

# BIG WAVE SURFER FREDDY OLANDER: "TO BE HONEST, THAT'S WHY I DON'T LIKE THE SURFERS LIFESTYLE"

*Stories and revelations*

by Heidi Hansen

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The winter season is almost over and I am sitting in Nazaré with big wave surfer Freddy Olander, talking about life and surf and listening to stories from his travels. Freddy is a great storyteller - always laughing and smiling. You don't need to spend much time with him to appreciate his authenticity and joyful and positive personality. He is a mellow and down to earth person with a pure love for charging giant waves.

Freddy has been a surf coach since he was 20. At one point he got tired of the surfer lifestyle and coaching. It ended up being more about selling a product and a lifestyle than teaching surfing. For some people it is more important to be a part of the 'cool' lifestyle than actually surf.

Many of them spend more time chatting about surfing and hanging in the bar than out in the surf. *"Sometimes I could just shoot myself, you know,"* he says laughing. *"These surf dude's only talked the whole day about surfing. I mean, you can be a surfer and talk about other topics too. I was like 'Oh, my God, I can't hear anymore',"* Freddy says laughing.

Freddy loves surfing and it is his passion, but he wants to surf and not only talk about it. There is more than surfing for him in life, and sadly finds that people often choose only one way to identify themselves. He lives for the stoke of riding waves and appreciation for nature. To him surfing is a way of life and an addiction. *"Now I coach people who really want to surf and where you can bring someone forward and see the progress. That is much more interesting."*

I ask if he had any idols or surfers he looked up to while growing up. He immediately says no. He does not like to put some people above others. It doesn't matter to him if they are famous actors or cleaning the streets. *"Everyone is worth the same. It's important to me, and it's my philosophy in life, to never put myself above anyone. What I am doing is not better than others. I believe the world would be a much better place if individuals would stop underestimate or overestimate themselves in relation to others."*



*"I love big, heavy drops, riding down the line and just feel the nature! To ride down these big walls with the hand touching the water and you look up and, 'swoosh', you hear the sounds. It's a crazy good feeling!"* (Photo: ©Toni Sahm)

Freddy is frustrated about how superficial things get a lot of attention, while good deeds for humanity are not honored enough in this world. It is easy to hear that this is important to him. *"What world are we living in? To be honest, that's why I don't like the surfer's lifestyle. For a long time I hated it because it was more focused on the superficial things. Many surfers were so arrogant. It was more about being the coolest and best and about looking good,"* he says laughing out loud.

## ***"He had oil everywhere! Like in a bad movie"***

Freddy grew up in Berlin, far away from the ocean. I ask how he got into surfing.

*"I don't know, to be honest." He pauses and thinks for a second. "Yeah, I think I saw it first on TV." During a family vacation to Sylt, an island in northern Germany, Freddy finally got to try surfing for his first time. "I was so stoked about it that my mom bought me a surfboard in Berlin before I even had a surf lesson."*

Freddy suddenly starts to laugh as he recalls his first surf lesson. He was about 13 and on a family vacation in Morocco. There was a guy at the hotel that offered surf coaching. *"He was this typical surfer from out of a surfer book, you know. Sitting in a chair with his long, curly black hair and brown skin and a lot of muscles. He was so slimy!"* Freddy laughs out loud. *"He had oil everywhere! Like in a bad movie"* he says laughing again.



Best friends enjoying deep talks before hitting some Caribbean waves. Freddy and Lenny. (Photo: ©Toni Sahn)

*"My mom brought me to him and said; 'You always wanted to learn how to surf, so lets go with him'. I don't know if he even knew how to surf, to be honest," he laughs. "He put me in the water and said, 'Yeah, this is how you paddle the wave. And then you just stand up'." The coach demonstrated to Freddy once before going back to the hotel, leaving him alone with the surfboard in the water.*

*"When I came back to the hotel after one or two hours trying by myself he was sitting again on his chair flirting with some girls" Freddy burst out in laughter. "No joke!! I never will forget this guy. I don't think it was a good experience for surfing," he says laughing. "But I had a lot of fun!"*

Back in Sylt, one year later, he decided to hire another surf instructor to improve his surfing. *"This coach Lenny had blonde, long, curly hair and a stupid laughter. He was laughing all the time like I do,"* Freddy says and chuckles. Lenny became his first real surfer buddy and best friend. *"With Lenny I finally found someone with the same mind-set who also lived for surfing."* Five years later they started to travel around the world together surfing. *"We are always laughing a lot when we are together. When people meet us they say 'Oh my God! These two guys,'"* Freddy says laughing.

