

FRESHPAVED

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Marcus Vorwaller is the creator and webmaster of Silverfishlongboarding.com (SF). If you don't know about SF already, it's a website that offers longboard forums, reviews, and articles. Marcus may be better known to the riding community by his online username, zzzMarcus. Since inception five years ago, SF has seen dramatic growth and currently gets about sixty thousand unique visits a month. No marketing, no advertising – just strong word of mouth.

Running a site like SF, Marcus has built up quite an extensive quiver of skateboards that are housed in a well organized corner of the garage. The portrait below is a shot of Marcus and his three year old son, Max, sampling various rides from the collection. With about fifty boards to choose from, Max will have no shortage of selection when he reaches riding age.

Marcus lives in Newport News, Virginia, near Virginia Beach. Before Portmann and I drove down, Marcus warned us that there aren't many (any) hills in Newport News. We hoped he was exaggerating, but unfortunately he was not. To catch some incline, we improvised with a parking garage session. For those of you who've ridden garages, you know the unsung luxury of elevators. Arguably, elevators are more convenient than chair-lifts back to the top, and no lines to hassle with. Skate in, skate out.

For the garage shots (opposite), Portmann busted out a fancy camera-pole-thing called a boom. He rigged the boom with a camera on one end, and a flash mounted to the other. This boom contraption looked like something out of a hi-tech, kung fu movie as he chased us around the garage snapping shots. We were joined by Mark Rondina and John Spears for the session (top left and right photos, respectively). Between the skating and Portmann's "kung fu boom", it didn't take long for the security guards to shut down the entire operation. No worries though. After the session, we went for Mexican food, and I got a chance to catch up with Marcus to find out more about the origins of Silverfishlongboarding.com.



SOCIAL LONGBOARDING WITH **MARCUS VORWALLER**

>> **JEFF GAITES**

PHOTOS: FRANCOIS PORTMANN

Marcus Vorwaller shares a common background with many longboarders. He skated as a kid, checked-out for what he calls, "the baggy pants and popsicle-stick scene," then got back into riding longboards in college. So, Marcus was skating again and looking for resources about longboarding online. He found a few sites at the time, but couldn't find exactly what he was looking for. As a web designer by profession, Marcus had the know-how to build his own mouse-trap, and that's how Silverfishlongboarding.com was born.

Marcus had a very simple premise for SF: board reviews and recommendations in an open forum. He explains, "Silverfish promotes objective reviews by users for other users. Obviously, there is bias in any review, but bias generally leans toward better products." In the beginning, Marcus attempted to include every board available, so users could begin sharing reviews about each one. Unfortunately, SF was brand new, so Marcus was the only one submitting reviews. Around that same time (circa 2000-ish), the longboard industry began to explode with new

manufacturers jumping into the mix on a regular basis. As one person, Marcus explains, "it became overwhelming trying to keep up with all of the new companies and models." He still tried out as many products as possible, and shared his reviews with the community. "In the beginning," he says, "I was the only one submitting reviews, but I didn't know much about longboarding. As I learned about the sport, I would write articles to share my experiences with the community."

As time passed, the word spread about Sil-

verfishlongboarding and other riders began to share reviews, stories, whatever. It's the "whatever" part that leads Marcus into a concept he calls, "Social Longboarding", explaining, "the two most popular sections of the site are "General Longboarding" and "Anything Goes". Usually, the post starts off as something longboard-specific, but generally degenerates into a more social conversation amongst the community." He points out that the subsequent comments are organized in side-bar fashion, so users are free to drift along wherever the conversation takes them, longboarding specific, or not. Marcus characterizes this "drifting conversation" further by comparing it to the "walk back up the hill". Simply, people getting to know one and other.

Social longboarding could be social "anything". If we are able to get together with a group of people, share a common interest, and get to know one and other, that's social. The common interest becomes irrelevant, and the trick is actually getting people together. Marcus has mastered this trick with Silverfishlongboarding.com — everything else occurs naturally. Longboarding serves as an entrée into all sorts of conversations about all sorts of topics, and friendships begin. Silverfish is the medium, and longboarding serves as an excellent facilitator with many other common interests among the same community; surfing, snowboarding, mountainbiking, etc.

When Portmann and I went down to meet

Marcus and have a session with his buddies, we were basically strangers. By the end of the evening, we were sitting down at a dinner table sharing a meal and a few drinks. The longboarding was awesome (as usual), but it also gave us a chance to get to know one and other — to find out that we're all just a bunch of regular guys who enjoy skating and hanging out. Social longboarding could be the secret that keeps Marcus surrounded by a large, and growing, group of friends in the riding community.

zzzMarcus can be found daily at www.silverfishlongboarding.com. If you're interested in organizing sessions locally, please visit www.freshpaved.com and start a Local Group. 