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- news
- videos
- photos
- magazine**
- travel
- cams & forecasts
- contests
- community
- surf shop
- learn

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THE JACK JOHNSON PROFILE

BRUSHFIRE

BY: CHRIS MAURO



FEATURES

- 100 MASSIVE ATTACK
- 112 BRUSHFIRE

DEPARTMENTS

- 18 INTRO
- 30 CAUGHT INSIDE
- 52 SURF TIP
- 80 HOTSEAT
- 92 SECTIONS
- 160 EASTERN LINES

August 1999: The man swung around in his reclining leather chair the very way you'd expect a record industry mogul to do it. "So, Jack," he barked, voice booming, "If we were to work this thing out, would you be able to come in here in September and record?"

Jack Johnson hesitated, fearful of how the man would react to his answer. "Actually, umm, that's not looking too good for me. I'm going to Indonesia in September."

"Oh yeah? What on Earth for?"

"Well, it's a surf trip--but a really good one."

The executive gave Jack a tilted stare of disbelief. "OK. Wait a minute. I'm here telling you I want to get you in the studio to record an album in September, and you're telling me you can't because you're going to Indonesia--on a surf trip, no less?" A sinister smile crossed the exec's face. "Do you realize what most guys would offer me just to be sitting in that chair?"

"Uhh, well, I guess I can imagine," Jack replied. "You're a pretty lucky guy, heh?"

Laughter eased the tension for a brief moment, but the man behind the desk tried to bring it back to a serious discussion. "OK, so what about touring?" he asked. "You'd be pretty busy. Are you prepared to be on stage 200 nights a year?"

This was serious.

Jack expected the question, but hearing it out loud startled him. On this summer day in 1999, on the ninth floor of a fancy office building overlooking bustling downtown LA, it suddenly felt like everything was happening too fast. Sitting there among gold and platinum records framed on the wall, 24-year-old Jack Johnson faced the harsh reality of what life would be like signed to a major music label. And it felt like a slap in the face. Wearing his familiar shorts, T-shirt and flip-



trips, ne reit inadequate for the first time in his life.

Jack looked to his friends Emmett Malloy and Paul Gomez, who he'd brought to the meeting for support, thinking, hoping they might be able to answer the question for him. But they just stared back at him, wide-eyed, as if to say, "This one's all yours, man," and Jack felt completely alone. He thought about the Indo trip: Ross Williams, Slater, Machado, Dorian, friends he hadn't seen in awhile. He thought about his plan for lazy afternoons on the front porch of his parents' house at Christmas, shooting the breeze and messing around with his niece Jaclyn and nephew Kona. He thought about his girlfriend Kim, and his intention to marry her in the coming year. This deal was a dream come true for any budding singer/songwriter, but as sweet as it sounded, it would also throw a serious wrench in his life. No more surf trips. No more film projects. No Christmas vacations at home. "Umm...I don't know about that," Jack finally responded. "How about a hundred nights instead?"



September 2000: Photo albums and boxes litter the kitchen table of Jack and Kim's one-bedroom apartment. Since their month-long honeymoon, they've barely had time to look through the volumes of photos they took, but they do so now while Jack powers down some Raisin Bran and Kim drinks a tall glass of milk. "She's crazy, man," Jack says. "She should be in those ads, y'know? We have to buy two big gallons of it every time we go to the store, and she'll still clean us out in five days."

Kim's mouth is full, so she can't defend herself. She just looks up with a glare and a strained smile, trying not to spray the photos. Jack sits down next to her and pulls an old photo album out of one of the boxes. Kim hands Jack some highlights from her batch, while Jack thumbs through the cardboard pages in search of a possible album cover. I sip my coffee watching the happy newlyweds and realize how lucky they are to have met and married their best friend.

"Oooh, check this one," Jack blurts. "I've been looking for this."

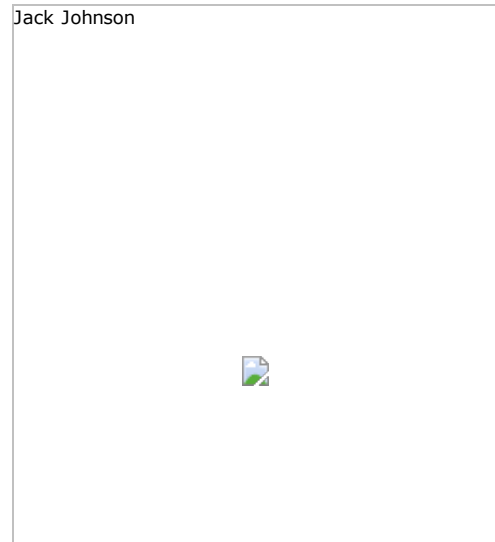
He hands me the photo, a small black-and-white of a tiny boy--2 or 3 years old, playing the ukulele alongside a bearded man strumming a guitar. They're obviously in mid-groove and focused on their collaborative tune. And had the young boy, with his blonde hair, not been standing on a surfboard with a leash wrapped around his ankle, I would've never guessed it was Jack, who has thick brown hair when he lets it grow today. I flip it over and read: "Kim, This pretty much sums me up. Love, Jack."

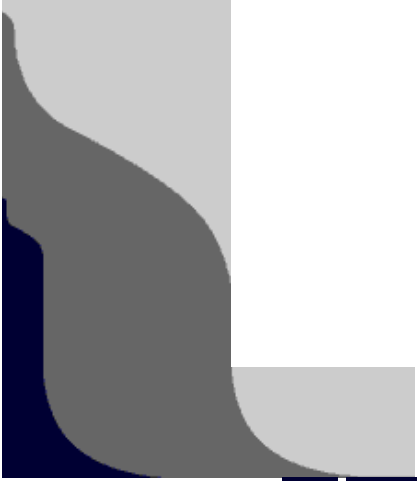
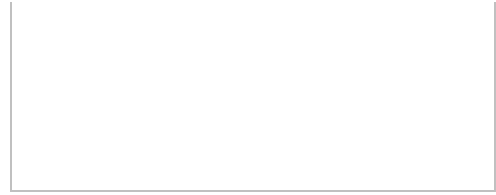
"You should have told me," Kim says. "I've known where it was the whole time."

At first glance, I mistake the man in the photo for Jeff Johnson, Jack's father. But I'm quickly corrected. "Actually, that's *Skill* Johnson [no relation]," says Jack. "He lived next door. He's the guy who announces the Pipe Masters now." But back in those days, when he wasn't surfing, Skill played the goofy clown at all the kids' birthday parties. Before Jack could walk, he was crawling next door to visit the funnyman. These days, and likely for years to come, Skill Johnson will proudly tell you he was the one who introduced Jack to the guitar.

[...next page](#)

Jack Johnson





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