

The Kiteboarder

THEKITEBOARDER.COM

magazine



NICOLLO PORCELLO: ALL GROWN UP

THE ALLURING ISLE OF ARUBA

special supplement:
STAND UP PADDLEBOARDING

Sneak Peak
2010 Fuel

AUGUST 09



\$4.95 USA

NICCOLO AND I HAVE STAYED IN TOUCH OVER THE YEARS. WE MET THROUGH KITEBOARDING BUT OUR FRIENDSHIP WILL LAST A LIFETIME. I HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED OUT FOR NICCOLO AS BEST AS I COULD. I NEVER WAS AS TALENTED AS HIM AT BOARD SPORTS, BUT HIS DETERMINED PERSONALITY WAS IDENTICAL TO MINE WHEN I WAS HIS AGE. PHOTO CHRIS TRONOLONE



By Ryan Riccitelli

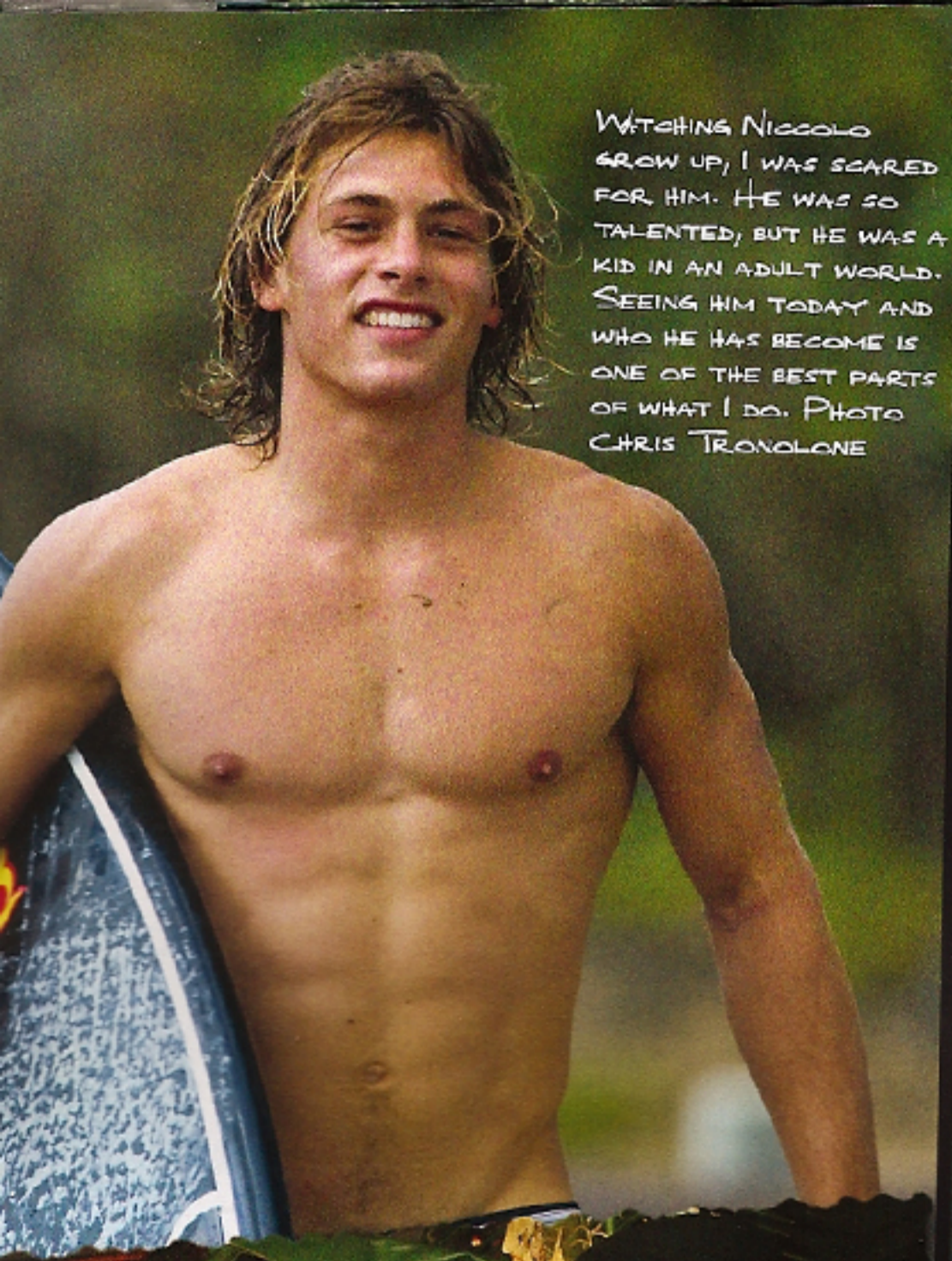
NICCOLO PORCELLA: ALL GROWN UP



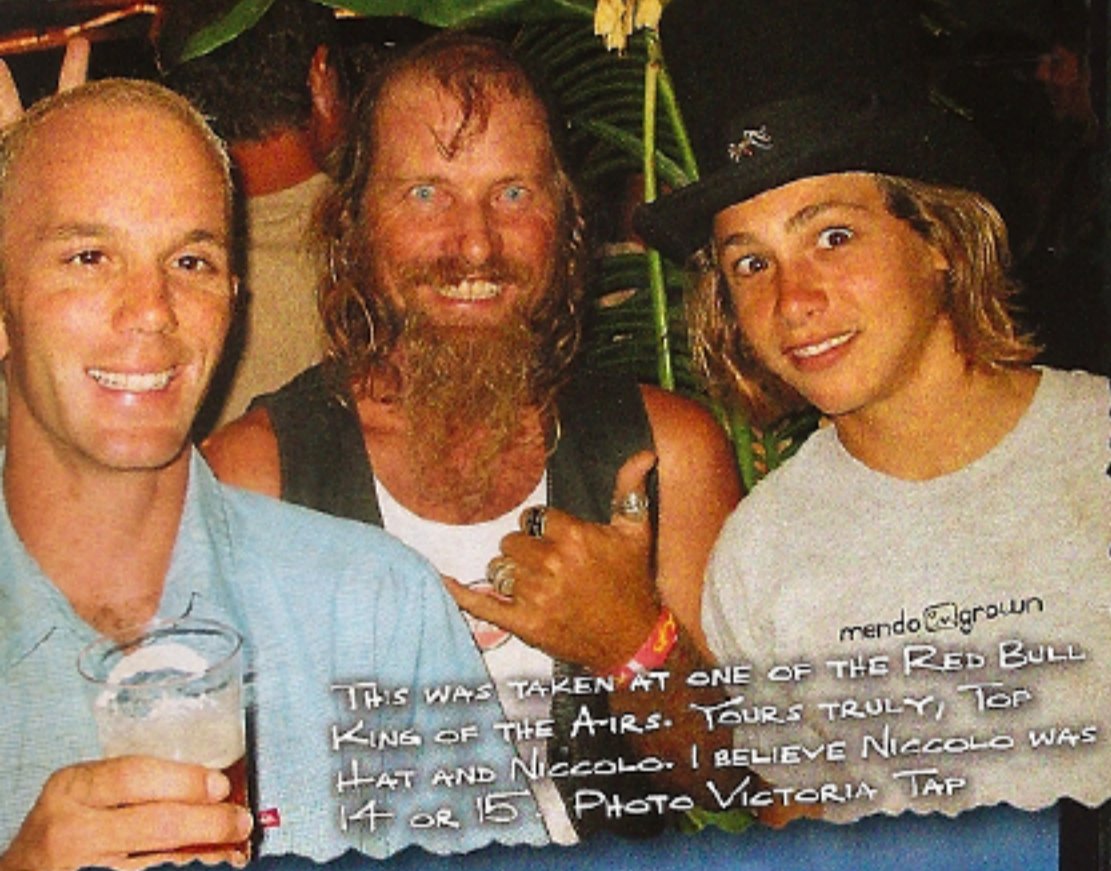
"Nico" BLASTING A HUGE PERFECTLY BALANCED STRAPLESS INDY AIR. PHOTO CHRIS TRONOLONE

