

Complete name: Diane Edmonds

Nickname: Didies

Age: 62

Birthdate: 11/30/55

Stance: I'm a body boarder!

Hometown, Local surf spots: Grew up in Huntington Beach, now live in Fountain Valley

Board (make, size): BZ 'Slick' 42.5" bodyboard

Why this board: It's a bit oversized - I'm a big girl!

Wetsuit gear: Aleeda 4/3, Spring suit

Favorite wave: HB northside tower 4, most spots in Newport, Cerritos near Cabo

Coolest place to plan a surf trip: Australia, Baja, Nias

Where you would like to travel to photograph surfing: Tahiti, Fiji, Africa

Fav pros to photograph:

Julian Wilson, John Florence, Owen Wright, Tanner Gudauskas, Kanoa Igarashi, Griffin Colapinto, Courtney Conlogue, Tatiana Weston-Webb, Lakey Peterson, all of our local pros

Upcoming groms to look out for: Nolan Rapoza, Meah Collins, Zoe McDougall

Inspiration:

My mom was a War Bride but she grew up in Australia and was a Bondi beach girl. She always took us to the beach when we were kids and she was the only mom I knew that actually went in the ocean! She body surfed well into her mid 60's until she broke her arm colliding with a boogie boarder while body surfing.

When and how did you begin surfing?

I learned to body surf around the same time I learned to walk. Seriously. I have ridden every type of floatation device invented - blow up air rafts, styrofoam boards that ripped up our stomachs, to today's boogie boards.

What got you into surf photography?

I have spent my life at the beach, studying waves, watching my boyfriends surf and eventually watching my kids surf. I was always into photography so it was a natural progression to keep buying better and better cameras and bigger lenses. There is a long learning curve to become a 'good' surf photographer.

What equipment do you use to get your shots?

Canon 7D Mark II, Canon 7D, 600mm lens, 100-400mm zoom lens, 18-135mm zoom lens, 11-17 ultra wide angle 2.8 lens

Any underwater photography experience?

I'm too old for that! Those guys are crazy but I envy their youth.

What's the scene like in the water at Huntington Beach? Territorial locals?

I try to avoid the localized spots. I do this (photography) because the beach makes me happy, so I don't want any part of the haters. When some of our OC "sensitive spots" are going off, about half of the surfers are texting me telling me to get down there and the other half are telling me to leave or angrily telling me not to post the shots on any websites. I have been told not to park my car where people can recognize it, instructed where I can and can't stand on certain beaches, etc.

How do you deal with the tourist crowds?

I don't like shooting crowded lineups. I like my photos to have only one surfer in them - ha! That's where Photoshop comes in handy so it is easier to shoot in less crowded spots rather than have to clone out dozens of other surfers in the background. When I go to the beach for myself, I usually head a bit farther south to my favorite beach when HB parking is scarce.

What's the best post-surf grub in Huntington?

Chronic Tacos on 11th and Orange, Wahoo's on Main St., Las Barcas

Best grub in the neighboring towns?

Carnitas de Villa in Newport, Super Mex in Sunset Beach

Any stand-out competitions you have seen?

The Hurley Pro and Swatch Women's Pro at Lower is always my favorite contest of the year - all the top guys and girls compete and there is plenty of

space on the sand to position my camera for good shots. I'm super disappointed that it wasn't held this year. The US Open in HB is fun but it has gotten too big for my liking and it is a nightmare to shoot when every inch of sand is crowded with spectators. Last year I shot some of the Da Hui Shootout at Pipe, which was incredible. For a few years I was able to shoot some of the Quiksilver Pro at Snapper Rocks when I was vacationing in Australia.

What is it like to photograph the top surfers? Any nerves when taking a picture of Kelly Slater?

I think it makes me a better photographer to shoot the best guys in the world. After a while I can start guessing what scores they will get and I'm usually pretty close. It's really fun to run into the top guys when they are in remote locations and I get to shoot them freesurfing. I love arriving at contest sites a few days early to watch the pros' warm-up sessions.

