviously I make some sacrifices to live by the beach. Where, you know, here it is the middle of November, and I'm able to surf whenever I want, you know? I'm not fighting the elements other than 55° water.

But yeah, no. There's a bunch of spots... There's a couple spots in China that I don't know the names of that I've seen videos for. But there's a lot of spots on Oahu. Even classic, like, Waikiki Beach. When there's a bit of a swell, some of those waves will last forever. But you know, there's a lot of beach parks north and south of that area before you hit the north shore that are just amazing longboard breaks. And I would love to surf them. One of these days, if I continue to be as diligent in my surfing, I would love to surf a shortboard break, like you know, the Banzai Pipeline on the north shore of Oahu. I would love to surf there.

Based on my current skill set, I have a very realistic understanding of where I stand in the pecking order of surfing. And while I am an experienced waterman, I also have a pretty good understanding of where my limits are. And you know, that's a big thing too that I always talk about. There's people who understand their limits; there are people who are too inexperienced to know their limits, which are two very different things. And there's folks like myself who have been doing this for a minute and, like, when I'm surfing at the top end of my ability, whether it's wave conditions, size of the wave, steepness, or relative crowds, I'm very aware of when I'm reaching the upper ends of my capacity.

If I get a couple waves, if I get barreled once or twice, I'll call it early and just live to see another day because, you know what, I'm not going to push my luck. When you get tired, that's when things get pear-shaped. That's when things start to get a little crazy out there. I've had plenty of experiences where, you know, out of nowhere a giant set will come in and either toss you or, you know, force you to make some rather quick, thin-slice decisions about, "Do I choose to paddle over this or do I turn and burn?" as

we say, where you turn around quickly and try to catch it and... hope for the best?
[laughs]

Julie: Oh jeez! Wow. How long have you been surfing and what got you started in it?

Zeke: So, I grew up in Hermosa Beach, which is probably about 20 minutes south of Los Angeles in the South Bay. There's Hermosa, Manhattan, Redondo Beach that are sort of the main part of the South Bay down there. I was very lucky to grow up in Hermosa a couple blocks from the beach. And while my parents were not the most athletic of folks, and I don't know how I came into this world given the pedigree that I was blessed with, but they were a couple of hippies who were just like, "Bodyboarding's amazing," and at a very young age put me on a boogie board, a bodyboard. So, I have very distinct memories of seeing my mom boogie boarding in the white water, taking me and things like that.

At that period of time, Hermosa was not the most... It was not the Hermosa of today, which is a very... These days it is a very ritzy area with some very expensive houses. It is not the Hermosa that I grew up with. So, my parents, they did a lot of things right, but they weren't great with money. So, consequently, I did not grow up with health insurance. Their overall philosophy - and this carried into all of my sports endeavors - they were like, "Have fun but don't get hurt." And you know, it informed my decisions as far as that goes. So, I bodyboarded through high school and didn't really take my first surf lesson until I was 15, and I took, like, a one-week camp and took to it right away.

But you know, even when you have that element of fear in the back of your head and don't want to send your family into economic collapse, a fiberglass board with sharp fins and a sharp nose, you're like, "Ooh, that seems a lot more dangerous than a piece of foam core with a slick bottom." So, that kind of kept me out of surfing for a little bit, until I turned 19 and was just like, "You know what? I now have health insurance. Let's go for it," and I started actually being a little bit more diligent in my surf practice. But even then... At that point, I was in Boston for school. I went to Boston College. And there's not a surf break there, and I was playing volleyball at the time for BC. So, my energy blocks were still very volleyball-focused at that point.

And I didn't really get a chance to enjoy surfing until I graduated and came back to Los Angeles. So, really, in my 20s I went through a long period where I was way into it, and then I took a detour into mixed martial arts and jujitsu, which you know, shifted me away. There's only so many hours in a day. It kept me out of surfing. I had a great experience there, retired from competition around 2012, and got back into surfing for a couple years. Got into CrossFit, surfing goes away.