## ***"We had problems with surf coaches hooking up with girls"***

Among many other places, Freddy worked for some surf camps in Indonesia as a project manager responsible for a couple of surf camps. *"We had problems with surf coaches hooking up with girls,"* he says laughing, *"so, I had to fire guys and find new ones. We had strict rules of that on these camps."*

He says Indonesia was a great experience, but now he finds it too crowded and hectic. He is done with the "party and surf" lifestyle and is now looking for a quieter place, where it is more about the surf.

*"I enjoy the vibes of Nazaré. It is nice to get to this level of surfing where it's more about the surf. It's nice to surf with people who are there because of their passion and to get better, not because they want to show off or be cool."* He finds the vibe better and smoother with the 'older' guys. *"They are more relaxed about everything and it's less hectic and aggressive. It's not always a challenging competition mode, but you can be relaxed and happy for the others."*

***"I did not know what to do with the girl situation and the work situation and I just started to cry."***

In his early 20's, Freddy got a nice offer in Costa Rica to manage surf bungalows. *"It was SO nice! You know, in the jungle, right on the coast, with the view of the ocean. It was the most crazy nice time! I was looking like Mowgli, with long blond hair,"* he says and chuckle. *"I was the happiest guy in the world. I had nothing except my surfboard and three shorts. I ate fruits from the trees. I was crazy happy! I had nothing, but life was so good!"*



Living the Caribbean dream.(Photo: ©Toni Sahn)



Mowgli enjoying his daily Indonesian coconut (Photo: ©Freddy Olander)

Talking about those days put a big smile on his face. The owner of the place was old and at one point she asked if Freddy wanted to take over the business. *"I was thinking for myself, what am I doing? Do I want to stay here and live here forever? I was just hanging in the jungle with my surfboard and shorts. I did not even carry shoes anymore because they were always stolen,"* he says laughing. He ended up rejecting her offer and went back to Berlin to finish his study in Business Administration.

After his studies, Freddy was having a hard time and felt lost. He was 27 at the time and did not know what to do with his life. All his friends started working for big companies and after doing a lot of job interviews himself he realized this was not for him.

*"There was also this big crazy love story with two girls. At one point I asked myself, 'what am I doing here?', you know. I did not know what to do with the girl situation and the work situation and I just started to cry. I did not know where to go. I was totally lost.*

One of his best friends came from the Canary Islands at that time and said "Oh, my God, just pack your stuff and come with me back to the Canary Islands." Freddy said 'Ok', and started packing. "It took me three days to sell all my stuff and give up my flat. I wrote one letter to one girl and one letter to the other girl and just left," Freddy laughs imagining the scene.

He spent two - three months in the mountains in the Canary Islands with his friend. "There were no other people. It was a very quiet time and I calmed down and recognized what I am and what I want to do." He got a job as a manager at a surf camp on the island. "A NICE life started! I knew what I wanted to do. I never lost my track again because I knew I have to be what I am. To always be in touch with surf and the ocean."



Stall into a tube at Mexpipe. (Photo: © Toni Sahn)

## ***"Spin the globe and go"***

After listening to countless exciting stories from all over the world, I have to ask Freddy; `how many countries have you been to??` He laughs and says *"Pff....I don't know... a lot,"* and laughs again. *"More than 40 countries for sure. I would say. Just for surfing."* He is telling me how Lenny and him started their travel adventures by spinning a globe, closing their eyes, and pointing a finger on the globe. *"It landed on Equador. Ok, lets go to Equador!"* They both wanted to surf all the best surf breaks in the world and so they did.

After surfing all over the world I wonder which wave he would choose if he had to stick with one for the rest of his life. He says that he likes Nazaré a lot, but there is a lot of work for much less surfing. *"There is no channel surfing and you get smashed all the time". It's mostly surviving and working until you get this wave. You know they say that it's better when you have more fun?"* He laughs.



Nazaré's Praia do Norte is a magnet to the worlds most fearless big-wave surfers. (Photo: ©Heidi Hansen)

*"So perhaps Cloudbreak or Uluwatu. These waves I really love," he says with passion. "When it gets big, pff! These waves cannot be compared with many others! But for now I stick to my plan. Nazaré and Puerto Escondido. These are the best two big waves for me, but to be honest, it is always hard work and a lot of smashes. Sometimes I'm thinking I just need some easier waves," he says laughing, "to not get smashed all the time."*

***"There's no limit in life. And if you want something, you can go for it no matter how big."***

At the end of our conversation we talk about achievements and moments in Freddy's life. What he is most proud of is that he, who is from inland Germany, could get into big wave surfing. Many of his surfer friends were happy when they reached a certain level and did not believe they could reach further, due to growing up and living in an inland city. *"But I said, 'there's no limit in life, except those you create for yourself. If you want something, you can go for it no matter how big.'"*



Ready to go big! Freddy has proven that with drive and ambition even a city boy can conquer the worlds most difficult and biggest waves. (Photo: ©Heidi Hansen)