Do you enjoy shooting video or stick to stills?

I stick to stills. There are a lot of people who are way better at video than I am, so I leave it to them.

How has the photography medium evolved since you first started?

I'm old school and like sharp, crisp photos that are symmetrical but today's ads are going for the grunge look, off-center, etc. You really have to be just as good at using Photoshop as your camera these days.

Your thoughts on the evolution of female surfing?

Today's girls can go head-to-head with the boys. They are so powerful and athletic. One of my favorite girls to watch is Malia Manuel - her turns are beautiful but very powerful. We need to get more sponsors to step up for the women so they get the recognition they deserve. I am thrilled with the WSL's recent announcement that they will award equal prize money to men and women starting in 2019!

What is the future of surf media?

It looks like it is heading towards online rather than print. Online publications like Aladdin were on the cutting edge because the photos looked so good on a big monitor. I still like having a surf magazine in my car so I can read whenever I am

relaxing on the beach so I hope the print mags can find a way to keep competitive and viable.

What is your goal as a photographer?

Maintain high standards. My reputation is only as good as the worst photo I have posted. I spend ridiculous amounts of time editing, but for me it is still about creating art. I love being able to provide something that most surfers (the older guys especially) have always wanted but never had the cameras to capture their stoke.

What's the ideal situation for a perfect photo shoot?

A relaxed surfer who isn't stressing about being on camera, great mid-morning lighting, offshore winds, glassy seas, clear water, some fluffy clouds for effect!

What's the wildest thing you've ever done to get the shot?

I took out my shoulder at the Wedge, running to rescue my camera bag that was sitting way back on the sand. I saw a massive wave coming so I was running but tripped and flew through the air. In trying to save my camera, my shoulder took the brunt of the fall. Had to have surgery on my shoulder for that one. Ouch! Another time I was doing a boat shoot outside of Puerto Vallarta at Punta Mita. The boat captain misjudged one wave and the boat went vertical. Everyone's stuff flew off the boat. I held on to my camera but when we landed, I slammed down on the bench seat and ended up with a whiplash and a huge bruise on my butt. Last year at Pipe, a massive wave swept all the way up to the back of the beach when I was shooting and carried a big log, which slammed into my shin. I made the mistake of not going to an ER to have the wound thoroughly cleaned out, so I endured 8 months of infection, a surgery, and eventually 2 weeks on IV antibiotics before it healed. There is still some foreign material in my leg which feels like it is working it's way to the surface.

If you could pick any angle for a surf shot, where would you position yourself?

In Orange County, we have mostly beach breaks and there aren't many choices on where to stand. I love any kind of point or jetty - it also helps to be able to stand with my back to the sun when there's a lot of glare. I really don't like shooting from piers - the angle is all wrong.

How much time do you spend during post-production (in the editing room)?

You seriously don't even want to know. The reason I'm not too good at dawn patrols is because I stay up way too late editing, labeling, backing up, etc. It takes a minimum of 1 hour per 100 photos just to edit, but usually a lot longer. I spend a lot of time labeling each photo so I can always find shots of any particular surfer in my archives.

What do you think about competitive surfing?

I think it is contrary to everything surfing is about. Having a fixed amount of time where you are under pressure to get 3 waves has to be frustrating to many surfers. You have to have a competitive spirit to survive, but it is a lot harder to progress to the elite levels than people realize. All that travel is not nearly as glamorous as it appears.

How are photography and surfing similar?

For me, I chose surf photography because I worship the beach and the ocean and everything about it. I have no interest in hanging out on soccer fields or in wedding halls. I think most surfers feel the same connection with the ocean. There is no better way to clear out your head than a nice walk in the sand or dipping your head under a wave. Capturing those perfect moments for surfers is rewarding for me. I'm just as bad as surfers when it comes to not wanting to commit to things too far in advance - I always need to check the surf forecast before I'll commit to going to lunch or make appointments! I love it when I turn on my cel phone in the morning and hear a bunch of texts coming in - I immediately know the surf is firing and my surf buddies are giving me tips on where it is good.