And maybe about... You know, time is soup right now [laughs] due to this pandemic. And so, I'd probably say, around 2017 is when I really, in my current iteration, really doubled down on my surfing and started organizing folks around me to make organized surf trips. And you know, I try to go twice a week. If the tides are cooperating with me, I'll try to go five days a week before I go to work. You're kind of at the beck and call of nature and the elements, so there's limiting factors. But probably since 2017 I've really rekindled my love of surfing and have just been trying to share the stoke with anybody who's around me.

So, I started an Instagram group called Sarf Club, which is 'surfing' but with an 'A', because, you know, that's how surfers talk, traditionally. "You guys wanna go sarfing

or what?" I was surprised the handle was available, and quickly people joined, and it was the easiest way to get people to come out. So, we would have groups of 10, 15 people, or as few as three people show up at any particular break. And it was just a nice way of reaching people and just being like, "I don't care how good you are. I don't care if you've never surfed. I usually bring extra boards. I can give you a ten-minute lesson, and after that, let's go have fun." So that's been fun.

I started doing merch with t-shirts and whatnot, and it's been a real fun experience just to rededicate myself to a hobby and treat it as such. So much of life, I feel, especially having an entrepreneurial spirit, is to monetize all your hobbies. And I have to carve out this one part of my life where I refuse to.

Julie: Was it initially created so you felt, like, a sense of accountability, like, "I'm going to get out there"? Or just because you love surfing so much you wanted other people to come along? What was that about?

Zeke: For me, it was sharing the gift of surfing. Like, when people find out you surf, you usually get one of two statements immediately. "Oh, I love surfing, I've never done it. I want to do it someday." That's one. Very fair and I totally support it. Two, "Oh, I surf. Let me know when you go surfing next time." Okay, that statement is one of my least favorite things because it puts the onus on me to reach out to any number of 30 people that have made that statement to me, to be like, "Hey, I'm going here at this time." Which is why I created the group.

So, literally there's a group chat with, I don't know how many people at this point, probably about 50 people, who are active members of Sarf Club. And I'll just type in, "Hey guys, I'm going to Sunset at 3 o'clock on Saturday. You know where I'll be. Let me know if I should bring extra boards." And people will respond, and then magically I'll see them in the water or I'll meet them in the parking lot. And you know, that just became a much easier way to figure out who's showing up when, and the onus gets shifted from me to other people, whether they actually want to be part of this group.

And it's... I don't know, it's a very low-stakes way of letting people know where you are and asking them to join without having any sort of commitment. And I don't know about you, but I've definitely noticed on this side of the pandemic, whatever side it is, getting people to commit to anything socially is a very tough game. So, I try to leave it as general as I can and let people know where I'll be. And if they want to come have fun, a good surfing experience, come join me.

Julie: How many people have you taught to surf during Sarf Club?

Zeke: Wow... A lot. [laughs] A lot of my friends grew up by the beach but never surfed, so I would probably say, including friends, parents, relatives, probably in the neighborhood of 30.

Julie: Wow!

Zeke: Could be more than that at this point. It's hard to say just because, you know, so many people come try it once, have a great experience, and they're like, "I guess I need to buy a wetsuit," and then you never hear from them ever again. [laughs] Because unfortunately, in Southern California, there's like a month and a half out of the year where you don't need a wetsuit. You can be... If you're of a hardy variety, you can do more. But you know, it's rare that the water temperature gets above 70.

Julie: What kind of gear do you need to surf?

Zeke: You definitely need some kind of wetsuit. The standard-issue one is a 3/2 wetsuit; 3mm at its thickest, a 2mm at its thinnest. It's sort of, like, the standard issue in Southern California based on water temperature. You need a board that ideally has a leash, and usually they all come with some sort of fin on there, or skeg as it's commonly known. And that's pretty much it.

Compared to a lot of sports, it's not a lot of gear. I'm also an avid snowboarder, and that requires a lot of gear by comparison. I don't know if you've ever talked to a ski or snowboard person, but gear is life. And with surfing, it's like... I try to keep my collection of boards within reason and shift boards in and out of the collection, but you know, I try to limit it all and just keep everything as simple as possible.

