

Timothy Morrissey RIP

Timothy (Tim) Morrissey's footprint was larger than Santa Monica Beach. He was known and loved by the major actors at Topanga Beach before California paved that paradise and put up a parking lot, with a lifeguard tower below, allowing anyone to surf the once private point break. He was a fixture in Chautauqua Canyon where he resided during his lifeguard years and the ever present film recorded of all things lifeguard.

Timothy passed away after a gallant battle with cancer on March 15 in Palm Beach. Palm Beach became his new home where he lived with his remarkable and beautiful wife, noted appellate attorney Edna Causo. They were a wonderful couple who cared deeply for each other and traveled the world to Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, Africa, Caribbean, and South America.

Timothy and I went through SMLG Rookie School together along with Doug Smith, Bill Beatty, Herb (Hurtin' Herbie and the Heartbreaks) Thacker, Kurt Ando, Terry Palma, Abby Schneider and a host of other first-rate beach lifeguards. We became close friends and became even closer when we shared Tower #9 south of the Jonathan Club for three years. They decided to make it a two-man tower on weekends because of Lt. Bobby Chavez's influence on Capt. Jim Richards. Chavez saw the need for two men to be stationed in #9 on weekends because two-man tower #8 had its hands full with all the non-surf action at Sorento Beach and because on big surf days the entire area between the two towers was rescue-City. I did the 9-5 shift and Timothy, the 11-7; I was an early riser and Timothy liked to stay up late and sleep in. The Jonathan Club on Tower #9's northern side also had the ear of the Santa Monica City Manager and he wanted his club members to be kept safe from strong rip currents on red flag days.

One Saturday I noticed the ever-present older attorney, we'll call him Dan-the-Man, who used to come to the beach on weekends and sit close to pretty girls. Dan was a fixture and many of the SMLG force knew him or of him. It was a flat day and about 10 a.m. this young lady came up to my tower and said that there was this old pervert exposing himself to her. I recommended she move to the other side of the tower to get away from him. She does this and about half an hour later Dan-the-Man gets up and repositions his towel close to the young woman. Morrissey had just come on duty and I told him of the incident. I was ready to aggressively invite Dan to take a fast hike off the beach. Timothy thought about it for a couple of minutes and said to me, "Dan-the-Man is pretty well connected in this city and with the lifeguard service, let me try something." Morrissey went down to Dan's towel and said in a loud voice: "Dan, you've been such a strong supporter of our lifeguard service, we need your help. It's been reported that there is a creep that is exposing himself to young women around here. Would you please keep a lookout for this guy and if you see him, point him out to us and we'll call the cops, and have him arrested." We never had any more problems with Dan-the Man.

Assertiveness was not Timothy's go-to disposition; he wasn't a fool to rush in where angels fear to tread. He preferred to hang back a little and watch how situations unfolded. The following rescue incident will help explain. There was an unusually big August south swell and Morrissey was working Tower 16 next to the pier, in panoramic view of Lifeguard HQ. There was a very pretty young woman (PYT) dressed in a skinny biking who had just entered the water where a substantial rip was pulling. Timothy immediately sensed that this could be a bad rescue situation, knocked the phone off the hook, grabbed his rescue tube and ran down. Ironically HQ had just dispatched Baywatch 1 from the pier and radioed to reserve rescue boat captain, Tom

Johnson to head for Tower 16 stat. Johnson hardly ever ran the boats, but apparently Tom Zahn was off that day. Timothy reached the now hysterical girl struggling and getting sucked out to sea and gave her his rescue tube just as Johnson was backing down the boat to them beyond the surfline. Kurt Ando was in the stern getting ready to pull the young lady aboard when Timothy screams, "There's a huge set wave coming and you'd better haul ass." Johnson runs up to the helm and buries the throttles just as Ando is pulling and Morrissey pushing her onto the transom. Timothy sizes up the incident grabs the transom and gives the girl another push out of the water just as the wave begins breaking over the bow. Ando grabbed the girl for dear life as Timothy pushes himself away to the port side. Timothy told me the twin screws were cavitating as the boat went up in the air at a 45° over the breaking wave. Beatty told me later that he and Cpt. Richards were standing in awe at attention fearing the worst. The rescue boat made it safely outside the wave zone and Timothy swam to shore calm and nonplussed as usual. I never heard of Johnson running the rescue boat again.

Timothy was a world class photographer and became a leader in the industry when it switched from film to digital format. He had a glorious photographic studio in West Palm Beach that I visited numerous times from my home in Tampa. Timothy also introduced me to Bill "Hutch" Hutcheon who became one of my very best friends. The three of us also attended the last SMLG reunion dinner together. We surfed the left beach break north of Reef Road together half a dozen times and when I took my Cabo sportfishing boat to Treasure Cay in the Bahamas for a billfishing tournament, Timothy allowed me to dock it at the Sailfish Club for a couple of days before my crossing to Bimini. We have a photograph taken at his wedding with Bill Beatty, Timothy, another best man, and me on the ocean wall doing Paul Strauch cheater 5's.

I moved to St. Pete Beach from Tampa and lost touch with Morrissey for the past few years as my wife Carol and I also traveled around the world. I now wonder how close each we came to them on our sojourns to many of the same places. I am sure with his untimely passing will be lost a treasure trove of lifeguard pictures including the ones he took the only time Santa Monica beat L.A. County in the Ironman race. Morrissey chronicled Santa Monica Beach Lifeguard service like no one else.

We will all miss you Timothy. You were a great friend, lifeguard and bon vivant who we all respected and learned from.

Rest in peace brother, we are all going to miss you!