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“Here we are at the end of summer already. We at Carolina Creations are looking forward excitedly to the upcoming fall season. We have been looking for some new and interesting artists as well as continuing to honor our tried and true friends. We think you’ll be pleased with what they are creating.

We’re looking forward to New Bern’s Bike MS, Mum Fest and this year we are going to celebrate American Craft Week. More details to come.”

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Legends of the Sandbar

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Richard and Claire from the section titled *The Ghost Dance*

workers will walk off the job site. Lawyers, accountants, and realtors will sneak in midday sessions. The work will get done, eventually; but the swell won’t wait for quitting time. You have to strike when it’s hot, even if it means pissing a few people off. Surf-consciousness breeds a malleable sense of time that can drive clock-driven people crazy.”

Here’s a portion of the text from a section titled *The Ghost Dance*:

If you happen to be driving through the village of Rodanthe, NC, on a fine spring morning when there’s a fresh swell coming in from the ocean, you might catch sight of a lithe sixty-year-old man with silver-and-blond dreadlocks riding an ancient beach cruiser across the road, a clean white surfboard under his arm and a plain black wetsuit pulled down to his waist, heading out for a surf at the end of his street.

He doesn’t really surf anywhere else, or with anyone else. Though he lives a stone’s throw from Rodanthe’s fabled S-Turns, and a few minutes’ drive from some of the better spots on Hatteras Island, he’d rather surf somewhere he can be at peace, and not have to contend with lineups, crews, snakes, pros, kooks, or, god forbid, photographers.

His features lined by the sun and wind, eyes the color of the ocean, dreadlocks the color of sand, he looks as if he sprang from a fairy rath deep in the dunes — which is close enough to the truth, if the one-story white clapboard house in which he lives, filled with artwork, guitars, and sea-treasures, qualifies as a rath.

Chances are you have seen evidence of his presence elsewhere on the Outer Banks. His mural art, depicting breaking waves, dancing trees, exotic flowers, and bright yellow suns, covers the walls of restaurants up and down the beach, and his smaller pieces adorn coffeeshops, rental homes, and private residences from Corolla to Ocracoke. His iconic wooden shop-signs line the roadscape of Hatteras Island, and you may have chosen a burrito or a burger off of one of his hand-painted menus.

He also paints surfboards. I myself own

a blue one, emblazoned with a spidery yellow sun, custom-penned by him in the summer of 2002.

If he has a nickname, I’ve never heard it. He goes by his given name, Richard. And with his longtime companion Claire, he lives a life of quiet creativity, struggling to maintain a foothold on the ever-growing and ever-endangered island outpost he calls home. He plays harmonica and sings in a band. Mans the helm at the local surf shop. Offers a helping hand around the community wherever help is needed. And, when at home, which is his preferred habitat, he spends his days and nights with Claire, drawing, painting, talking, playing music, and welcoming friends who always seem to be dropping by for a beer and a chat.

Early on a warm February afternoon, I stop in for a visit. Richard and Claire are in the kitchen, seated at the table intently working on drawings, trading colored pencils as they talk. Light streams in through the southern-facing windows, picking up bits of multi-colored dust that swirl around their heads like disintegrated pieces of a cartoon thought-bubble.

I knock on the window. Claire turns, lights up a smile and waves. Richard rolls out a squint-eyed bodhisattva grin as if he had been expecting me, and both of them get up to welcome me at the kitchen door.

A flurry of conversation ensues. It’s a moment I never grow tired of, coming through that door and, without fail, being greeted with such warmth and genuine happiness.

I first met Richard fifteen years ago, in the company of fellow Hatteras Island stalwarts Walker Pruden and Bert Lowdermilk. These three amigos, veterans of an earlier, wilder era on the Outer Banks, regaled me with half-remembered vignettes far more interesting than the sepia-toned yarns of tourist books and the Kodachrome memories of my own childhood vacations. I crashed on Walker’s couch in Salvo. I slept on Bert’s boat in Ocracoke. We played guitar. We drank beer. We surfed. The easy