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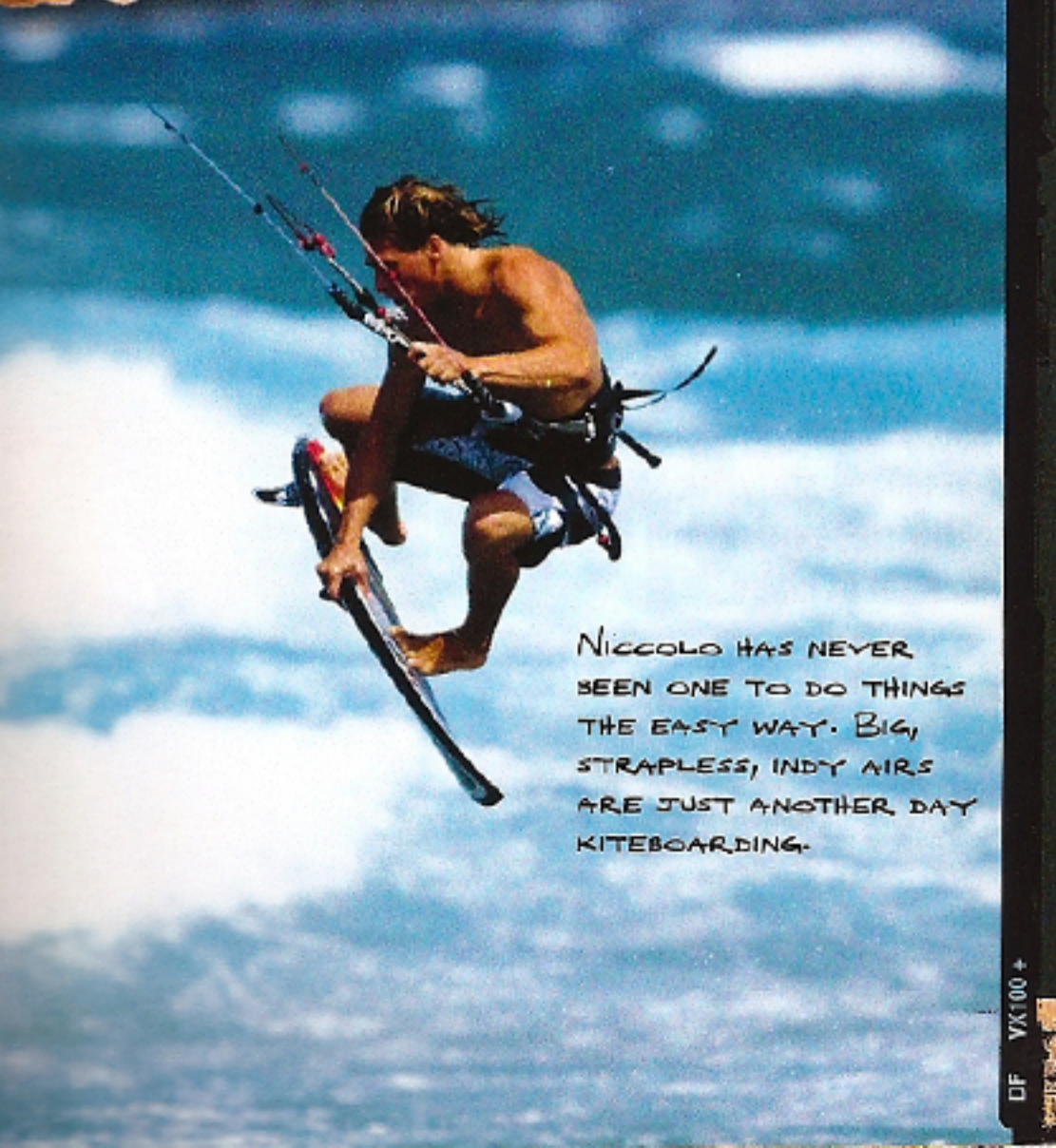
I WAS ON VACATION IN MAUI BACK IN 2000 WHEN I CROSSED PATHS WITH NICCOLO PORCELLA FOR THE FIRST TIME. I remember it like it was yesterday because he immediately lipped off to me. He yelled, "Watch your lines!" as I was getting ready to take a session on my two-line Wipika. I was not used to a young punk talking to me like this, so I immediately told him how I felt. He giggled and said he was joking. I knew he wasn't. What I did not know was that this was the beginning of a great friendship with one of the most talented and amazing prodigies of our sport. In the next year, Niccolo went on to reach legendary status around the world as the shredding 13-year old kiteboarder featured in magazines and on DVDs. He was still a little punk, but he began traveling the world at an age where most kids were in grade school. Niccolo grew up quicker than most. Hang out with him for a day and you will quickly see he is way beyond his years. In the last few, Niccolo has matured into a young adult and has grown up considerably. I check in with him periodically and have been waiting for the right moment to tell his story. Niccolo was not the first kite grom, but he was the most visible because of his close friendship with Lou Wainman. His dedication and natural talent fueled a new generation of kites.



