

# M+B

## TRANSWORLD SKATEboarding

### Silver Skate 70s, An Interview With Photographer Hugh Holland

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As you ought to know from history, or the Dogtown films, skate culture as we know it was birthed in Southern California in the 1970s. You've most certainly seen Craig Stecyk's and Glen Friedman's photos from this seminal era, but have you seen Hugh Holland's? He put out a book call *Locals Only* in 2012, composed of color photos from those years. Now 77 years old, Hugh's just published his second book of all black and white photos from 1975-77. Three years might not sound like much, but as you'll read, skating changed rapidly, and Hugh shot thousands of photos in attempt to capture the sand before it ran out of the hourglass. This book—is amazing. I had to interview this man whom I've never heard of. I rang Hugh earlier this week, and after exchanging pleasantries, Hugh actually kicked off the interview like this: I was looking up your name and saw that you interviewed the director of *Mid 90s* and that was kind of interesting.

**Yeah I interviewed Jonah Hill and Mikey Alfred right before it came out.**

I really liked that movie, and it's called the *Mid 90s*, but it could've been the mid '70s to me.

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**Oh really?**

Yeah, the way the kids were, reminded me very much of the way it was in the mid '70s.

**That's interesting. Someone should do a book or movie that shows the mid '70s and mid '90s side by side.**

Yeah, well both were in California. It took me back to the '70s [laughs]!

**I take it you saw the *Lords of Dogtown* movie that came out a while back? Was that pretty accurate from your experience?**

Yeah, more or less. It got a little bit Hollywood. Of course the documentary that he did I liked better.

**Yeah, the documentary was amazing. Did you know a lot of the Z-Boys? I know Stacy Peralta is in one of the photos in this book.**

Yeah, they were around everywhere. I started out in Hollywood, in the hills between Hollywood and the Valley. They were mostly in the Santa Monica area. '75 was when I started shooting them, and in '75, skateboarding was starting to go vertical. And the main place they were doing them was in the storm drains and storm bowls. They called them bowls. Mini Bowl, Skyline Bowl, Lauren Canyon, and Mulholland; in the hills. In '76 they started going to pools, empty pools, because there was a drought. Then that's when we got around a lot. By the end of '76, skateparks were starting, and '77 was more skateparks and stuff. It was only three years I was shooting skateboarders. In those three years, I can look at a picture, and if I don't remember it, I can tell what year it is just from the way it looks, the way they're dressed, the way it's taken.

**"I consider myself of the style of street photography, not sports photography at all. Just get the atmosphere and what's going on at the moment right on the street."**

**That's interesting. I know a lot of Z-Boys were photographed by Craig Stecyk and Glen Friedman. Did you ever end up on sessions where those guys were shooting as well?**

Yes I was, both of them, but especially Glen Friedman. I knew him from Kenter Canyon Elementary. He lived in that neighborhood. He was about 14, and one day he was skating and he broke his arm. I was the only one that had a car there at that moment. I gave him a ride home, he lived in a nice big mansion just a couple blocks from that school. He started showing me his cameras and stuff. After that he was in a cast for quite a while and he was shooting a lot. So yeah, I knew him. His mother had an antique store, she was one of my customers. I had a workshop—furniture finishing, decorative painting. That's what I was doing in those years. My passion was photography. I was just getting started really, I had my darkroom, I did mostly black and white. As soon as I started shooting the skateboarders, I started using color more, because I figured the California afternoons, the smog, and the sunsets would look great in color. But I still continued to shoot black and white through the whole time. I'm so happy with this book. Steve Crist, the editor, put it together, he also did my color book that I put out almost ten years ago (*Locals Only*).

**I gotta get my hands on that one.**

Yeah, and I still have thousands and thousands of pictures that haven't been seen. I've got enough to do another book, maybe color and black and white, in another couple years [laughs].

