



God

went surfing with the devil

Text und Interview Alexander Klein, Robert Wiedemann

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A barbwire fence encloses a prison in Jaffa, the Arab neighborhood of Tel Aviv. Jaffa is one of the more dangerous neighborhoods in Tel Aviv because unemployment and crime is higher among the often oppressed Arab communities.

A1s

ich das erste Mal davon hörte, konnte ich nicht anders, als mir das Ganze bildlich vorzustellen. Da erschien in meinem Kopf ein Bild von einem alten Mann mit Rauschebart und schlohweißen, langen Haaren, der sich mit seinem alten Kumpel und Widersacher, El Diabolo persönlich, auf den Weg zum gemeinsamen Surf macht. Nur leider ist das lediglich eine Ausgeburt meiner Fantasie und wie so oft im Leben ist diese nicht immer deckungsgleich mit dem eigentlichen Umständen.

Hinter „God went surfing with the devil“ verbirgt sich ein Projekt, dessen Voraussetzungen kaum schlechter hätten sein können. »



In the ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem, hundreds of Hasids gathered to protest the sale of leavened bread during Passover. It was a very tense demonstration because the Hasids are so adamant about their religious ideals and feel that the Israeli government is not observant enough.

„Gaza felt pretty dangerous. Lots of people with guns everywhere, lots of different factions all fighting each other. Sort of like the Wild West.“





Our cameraman Edward Chase films a surfer on the beach in Tel Aviv. The waves in the Mediterranean are usually pretty small and are more a product of wind than tide. Still, the surfers have learned to make the most of it.

A Hasidic boy waits for his father in the center of the ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim. The Hasids were protesting the sale of leavened bread during passover. Men and boys crowded the streets but women were not allowed to participate.

Eine



Gruppe namens Surfers 4 Peace, bestehend aus jüdischen Israelis, arabischen Israelis und dem Amerikaner Alex Klein, schickte im Jahr 2007 ein Dutzend Surfboards nach Gaza um die Jugendlichen dort zu unterstützen, was sich dank geschlossener Grenzen und der Tatsache das man sich dort im Epizentrum des Nahostkonfliktes befindet mehr als schwierig gestaltete. Im Jahr darauf beschloss man, das ganze mit 23 Boards zu wiederholen, doch hatten die Umstände sich eher noch verschlechtert. Um nach Gaza zu gelangen, mussten alle verfügbaren Hebel in Bewegung gesetzt werden, da ein Projekt zur Unterstützung von Palästinensern bei den Israelis nicht nur auf Gegenliebe stößt. Doch dank der Unterstützung einiger aufgeschlossener Militärs fand die Aktion ein glückliches Ende und man konnte endlich sich um das wichtigste kümmern; nämlich mit den Kids und Jugendlichen die Boards zu nutzen und die Wellen von Gaza Beach zu reiten. Um das ganze für sich und die Nachwelt fest zu halten, wurde kurzer Hand beschlossen, die ganze Aktion zu filmen, den Trailer zum Film könnt Ihr Euch unter „www.godwentsurfingwiththedevil.com“ anschauen könnt.

Der Jugend zu zeigen, das es noch andere Dinge als Dschihad, Allah und die Hamas gibt, dürfte wohl einer der wichtigsten Ansatzpunkte sein, um nach und nach die Spannung zwischen Israelis und Palästinensern abzubauen. Schließlich haben beide Seiten einen langen Weg der Entbehrung und des Leids hinter sich, beziehungsweise noch ganz aktuell direkt vor der Nase, so dass ein Suchen nach Gemeinsamkeiten wohl produktiver wäre, als das ewige Herumreiten auf Unterschieden und das Hervorheben von Differenzen. Die Surfers 4 Peace haben einen wichtigen Schritt auf dem Weg Richtung Frieden getan, und man kann nur hoffen, das sich noch viele diesem Beispiel anschließen werden. Wir haben mit Alex Klein ein Interview geführt, was wir Euch nicht vorenthalten wollen. »

Anna Landesman plays on a trampoline before a show. Her band Terry Poison played a large concert on Israel's 60th Independence Day.