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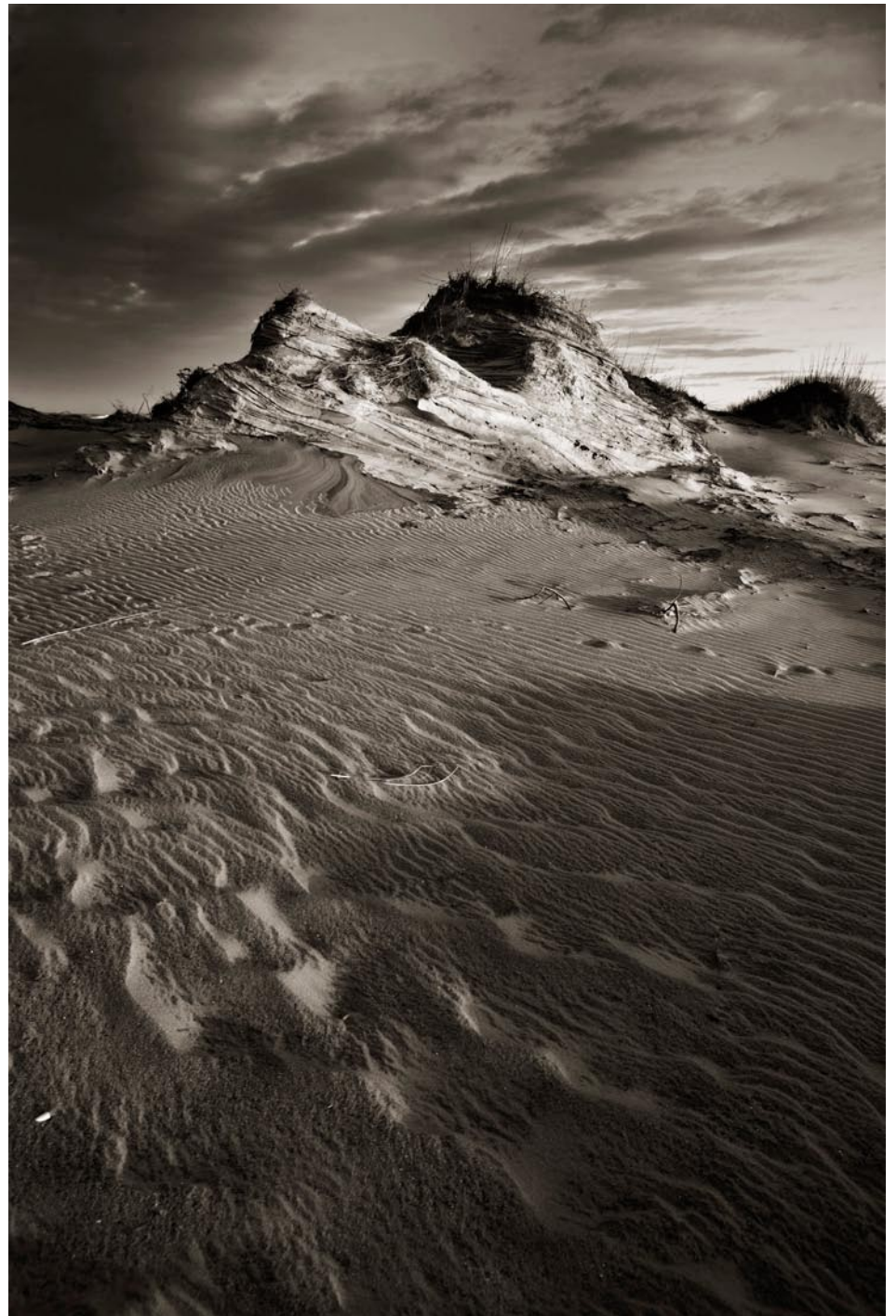


Photo of Pea Island erosion

company of these mellowed-out surf punks gave me a new perspective on the Outer Banks. They were the real deal, and felt no need to prove it to anybody.

These days our conversations linger longer and longer over the changes that threaten the sanctuary of their little house on the side of the road at the edge of the continent. The rising sea levels and growing intensity of storms. The beep-beep-beep of earth-moving cranes clearing sand from roads and re-building dunes — machines which have become a permanent fixture in a town that otherwise would have been washed away by the ocean years ago. The recent influx of urban boardsporting professionals who treat the area as their own private recreational facility: blow-ins from the north who tend to show little respect for, or interest in, the local community. And the relentless rat-tat-tat of new construction, which continues in spite of a depressed economy and examples in every direction of derelict structures laid waste by wind, sand, salt, and the incessant pounding of the ocean.

Richard has begun to call it the Ghost Dance, this life they are living, a nod to the Native American religious movement of the same name that began over a century

ago. It was basically kind of a death dance, he says by way of explanation. The Indians were getting moved off their lands, or just killed. It was basically the apocalypse as far as they were concerned. So they just started this dance. It was their only way they could stay connected to the spirit of their culture.

So now, he says, whenever I’m playing with the band and we’ve got some kind of nightmare crowd of binge-drinkers from up north who keep hooting, Wagon Wheel! or Play some Skynyrd!, I say to the other guys, we’re doing the Ghost Dance tonight. Just keep on dancing. Whenever the septic tanks overflow from over-use and algae bloom fugs up the water, we just keep dancing. Nasty customers and crazy drivers on the road, just keep dancing. Another hurricane bearing down on the island, just keep dancing.

Chris Bickford has a book signing scheduled at Downtown Books in Manteo, NC, on Oct. 6, 2017.

Editor’s Note (Tom Starland): Being from Michigan, even though we have the Great Lakes there we don’t have any surfing communities, that I know of, so when I came to Charleston, with its barrier islands

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