WATCHING NICCOLO GROW UP, I WAS SCARED FOR HIM. HE WAS SO TALENTED, BUT HE WAS A KID IN AN ADULT WORLD. SEEING HIM TODAY AND WHO HE HAS BECOME IS ONE OF THE BEST PARTS OF WHAT I DO. PHOTO CHRIS TRONOLONE



THIS WAS TAKEN AT ONE OF THE RED BULL KING OF THE AIRS. YOURS TRULY, TOP HAT AND NICCOLO. I BELIEVE NICCOLO WAS 14 OR 15. PHOTO VICTORIA TAP



NICCOLO HAS NEVER BEEN ONE TO DO THINGS THE EASY WAY. BIG, STRAPLESS, INDY AIRS ARE JUST ANOTHER DAY KITEBOARDING.

How long have you been kiting and how long have I known you? I started kiting in the summer of 2000, and that's when I met you. It's been almost 10 years now... [laughs] no way.

How did you become involved in kiteboarding? I saw it for the first time in the summer of '99 when Flash Austin came to Sardinia. It caught my attention, and that's when I said, like, that's what I want to do. I came to Maui in 2000, the year afterwards, and that's when I started. I started with Mauricio Toscano - he taught me how to kite, and then I was always at the beach with Lou [Wainman], Morris [Mauricio Abreu], Elliot [LeBoe], all the boys.

Many people do not know your brother is a bad ass windsurfer. Is he still pushing the limits there? Yea, my brother [Francisco] rips not only at windsurfing, but surfing as well. On those big days, he's one of the few that will get your attention real quick. He has fearless power and style. He's definitely always pushing the limits in windsurfing, for sure.

Who were some of the people you learned from during the early days on Kite Beach in Maui? Are you still close to any of riders from that original Kite Beach crew? Well, you know, if I have to start saying the names, it would take forever, but yea, there's definitely all the crew. Elliot, Lou, Mauricio, you know, and Jim Bones. All the young riders are all there too. I'm definitely still friends with a lot of the crew from the old days.

As the grom at Kite Beach, you went through a fair amount of hazing from the older riders. What were some of the things you had to put up with as the kid of the group? They would make me do all the stupid stuff for sure, and I would get a little bit worked every once in a while, but everybody took care of me, it was pretty amazing. Now that I look back due to this interview I want to thank everybody that kept an eye on me, fed me, gave me rides, and basically told me the right things to do. As much as I was the little grom getting picked on, at the same time everybody loved me. It's actually a really nice group of people that are really passionate about the sport, and they saw me as a little grom and they all took care of me. It was really great.

What do you think about the scene at Kite Beach now compared to then? There's for sure more younger riders and there's still a lot of us there having fun. I don't know, back in the day, it was, I have to say, a little more exciting. You came down to the beach, and it was like, what am I going to see today? Just launching the kite was exciting, you know what I mean? The whole launch, everybody was like, "Are you ready? Check this one out. Frickin' here we go! Frickin' boom!" Now it's a little more hi-tech. It's a different vibe, for sure it's focused more on tricks. Back then, every day was a little different, and now you kind of have a routine. Back then, you would discover something new every day; it was different, but it's always fun, of course.

You have always been a determined guy. How has this helped you over the years? It's helped me to continue doing what I love to do, to follow the dream and do whatever it takes to get there. Always keep it fun, and live your dream, you know?

What is/was your relationship with Lou Wainman? When I was a little kid, I think a lot of people looked at Lou as a God. To me, I was like, I want to be Lou Wainman. He's been kind of like a step-father to me. He took care of me and I lived at his place for a little bit. I was basically, you know, learning his moves. Then, I had some injuries and had to do a few different things, but we've always been brothers; more than brothers. I mean, Lou and I have a super close relationship. He's a great guy.

What was it like being featured in DVDs at such an early age? For sure I was living the dream, I mean, that's what I wanted to do. It's funny, the other day I looked back at Unhooked, and I haven't looked at it for three or four years. I was cracking up; it was really funny to see me as a grom.

