

# HOW I FOUND MAGIC IN MY OWN BACKYARD

I grew up along the southern stretches of Big Sur. If you drove 20 minutes north you would hit this wild, spectacular coastline—beaches where you knew great white sharks were out there in the water and massive, many-thousand-pound elephant seals would be fighting each other right on the water's edge, blood seeping out of their mouths. Every day there felt like an adventure.

My exposure to nature began with my grandparents, who lived on the east side of the Sierras in a small town called Bishop. In the summers, Grandpa would take me fishing, or we'd explore the mountains together. My biological father passed away before I was born, so I think my Grandpa was trying to make up for the time I didn't get to spend with my Dad—he stepped in and was basically my surrogate father for a long time. Looking back, I realize that I had to be coaxed into appreciating the outdoors. I just wanted to stay in the car, eat Twizzlers, and play video games.

But I'm so grateful that my grandparents did that for me, because those experiences in nature really molded me into the person I am today.

My first road trip down the Californian coast, from Oregon to the Mexican border at Tijuana, was a real coming-of-age experience for me. My friend Eric Soderquist and I jumped into a Volkswagen bus and drove down Highway 1 for 50 days straight, exploring every wave and break and beach community along the way. The goal was to surf all the coastal counties and document the state's coast and the ocean that lines it. California is such a huge state and is incredibly diverse. The trip really showed me the beauty of the different surf cultures that exist all along coastal California, and how surf culture is synonymous with California's values and ethos. It's hard for me to think about the state without *Surfin' USA* immediately coming to mind, so for me that trip was a rite of passage. I was 20 years old and