Julie: For a decent longboard, how much are you shelling out?

Zeke: Good question. There's a lot of considerations. If you want the cheapest entry point to surfing, Craigslist, OfferUp, Facebook Marketplace, you can pick up cheap boards for \$100 or thereabouts. Costco, 15 years ago, came out with this silly board called the Wavestorm. It was an 8-foot longboard, and it was thick, it was foamy, but somehow - I have no idea how they did this - it was actually a halfway decent board. It's one of those things that you see someone who has one of these boards, and I own two of them, and... you have to size somebody up. Just because they have this board that's stamped out of China and is just, as we like to call it, the ultimate kook board, doesn't mean they don't know how to surf.

If you've ever seen a surf school, surf schools are littered with these cheap, giant, thick foam boards because they're safe, and they're thick, which allows you to catch more waves. If you ever want to make a turn with them, that's another story. [laughs] It's like driving a couch down a wave. Like, you really have to make a choice to make your turns. But you know, I've seen some very experienced people take those very boards out into the lineup and do incredible things with them.

I surfed one this past weekend. It was a rocky... I went to Sunset. The rocks were exposed. I didn't want to take one of my nice 10-foot boards out that's fiberglass and... The shaper, Scott Anderson, passed away this year. And I just don't want to risk one of my nice boards on a rocky point break. So I'll take a foam board out. And I understand the challenges of that board, but I also understand how to stretch it to the limits of its surfability. This is all a longwinded way of saying, you know, if you go to Costco, for \$200 you can get a brand new 8-foot board that will be your perfect entry point into surfing. And of course, the older I get and the more established in my career I get, I can afford nicer toys.

So that's when I start looking at, like, custom boards that are made by local shapers. For me, I'm getting ready to buy another board, and what's really important to me is environmentally friendly, locally sourced, made by someone who has lived in the area. And for me, that's really important because I want to keep the economy of surfing going in Southern California. Because, like, the surf industry has actually, kind of, contracted a little bit in the area. So, there are plenty of independent shapers who are making quality boards out there and I'd love for them to eke out a living being a shaper because there's not many people that are taking up the trade.

Julie: You know, one thing that's always fascinated me about surfing is, if I'm watching people at Santa Cruz and there's just a bajillion people out in the water, who gets priority? How do you decide who gets to go? Have you ever gotten into a fight?

Zeke: Um, fight is a generous term. In answer to your question, there are a couple ways. In a dedicated lineup situation... I can't speak specifically to Santa Cruz's lineup or which break, but... It's funny, I was just talking to my girlfriend about this; about, like, what makes the lineup at a certain place. For example, the lineup, as they call it, is sort of the line of demarcation where the waves, more than likely, have been breaking that day. You'll see a crowd of people sort of in a vague line that, sort of, goes parallel to the shore.

Depending on your ability to surf, depending on the size of your board, you may be further out; you may be further in. But usually, the person who is first in the lineup at a point break has the first opportunity to paddle and successfully get a wave. It's very clearly demarcated. Literally, you're in that spot. At a majority of places, in a lot of beach breaks, good luck. It's the wild, wild West. A couple people will paddle for a wave, but the person who actually stands up first closest to where the wave is breaking, where the wave you can actually see the wave breaking, that person technically has the right of way.

Anybody who stands up after that or tries to catch the wave down the line in front of them is violating the unwritten rule of surfing by dropping in. You never want to drop in on somebody else's wave. Not only because you, kind of, technically ruin the wave for the person by creating traffic, but also it can get dangerous. If you're charging down the line going 15, 20 miles an hour down the face of this wave and somebody stands up and crashes into you, that's a problem. I've seen some bad injuries. I've seen some bad cuts and whatnot in there. It's just really unfortunate.

Even if you're situationally aware... Like, I've caught surfboards in my hand as I'm charging down the line and somebody drops in. A lot of my friends who are not nearly as experienced as me, they'll drop in... I always say, "Feel free to drop in on me. I'll be fine," because they're riding foam boards and I know what to expect. But yeah, there's been some sketchy situations for sure.