„99% of the people there are completely non-violent, wonderfully hospitable and friendly, and want peace more than anything.“

Young Arab-Israeli kids play on an old windsurf board on Jaffa Beach, in the Arab neighborhood of Tel Aviv.



CAN YOU GIVE US SOME INFORMATION ON SURFERS 4 PEACE.

Surfers 4 Peace was started in 2007, when Doc Paskowitz had the idea to send surfboards into Gaza. They sent thirteen boards, and that was that. In 2008 Surfers 4 Peace decided to do it again, but this time they wanted to send twenty-three boards, and actually follow them into Gaza, to meet the surfers there. I was there to document this effort.

HOW DID YOU GET TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEALED BORDER?

At first we had a lot of problems, since I'm not a journalist, and the Israeli Army isn't really interested in helping out film crews, particularly ones that might be sympathetic to the people of Gaza. So for weeks we kept getting denied. Then finally we found a friend, a former General in the Israeli Army, who really believed in the story we were trying to tell. He made some phone calls and ended getting us two visas into Gaza. In May of 2008, I went in with a cameraman to try to find these surfers.

HOW DID YOU FIND THE SURFERS IN PALESTINE ON YOUR FIRST TRIP?

The surfers in Palestine were great. So happy to meet new people, show us their surf scene. None of them cared about politics, and they all despised the violence. They just wanted to surf and get an education and travel. It was wonderful to meet them.

WHAT WAS THE REACTION FROM THE ISRAELI SIDE ON YOUR PALESTINIAN SUPPORT ACTIVITIES? ANGRY, SUPPORTING, ...

It really depends on the person. A lot of people were angry that we were trying to get them surfboards. They thought we shouldn't help them at all, especially not with Hamas still in power. Interestingly enough, a lot of the Israeli soldiers we met, including some really gnarly commandos, thought it was a great idea to give them surfboards. They realized that surfers aren't typically violent people, and if a young guy has an activity he's stoked on, he's probably going to be a lot less likely to become a resistance fighter.

IS THE CURRENT SITUATION IN GAZA HANDABLE FOR YOU OR DID YOU COME ACROSS SERIOUS SITUATIONS?

Gaza felt pretty dangerous. Lots of people with guns everywhere, lots of different factions all fighting each other. Sort of like the Wild West. Many of the Israeli soldiers we talked to thought we'd be kidnapped or killed if we went to Gaza. The situation there is definitely not under control, and to make matters worse, the Israelis are constantly leveling buildings with airstrikes, or accidentally killing innocent civilians -- including journalists -- who they've mistaken for terrorists. In fact, everyone told us not to bring a tripod into Gaza, since a camera on a tripod looks like a rocket launcher, and they were afraid the Israelis would call in an airstrike on us. On the other side, all the citizens of Gaza we met were wonderful. 99% of the people there are completely non-violent,

wonderfully hospitable and friendly, and want peace more than anything. We got invited into lots of homes, and everybody wanted to have a cup of tea with us and talk, they were really all very lovely people.

WHAT IS HAMAS REACTION ON YOUR PROJECT? DID YOU GET THE IMPRESSION IT WAS TOO MUCH WESTERN INFLUENCE FOR THEM?

Hamas is definitely isolated to a certain degree, but from what I observed, they had no problem with the guys surfing, and no problem with the fact that our film crew was American. They really portray themselves as the resistance, and feel that they are fighting to liberate their homeland. Ironically, on the last day in Gaza, we got arrested by Hamas. This Hamas soldier saw our cameras and thought we were photographing a police station, so he followed us and arrested us. We were escorted into this big compound by all these guys with assault rifles, and to make matters worse, I had a bottle of whisky in my bag. They took us into this windowless room and interrogated us, and for a brief moment, I thought we were done for. In the end, we just told them we were making a surf documentary, and I think it was so bizarre that they wound up believing us, and letting us go. This senior Hamas official apologized to us, and even tried to take us out to dinner. It was strange.

