

Surfing legend 'Skeeter' Malcolm, 70; educator was 'the big Kahuna'

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Staff Writer

Surfing legend Raymond Leon "Skeeter" Malcolm, an original beach boy who began riding the waves off San Diego's shores in the 1930s, died Sunday of cancer at his Mission Beach home. He was 70.

"He was what we called the big Kahuna," fellow surfer Joe Gann, recalled of Mr. Malcolm, who surfed up to a month before he died.

A 13-year-old Malcolm and a group of friends were said to be the first to surf Sunset Cliffs. Although his responsibilities grew over the years, Mr. Malcolm's passion for the perfect wave never waned. He worked as an educator for more than 30 years, raised four children, joined the Kiwanis, and all the while rode surfboards that went from heavy redwood and balsa to lightweight longboards.

For the last 15 years, Mr. Malcolm, Gann and the rest of a group affectionately known as The Old Gang have met at Tourmaline Surfing Park in Pacific Beach, Gann said. Rain or shine, whether the surf was two feet or 20, the group that now ranges in age from 54 to

78 paddled out to sea.

Afterward, they tailgated at the back of Mr. Malcolm's Suburban. Mr. Malcolm, remembered for his easy smile and an unfailingly positive attitude, was considered the leader of the group. He would play Hawaiian music from the 1940s and everyone would eat pineapple. They traded stories about great rides, Gann said.

"The kids think surfing started in the '50s with the Gidget movies," said surfing pal and Old Gang member Ron St. John. "But it really started in the '30s with Skeeter and the guys."

Mr. Malcolm's love affair with the coastline took shape after his family moved to San Diego from Texas when he was a child. He grew up in Ocean Beach and graduated from Point Loma High. With a passion for water, Mr. Malcolm became a lifeguard, guarding the county's beaches for 15 years in the 1950s and '60s.

"He was like a celebrity around the beach," said his son, Steven, who also became a lifeguard and, along with his sister, Marilyn, learned to surf with their father's

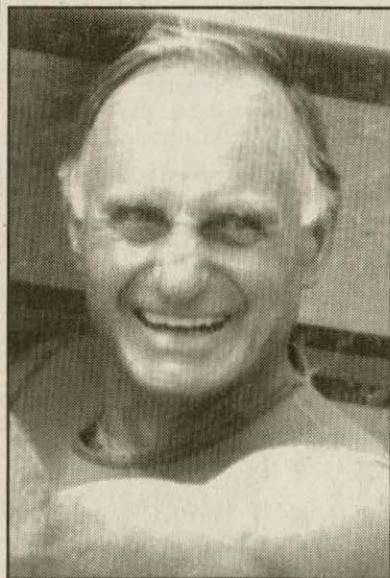
help. "For Skeeter, surfing was a lifestyle — it meant everything to him."

Steven Malcolm said his father was among a group of surfing legends recently honored in San Clemente. And three years ago, the elder Malcolm made a Nike commercial featuring pioneer surfers.

Skeeter Malcolm's endless summer was interrupted only briefly by a stint in the Navy. He attended officer's training school in Plattsburgh, N.Y., and was commissioned as an ensign in 1944. He was assigned to the Montrose, an attack and transport vessel, and fought in the battle of Okinawa.

After the war, Mr. Malcolm graduated from San Diego State and then earned a master's degree in education from USC. His first teaching job was at his alma mater, Point Loma High, where he coached track and football.

In 1980, Mr. Malcolm retired as the principal of what is now Ray Kroc Middle School after 32 years with San Diego City Schools. The PTA awarded him an honorary life



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'Skeeter' Malcolm: Surfing
"meant everything to him."

membership certificate in 1966 for outstanding service to children.

In addition to his son, he is survived by his wife of 47 years, Norma; a daughter, Marilyn Malcolm of Coronado; his father, Marshal Malcolm of Ocean Beach; a sister, Lavana (Dolly) Belt of Encinitas; his brother, Marshall of La Mesa; and six nieces and nephews.

An informal memorial service will be held at Tourmaline Surfing Park on Monday at 8 a.m.