And there's a couple of breaks like my favorite one, like Sunset, everyone drops in on everybody. As we like to say, it's a party wave. Literally, I've seen six people on the same wave at Sunset. It just changes the way you ride. You're not going to be charging down the line so much. You're probably going to be going a little bit straighter towards the beach than you are, you know, down the line and finding the open face of that wave. But that's part of the charm. Like, I expect that at certain breaks.

There are other breaks that are very unforgiving for that sort of transgression, if you will, where people will get chippy with you. People will give you dirty looks. People will say something to you. So, it really depends on the break, depends on the people who are in the lineup, and ultimately it depends if there is a lineup. A lot of the big wave spots, those are lineups. The big famous ones like Jaws, like Pipeline, Backdoor, all these spots have dedicated lineups because those waves break virtually in the same spot. But at a lot of spaces, waves come at all angles; sometimes they break further out, sometimes they break further in. And you know, it's a little bit of a free-for-all.

Julie: Is there, kind of, a locals-only vibe at any of the places that you surf?

Zeke: Not at... Not where I surf, and that's with intention. I can't stand localism. I can't stand people who have poor attitudes in the water. To me, it just feels like they're missing out on the entire point of surfing, which is to commune with nature, to share the stoke, as we like to say. I'm always cheering people on in the lineup when I see somebody taking off on a wave. I'm just like, "Woo! Let's go! Get it!" Encouraging people to have the best experience possible. And you know, whenever I... There's a couple breaks that I just don't go to because I don't like the attitude, which is really disappointing.

But you know, it's one of those things that I just find very uninviting. I'm like, "Way to kill the sport, guys." I was like, "I know you get frustrated with the tourists and the people who are beginning, but we need those people to keep the sport going." It's just disappointing when people take a really poor attitude towards people who are learning how to surf or don't know any better yet.

Julie: You say it's about communing with nature, but what grabs your heart about it? What was the moment where, you know, you were like, "I love this so much!"?

Zeke: I would say it was... It's for me, and for almost anybody who surfs, and that is the first time you stand up on a wave and you stay stood up for more than a second. It is the greatest sensation on the face of the planet and there's nothing else like it.

Julie: Why is that, for you? Why is it the greatest?

Zeke: It is the greatest because you're doing, seemingly, the impossible, which is to ride nature. The ocean is so unpredictable, it's so much more powerful than me, it's so much more vast, and you're trying to tame it. It's almost like trying to tame a horse. So anytime you're actually able to tame a wave, and ride it, and at the same time have agency, impose your will. But at the same time, sit back and enjoy the ride. It's that rare balance that I feel like I'm trying to achieve in my life of taking the will of the universe and my will and finding the Venn diagram where those two things come together, if that makes sense.

There are times when I chase waves that's completely my will; I'm trying to make this wave work. Maybe I'll catch and maybe I won't. And there are times where the wave will impose its will on me. So for me, surfing is sort of like an overall metaphor for the way I approach life, in that, like, I'm trying to align God's will with my will, and surfing... that's best represented by that.

Julie: That's fascinating.

Zeke: Yeah, no one's ever asked me that before. [laughs]

Julie: [laughs] So, when you're surfing, especially in Southern California, have you had experiences where you've surfed with dolphins or had a sketchy shark encounter?

Zeke: Yeah, dolphins happen all the time, which is pretty amazing. There are just seasons when there's more dolphins around than when there's not. They love to play in the lineup. Anytime you see them, it's sort of magical. You're just like, "Ah, cool. We have the same interests." And they'll get as close as ten feet. I've had a couple experiences where they've gotten within what feels like six feet. What's interesting is that it's so shocking to see how truly large they are.

Julie: Oh really?

Zeke: You don't understand the size of a dolphin until it pops its silly head right next to you with its dark black eyes and you're just staring it in the face like, "Oh, wow." And then

you see its tail, you know, eight, ten, twelve feet away and you're like, "Oh, you are a *giant* creature." More often than not, they're super playful. It's pretty magical to... even when I'm not in the lineup. Sometimes during, like, bigger swells or winter storms, you'll see dolphins surfing waves. It's pretty amazing, just to see that same element of play that I aspire to have still occurs in nature. Dolphins are a pretty regular occurrence, at least in Southern California.