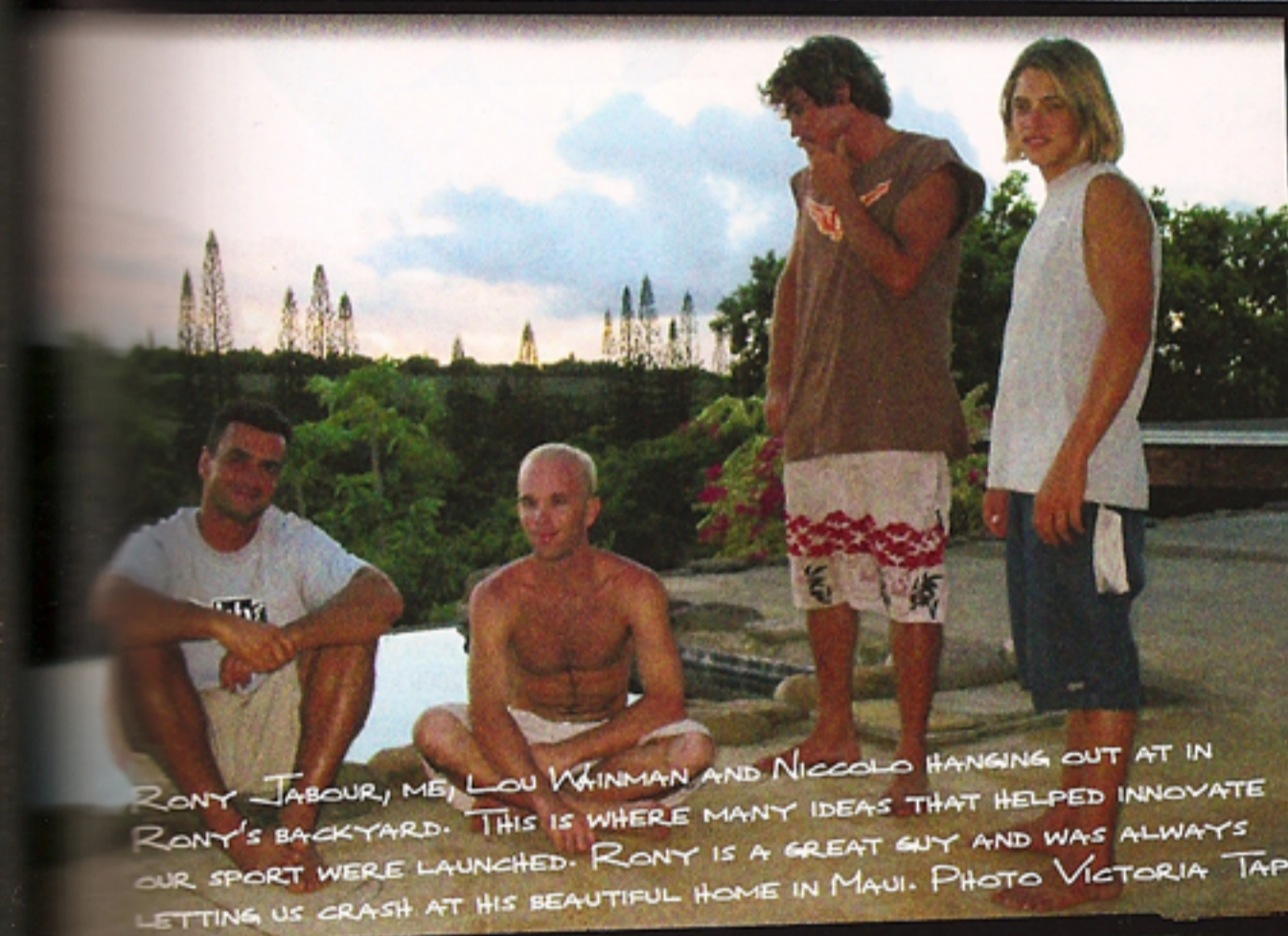
You were known for having a temper. How have you grown up since your younger years? I'll admit, for sure, I was really cocky back then. You know, I was 13 years old and 4-foot something. From 13 through 15, I looked like I was 10, but in my mind, I was grown up. I wanted to talk up; yea, I was cocky for sure. I've definitely mellowed out but also, I like to charge, I like to have fun, and life is good.