Most memorable moment as a photographer?

Probably the volunteer work I do for organizations like Life Rolls On, Best Day Foundation, RAMP It Up, and many other groups who work with kids and adults with spinal cord injuries, Autism, Down Syndrome, blindness, etc. Documenting the joy of someone catching a wave or enjoying a sport they thought they would never be able to do it is wonderfully rewarding. I know it means so much to the parents of these 'special needs' kids to have the photos of their kids experiencing a new and fun challenge.

Why is photography special to you?

My favorite clients are the older surfers who really appreciate getting great photos of themselves. I know that I am giving them something that they haven't had before but they have always wanted. The younger guys are so spoiled by an abundance of cameras following them around, capturing them at their peak. The older guys can only dream of having today's quality of photos of themselves back when they had hair and washboard abs!

What makes a good surf photo?

Sometimes it is a tight shot that highlights the surfer's technique. Sometimes it is a pulled back shot that tells a story about the location. The best shots are the ones that make you really want to be right there, wherever it was taken. It's a lot harder than people realize to get everything in focus when you aren't 100% sure what the surfer is going to do next. You have to be zoned in the right spot, especially with airs when you don't know how high they might go.

What's the biggest change or changes that you've seen in the sport over the span of your career?

I would have to say the evolution of pretty reliable surf forecasting. Web cams, buoy data and up-to-the-minute reports have made it much easier to 'know where to go' but this has also resulted in bigger crowds at most spots when they are firing. A lot of surfers blame websites like Surfline and photographers like me for 'outing' their spots and contributing to the crowds, but reality is that more and more people are learning to surf these days. Being able to buy inexpensive soft top (beginner) surfboards from stores like Costco has also opened the sport up to many, many more people. Better live webcasts of contests all around the world has increased the number of fans, and now the excitement of surfing in the next Olympics will spread the stoke even more. I love seeing the establishment of local surf clubs/teams here in California that include all ages and genders and each city competes against other neighboring cities for bragging rights. This system has been popular in Australia for decades and it really creates a great way for older, more experienced surfers to mentor the younger generation, all while having good family fun.

Any words of advice for fellow surf photographers?

Pay your dues - it takes a long time to get really good. Just being a good photographer is only part of the equation. Understanding waves and studying the best surfers will improve your shots. Take the time to learn how to read surf

forecasts so you can put yourself where the best waves are. Being in the right place is a huge part of getting the shots! If you don't surf yourself, surround yourself with surfers who can teach you what moves are worth shooting and delete the zillions of shots where the surfer isn't 'doing' anything. If he isn't throwing spray, turning, or fins out, it probably isn't worth keeping the shot. I can tell the experience level of a photographer just by looking at one session he or she has posted. If they post every single shot, they are a beginner. Highlight the most critical maneuver on each wave, unless it is a really spectacular sequence - that is the only time you keep every shot. Pull back - most surfers want to see how big the wave was! And, whatever you do, don't cut off a surfer's spray arc - you can always crop in but if you shoot in too close, you can't pull back. Learn which spots are "sensitive" and keep your lip buttoned up when it comes to those spots - don't name the spot and whatever you do, don't post any shots while that spot is still firing - post them a few days after the swell has subsided.

Number one tip - keep archives of your original, unedited files, even though it means double storage space. If you are serious about being a surf photographer, you will learn more editing tricks over the years and it is really cool to be able to pull out an old shot and make it look 1,000 times better!

Summary: My husband (of 36 years) is an Aussie so, now that we are "retired", we are lucky enough to be able to travel for a few months most years to Australia. Our oldest daughter was surfing around the world and fell in love on the remote Indonesian island of Nias. She married one of the best surfers in Indo and has adjusted to a very surf-oriented, but very basic, life there. So, between Australia and Indonesia, we get to do some pretty amazing surf trips. With Cabo being only about a 2-hour flight from Southern California, the beaches along the Pacific side of Southern Baja are our favorite destination, whenever we are craving some warm water and great tacos.