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**Were you shooting everyday back then?**

Yeah, pretty much. I had my workshop on Melrose. When I started with the skateboarders and really got into it, it was my favorite subject at that time, I'd work until four or five in the afternoon and then I'd go out. Especially on the weekend. I had a car so I'd be able to go all over the place. It was amazing how they'd know when there was a new spot, a new swimming pool on the other side of town. We didn't have internet or cell phones, it was word of mouth. When I think about it now, I don't know how they knew about what's going on across town. But they got around, the young skaters, they really got around. They were the Wild Boys, they were everywhere. All over Southern California, just going for it. The one photo I have in the middle of the book, it's a big group picture at the Del Mar racetrack in San Diego. It's supposedly the first national contest, the Del Mar National. All the skaters are sitting there, all the Dogtown boys are over here and you can see Stacy on the other side. I wasn't focusing on the Dogtown boys at all [laughs]. I was focusing on the whole group. Dogtown was making waves at that event, they were showing off their surfing style from Santa Monica and Venice. A lot of the skaters from the South, San Diego and Orange County, were more into streetstyle, you know, freestyle.

**There's one photo I love, it's where the guy is doing a kickturn on the plywood that's on the car.**

Oh yeah, that's my car. I didn't care if it got beat up a little bit more because it was already beat up [laughs]. That was up in Beverly Glen on Benedict Canyon Drive. That was my old Toyota.

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**Do you keep up with skateboarding at all today?**

No [laughs], sorry to say. Because I never did skate. I was already 32 in '75 when I started and I think I tried to get on one once and fell, and thought, oh I better not do this [laughs].

**So the skaters accepted you, being a bit older and not being a skater?**

Yeah, they seemed to accept me very well. I had a camera. Nobody had cameras. Like you said there was Stecyk and Friedman, but photographers were few and far between. These skaters were breaking the barriers, just starting to get some air. Going vertical was a big deal. The new urethane wheels and all that, they just couldn't wait to get somebody to photograph it. I can remember Jay Adams saying, "Hey cameraman, get this!" And then he would crash. He would make a beautiful shot at the apex, he would have this incredible style, and then he'd crash [laughs].

I have photos of Jay Adams that haven't been in either of my books. They're not the iconic ones that Glen Friedman got. Glen was really in there with him. Jay just appeared here and there, and I'd take pictures of him. I didn't get any really good ones of him. I wasn't one to go looking for specific things, I didn't really know who was who. I started to realize that quick and the Dogtown boys were getting really well known in '75, that was a big year. It all happened so fast. It was the right time and the right place, in California.

**Were your photos getting published in any skate mags at that time?**

Yeah, in '76, *Skateboard World*, they were in the Valley.

**Were the skaters seeing that, and wanting to shoot with you more?**

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Yeah, but I didn't do too much for the magazine. I did one article where I wrote it and did the pictures in San Francisco, in '77. *Skateboard World* only lasted for a year, so it wasn't as big as *Skateboarder*. I never thought of shooting for magazines, I got in for a while with *Skateboard World* and got that one article. A couple of the photos are in the book from San Francisco. The gang there at the skateshop on Ninth Avenue.

I have some really nice color pictures published in the magazine from that time that I can't find. All my pictures were in boxes for 30 years, in different peoples' houses. Thirteen or fourteen years ago, my pictures got discovered and I had a gallery show, then it was several years before my first color book. Then ten years between the color book and this black and white book.



## **Do you still shoot film?**

I haven't been shooting film for the last ten years, but I'm still shooting. I shoot digital now. I'd love to go back to film, but it's [digital] too easy, I'm 77 years old. Digital is so less expensive, well it's not really, but you don't have to worry with film and processing. But film is a great medium, I know it well. I'm still shooting a lot.

## **When's the last time you shot a skateboarder?**

Couple days ago [laughs]. At the beach, at the Hermosa pier. Every once in a while, when I see a skateboarder, my camera perks up, my lens just points to it automatically [laughs].

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I consider myself of the style of street photography, not sports photography at all. Just get the atmosphere and what's going on at the moment right on the street. So skateboarding was a fantastic thing for me, just for those three years, then it just started to be, I don't know, maybe too commercial. It evolved, of course, so fast in those three years, '75, '76, '77, to a sport. First it was just Wild Boys in the street, having fun, and then in a couple years there started to be uniforms and logos on the shirts. Helmets and knee pads and shoes, at first there were no shoes even [laughs]!

**Thanks for the time, Hugh. Thanks for sharing all those stories.**

I hope you have enough for an article or whatever you're going to do.

\*All photos are from *Silver. Skate. Seventies.* by Hugh Holland, published by Chronicle Chroma 2019.