What is your single greatest accomplishment? Realizing how fun life is and how you need to be grateful for what you have. Keep dreaming big and do what you want to do. Do whatever's fun and believe in yourself. That's been my biggest accomplishment, really understanding that.

After becoming a big name in the sport and being featured in all the magazines and videos, you seemed to disappear from the sport. What happened, and where have you been for the last few years? Well, as I said, I had some really bad injuries and I also had some stressful years of my life. You know, things happen, and sometimes life takes some turns to teach you a few lessons. If you're a strong guy and you're determined, that only makes you stronger. I went through some hard times and learned some basics about life. Now I want it more than ever, to make it and do what I've dreamed of doing since I was born.



WATCHING NICCOLO DESTROY THIS SPOT WITH ONE HUGE LOFTY STRAPLESS AIR FRONT SIDE AND THEN BACKSIDE AND THEN GRABBED AND TWEAKED WAS MIND BLOWING. PHOTO CHRIS TRONOLONE



RONY JABOUR, ME, LOU WAINMAN AND NICCOLO HANGING OUT AT RONY'S BACKYARD. THIS IS WHERE MANY IDEAS THAT HELPED INNOVATE OUR SPORT WERE LAUNCHED. RONY IS A GREAT GUY AND WAS ALWAYS LETTING US CRASH AT HIS BEAUTIFUL HOME IN MAUI. PHOTO VICTORIA TAP



AT 13-YEARS-OLD, NICCOLO USED TO TELL ME STORIES OF HOW HE TRAINED ON THE TRAMPOLINE. HE WAS A FUNNY KID. HE WAS SO DRIVEN AND SO DETERMINED. HE WAS NEVER SATISFIED WITH HIS RIDING. NICCOLO SHOWS OFF SOME OF HIS ACROBATIC SKILLS. PHOTO CHRIS TRONOLONE

You and Jimmy Lewis have been friends for many years. How did you meet him and how has your relationship evolved over the years? I've known Jimmy since I started kiting. I've been riding for Jimmy for 7 years. Jimmy's another of my closest friends, I mean he's Uncle Jimmy. He helped me out a ton and I've learned a lot from him. Anyone who knows him personally knows he's one of the coolest, funniest people you'll ever meet.

What projects are you currently working on and where will see you next? I have some things in the works, but I kind of want to keep it secret for now. I want to be pushing the sport in big waves, small waves, wakeboard style, and kickers and rails. Kiting is a big part of me, but I also surf and tow surf a lot and I do my acrobatics. I do a bunch of things that I really have fun with in life right now, and they're all helping me out to enjoy life more. I can't wait to basically be a little more free so I can go ride and film in good conditions.

What kind of gear are you using these days and what type of riding do you enjoy most? I'm using Jimmy Lewis boards and Wainman Hawaii kites right now. Jimmy boards are for sure my main boards. I'm using the 6'0" Thruster, 5'11" Thruster, and I have my 135 and 138 wakeboards. The Wainman Hawaii Rabbit kites are like a dream come true; to have some kites that you're really proud to pump up at the beach and put in the air and fly is great. These kites are unbreakable, and they just fly so good and are so smooth. I love the kites I have right now.

I watched you grow up from a teenager into a young man. What words of wisdom do you remember me giving you over the years? Ryan, I appreciate everything you've done for me, which is a lot. I remember that one day we were talking sht. I was so cocky, I think it was the day I met you, but we kind of connected. You've always told me all the good things about staying positive and just having fun and being appreciative for being at the beach and riding. Don't let the fame get to your head and don't get cocky, even if I was cocky, I mean, frick, sometimes it takes life lessons to realize it, but I was young. I think I was funny too though. I was a good kid. I was just cocky a little bit. I wanted everybody to be like, "Dude, you were killing it," and I'd be like, "Dude, did you see that, brah, how sick was that?"

What is your primary focus now on the water? To push the sport closer to surfing, or closer to wakeboard style. I'll admit that waves are taking over right now, and I really want to make kiting look like surfing; to draw the same lines and do the same airs, I love that side of the sport, but also wakeboard style attracts me a lot. I want to keep inventing new moves and putting more style and power in everything I do. I'm trying to make it so I can kite even more, instead of teaching. I'm going through a phase where I have to work to survive, but that makes me want it even more. Lately I've been teaching more than kiting; I haven't been practicing so much because I have to pay the bills, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to get some sponsors now where I can practice every day, and I can't wait — I know I'll be going off.