As far as sharks go, I've only had one experience with a shark; that was at Sunset. The area between Los Angeles and Catalina Island is a main thoroughfare for juvenile great white sharks. I don't exactly know the reasons for it, but it is a known area where juvenile great white sharks love to travel. And if you hang out at Sunset long enough, you'll see sharks jumping up into the air a couple miles offshore. And you know, there's a guy who, I suspect, lives out of his truck over there. And he photographs people surfing but also photographs the sharks jumping, and all that stuff.

Every now and then I'll say hey to him and be like, "Hey, how's it going today?" And he's just like, "Ah, they're jumping today, man!" [laughs] I'm like, "I don't know if that's good or bad but... Great."

But yeah, there was one time at Sunset where I was out there and there was a bunch of us out there; a great day of surfing. And then out of nowhere we just see a helicopter start circling overhead. And less circling and more staying in one place. And then there was another, then another. And you know, it turns out, you know... Police helicopters circle. For some reason - I don't know the reason - but they tend to circle a spot. They don't stay in one place. News copters hover and stay in one place.

So, I was out there for probably another half hour before I called it for the day. Later on, I checked my phone and they were like, "Great white sharks sighting at Sunset!" [laughs] And none of us in the water knew anything, which was amazing. Maybe we didn't see a lifeguard boat pass by; we were too busy enjoying the waves. But it was probably my only encounter. Which, I don't know if I was in danger, but it was just hilarious that it must've been a slow news day that that was the lead story. "Great white shark off the coast of the Pacific Palisades."

Julie: Wow. Oh my gosh. So, walk me through a day where you decide, "All right..." You go to bed Thursday night and you're like, "Eh, I don't know..." But then Friday morning you're like, "I gotta go today!" What is that like? Walk me through that.

Zeke: Sure. So, it all comes down to... Surfing has gotten really nice and convenient these days in that there are surf cams at many of the best breaks in Southern California and around the world. So, the first thing I'll do when I wake up is I will consult one of the apps that has these surf cams and I'll take a look. Based on my experience and knowledge, I'll look at the swell, the size of the waves, the tide, the wind, and then also I'll look to see if there's anybody else out there or see if the forecast was as predicted.

And if it is, you know, I'll immediately load up my truck, decide on the board I want to ride that day based on the conditions, grab my wetsuit, grab my booties, which are... sometimes those surf booties are for temperature and other times they're for rocks. Rocky beaches can be very tough on tender, soft, city-dwelling feet like mine. And I just head out there. I'll probably take five or ten minutes of watching the waves to get an idea of where waves are breaking, how fast they're breaking, how often they're breaking, and see if there's any additional hazards. Are there rocks? Are there riptides?

Are there surfers who I need to keep my eye on because they're brand new, or extremely aggressive, or anything like that?

And then, you know, I'm not as young as I used to be, so I'll warm up. So, I have to make sure my body works because once you're out there, your shoulders are working, your chest is working, your upper back's working. It's very core intensive. Once you actually stand up on a wave, it's essentially like doing a burpee on a moving piece of wood. And you have to be quick. You can't dillydally on your way up. The popup is, like, the most important part of surfing; going from paddling to standing up. The popup is what determines whether you'll have a good ride or wipe out, more often than not.

But for me, it's like, I do some burpees on the ground before I get in the water. I'll warm up my shoulders and my legs, do some squats; all the things I used to make fun of. I'm now that guy. But I also understand that it's a necessary evil to make sure that when I go out there I'm not going out cold, that I'm not hurting myself in a very silly sport.

I mean, more than anything, I just don't want to miss out on surfing or I don't want to miss out on any other of my favorite activities. I'm still training mixed martial arts; I'm still doing jujitsu a couple times a week. I love hiking. I've started playing pickup volleyball for the first time in well over 15 years. And I just don't want to miss any part of my active lifestyle over a silly injury. That's kind of where my priorities are these days, which, you know, 20-year-old me would be laughing at 42-year-old me.