ARE THE PALESTINIAN SURFERS JOINING DO THE PALESTINIAN SURFERS WANT TO JOIN HAMAS AND/OR FATAH OR ARE THEY ONLY INTERESTED IN SURFING?

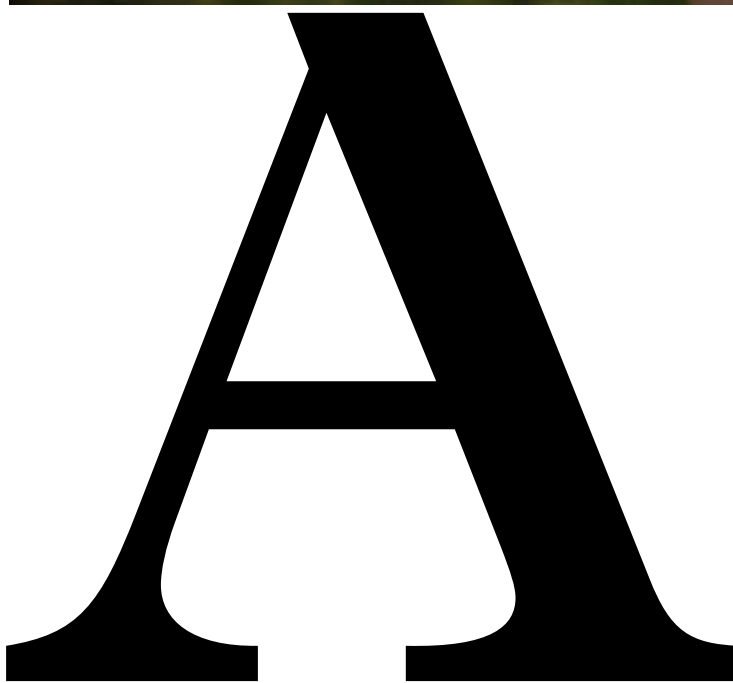
The surfers mainly just want to surf. Some of them have political affiliations due to their families, but they all were really peace-loving. They just want to surf, study, find jobs, and live their lives as normally as possible.

WHAT ABOUT THE GIRLS? IS IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO SURF?

When we were in Gaza we met this awesome 12 year old girl who boogieboards and surfs. She doesn't have her own board, but she and her brothers borrow boards from the older guys. It's a big deal for her to even be in the water there, since most women don't know how to swim. But she lives right across from the beach, and her dad is a fisherman and really loves the sea, so he taught all his kids to swim. »



A young boy flexes his muscles in Sderot, Israel. Sderot is the closest city to Gaza and receives near daily missile attacks. The remaining residents that couldn't afford to leave have learned to be tough.



AND WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON THE CONFLICT? IS THERE ANY CHANCE FOR PEACE?

I'm optimistic. I think the fact that these young Arabs and Israelis are getting together to surf instead of fight is a sign that peace is possible. Everyone on both sides is tired of the cycle of violence, they just don't know how to snap out of it. It could take years, but it will come.

WHEN WILL THE MOVIE "GOD WENT SURFING WITH THE DEVIL" BE FINISHED?

We just sent it out to film festivals now, it should come out for general release in early 2010.

DO YOU HAVE PLANS FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES, ESPECIALLY FOR THIS REGION?

No plans right now. I'd like to go back and screen the film for everybody, we'll see what happens. «

Alexander Klein

I was born and raised in San Francisco. I never was very interested in film growing up, I much preferred to read. Around 13 I got into skateboarding, and eventually got sponsored and traveled around the world as a skateboarder. After about ten years I was ready for something new, and it wasn't until I was around 24 that I started to really become interested in film. Around that time I met Joel Coen, of the Coen Brothers, at a barbeque. He told me to just go make a film, that actually doing it was the best way to learn. The thought of raising a million dollars seemed impossible to me, so I decided to do a documentary instead of a narrative film, because the costs are much, much lower. I settled on the idea of surfing in Israel and Gaza, recruited three of my good friends, and set sail for Tel Aviv. At the time, I had no idea what I was doing.