Julie: [laughs] I wouldn't want to be 20 again anyway.

Zeke: Yeah, me neither.

Julie: Hell no. [laughs] That brings me to another question, which is, what kind of fitness regime do you have to have to be not only a safe surfer but a good surfer?

Zeke: You know, it's different for every person. It really depends on the type of waves you're going after, what you want out of the sport, but more often than not you need a little bit of upper body endurance. Paddling is just such a big part of surfing. And when you first start out, your paddling technique is not going to be good. It is a very specific technique and I feel like I'm always refining it over time. And you just don't have that efficiency so you gas out very quickly when you first start surfing. Your wave selection is really terrible too, so you'll find yourself chasing waves that you either can't catch or shouldn't catch.

You can be done inside of 10 or 15 minutes if you're out of shape, or don't know how to paddle, or are inefficient with your paddle, and your wave selection's poor. So, a big part of it is understanding the limits of your body and understanding that part of it is your metabolic conditioning. Without getting too into the weeds on stuff like that, your ability to regulate your heartbeat is really important. Because when you're chasing waves, your heart rate's going to spike through the roof, right? You've got a huge adrenaline dump. Even if you don't catch the wave, you're just going to hear that pitter-patter of your heart. And what you have to do is [deep inhale] slow down your heart rate, try to bring it under control as quickly as possible so your body recovers so you can go after the next wave.

Understanding your fitness level is so important in surfing, and also part of it is having enough strength to paddle for a long period of time. The first time anyone surfs, the next day they're sore in places they didn't know they had muscles, you know? They're

just like, "Oh man, my obliques are really sore. I didn't know I had muscles near my ribs." So a lot of it just develops over time. And it's also kind of sport-specific. It's not like I can say, "Hey, go take CrossFit for four months before you go surf." I just say, "Go surf," because your body...

The human body is incredibly adaptable to stimulus, so as you start to surf... Like my girlfriend, she just started surfing within the last year, and her ability to be in the water for an extended period of time has just gone on a hockey stick compared to when she started for all the reasons we just laid out. And now she's able to hang out in the lineup with me for an hour, hour-and-a-half before she calls it just because she's now much more efficient in her paddle. She's developed the muscles and the muscle endurance required to surf, and now she understands what makes a good wave, when she should and shouldn't go. But that just comes with experience and the hard work of just logging reps and... and sucking. [laughs]

You know, I equate it to the sport of jujitsu or martial arts where it's like, the first six months... If you can survive the first six months of surfing, there's a very good chance you'll be a lifelong athlete. But it's not going to be fun. You'll have tough days out there where you don't catch any waves. You'll feel like you're caught in a washing machine some days. And there's other days where you can't do anything wrong; you catch every single wave, you ride it forever. And it's those days that bring you back, even if you have another bad five days.

As I like to say: Even when it's bad, it's good. It's like pizza. When people are like, "How was it out there?" I'm like, "Even when it's bad, it's good." It could be worse. Here I am floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on a board, usually with friends. It could be worse, guys. [laughs]

Julie: Right! You mentioned *Point Break* a couple of times, so I have to ask you... Does that movie suck or do you love it?

Zeke: It is the greatest movie in the history of movies.

Julie: [laughs]

Zeke: I hope we're talking about the original with Keanu Reeves and Gary Busey, directed by Kathryn Bigelow in her... I believe it's her feature film debut.

Julie: Oh!

Zeke: *Oscar-winner*, Kathryn Bigelow.

Julie: Right!

Zeke: Believe it or not... It's a basic cable classic that holds up incredibly well, and everyone around Keanu Reeves is doing an incredible job acting their ass off. And the action sequences are good, it's funny in the right places. Keanu is, like, the perfect vehicle for this movie as Johnny Utah. And you know, I don't know if you've ever seen *Point Break Live!*... Oh my god, I hope the show comes back.

In Los Angeles, there was a show called *Point Break Live!*, and I was the biggest fan of it because... It was a live theater production where they would take a member of the audience to play Johnny Utah, Keanu Reeves's role, and all they would have this person do, boy or girl or anybody in between, was read cue cards. Because their premise was that *literally anyone* could've shown up on set to play Johnny Utah. It is

the most entertaining thing to see all this action and all these people acting around this lead character that has no idea what's going on.

And I enjoy the humor, and Keanu has done his own role in *Point Break Live!*, and he has a very good spirit about it. But there's a certain magic to that movie that it's actually - from a screenwriting point of view - really well done. And if you look at another basic cable classic by the name of *The Fast and the Furious*, it is literally the same movie, except in the world of underground street racing.

Julie: [laughs] You're right!

Zeke: Think about it! You know, Bodhi only lives to get radical, and Dominic only lives his life a quarter-mile at a time. You know, it's literally like they took the same script and they're like, "All right, so it's still a heist movie, but instead of surfing we'll make it... yeah! Underground street racing! Perfect." Same movie and I love them both. I can't speak for any of the sequels or the remakes or anything like that, but both of those scripts and those movies hold up in a very incredible way.

Julie: Oh my gosh. I love it. Just to wrap up, if someone's listening to our chat and they're like, "That just sounds amazing. I would totally love to get into surfing," how would you recommend they get started?

Zeke: Probably the easiest thing to do would be to head to your local surf shop and literally come up, with a good attitude, and just say, "Hi. I'm new and I would like to learn how to surf. Please help." And they probably have someone who literally works there who would set you up with lessons for money. Everyone who works at a surf store, I can say almost without fail, is a surfer, and they're usually pretty good and would look forward to the opportunity to share their experience with others.

But I will say this. Just because you are a good surfer does not mean you are a great instructor. I have some friends that are excellent surfers, much better than me, that are terrible instructors. And even though I might not be the best surfer, understanding how people's brains work, relative to time and space, and how to coach, is definitely a thing. And having patience, all those things make a good coach. And you know, you're going to have to roll the dice a little bit. But very often, I send people to surf shops or just a quick Google search.

But it's almost like skiing, or snowboarding, or anything else. You could conceivably go out by yourself. Buy yourself a board, buy or rent a wetsuit and go try it. But your learning curve is going to be so much steeper. Or would it be smoother? I don't know which. You'll have a much better time if you have somebody take you out there for an hour and show you, A, some basic safety stuff because it can be a dangerous sport. But also, how to popup, how to paddle, as opposed to trying to flop around out there. And you know, I can always spot a brand-new surfer in the lineup because they're too far back up on their board, or they're paddling with their chest down.

And you know, I'll paddle over towards them and be like, "Hey, if you want to have a slightly better time, consider moving up on your board an inch or two. Keep your chest up." And they're like, "Oh man! Thanks! That was the greatest thing anyone's ever taught!" I'm like, "Man, just go take a lesson. It's okay." It's all right to... Personally, I love being a white belt at stuff. I love being new at anything. I love learning new skills. And I encourage anybody who's even thought about it... listen, go try it. If you catch a wave, you'll understand why surfers are the way they are. [laughs]

Julie: I love it. Well, that's outstanding advice. Zeke, thank you so much for taking so much time to chat with me about this. This has been such a joy.

Zeke: Awesome. Thank you for having me on. I'm glad I could, hopefully, share the stoke of surfing with your audience. Hopefully I'll see some of them in the lineup sometime.

Julie: Yeah, for sure.

You can find Zeke at ZekeThomas.com and on Instagram [@SarfClub](https://www.instagram.com/SarfClub) and [@ZekeThomasIsRad](https://www.instagram.com/ZekeThomasIsRad). And he is. I'll include links to everything in the show notes as well as Zeke's favorite nonprofits and mine too. Huge thanks again to Zeke for sharing his passion with us today.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](https://www.instagram.com/LoveWhatYouLovePod), on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](https://twitter.com/WhatYouLovePod), and the website is LoveWhatYouLovePod.com.

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription magician and proprietress of The Wordary. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

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