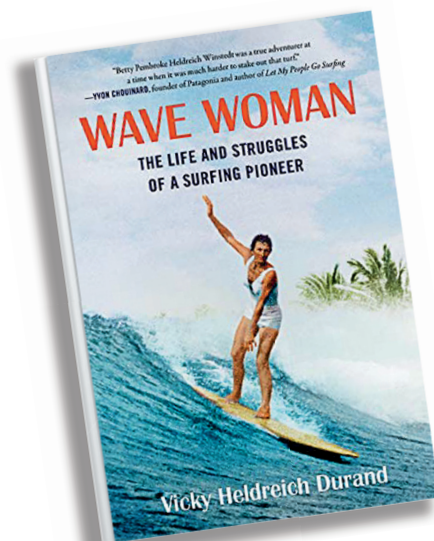




HELDREICH
WINSTEDT WAS
AN ATHLETE TOO,
OF COURSE. BUT
SHE WAS ALSO
A SCULPTOR,
A JEWELER,
A FISHER,
A POTTER AND
A POET.

Betty Heldreich Winstedt (left) began surfing in the 1950s, when she was 40 year old. Her remarkable life is the subject of a new book (below) by her daughter, out in April from SparkPress.



Family Fortune

In a powerful new book, champion surfer Vicky Durand shares treasured tales of her mother, the inimitable Betty Heldreich Winstedt.

words **KARYL GARLAND**

*Hidden energy
Surfing the big waves is like
Dancing with nature*
— Betty (2010)

SPEAKING WITH DESIGNER, AUTHOR AND CHAMPION SURFER VICKY HELDREICH DURAND, IT'S EASY TO GET SWEEPED UP IN THE APPRECIATION AND ADORATION SHE FEELS FOR THE OCEAN AND FOR HER MOTHER, BETTY HELDREICH WINSTEDT. These are the subjects of Durant's new book *Wave Woman: The Life and Struggles of a Surfing Pioneer*.

Each chapter of this remarkable paperback frames a different period in Heldreich Winstedt's life. Each chapter also explores how Durand and her mother made their way into surfing history. Both women were renowned for their wave-riding. But when Durand discovered a large box of keepsakes at their Mākaha Beach home, she knew it was time to extend words about her mother, a supremely adventurous woman who began surfing during the 1950s.

Durand's decision to write *Wave Woman* now seems prescient. The book arrives with a strong tailwind, in the midst of a movement focused on acknowledging (and championing) women in ways that transcend

stereotypes. And the subject matter feels particularly relevant heading into the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, where Carissa Moore and Caroline Marks are competing on the first U.S. women's surfing team.

Moore and Marks are part of a long and proud tradition. Hawaiian mythology offers us stories about powerful goddesses riding the waves. This precedes centuries of documented feats by ocean-savvy women, including Keleanuino'ho'ana'api'api, whose surfing strength and grace is still celebrated today.

Kelea lived as an ali'i, and exhibited unrivaled vibrancy and power in the water. Her brother, the King of Maui, hoped to gain an alliance with other rulers through Kelea suitors. She graciously reminded him that her true love could only be found while riding the waves.

*Waves breaking on rocks
They have a certain rhythm
Beautiful to hear*
— Betty (2008)

Betty Heldreich Winstedt, born Betty Pembroke, first encountered the Pacific Ocean at the age of five while visiting family in Santa Monica, California. According to Durand's introduction from



Wave Woman: “[Betty] fell in love, infatuated with the sand between her toes, the shades of blue in the water, and the waves that crashed on shore.” Durand’s own initiation to the Pacific, in 1954, was strikingly similar. She was 12 years old, spending the summer with her aunt and uncle on the island of Molokai, and she knew right away: “I had to live near that ocean.”

That summer, Heldreich Winstedt joined her daughter in the Hawaiian Islands. They would learn to surf in Waikiki, riding into an era when the sport began receiving recognition on a global scale. Durand was a teenager; Heldreich Winstedt was in her forties.

In the fall, Mākaha became the site of Hawai‘i’s first international surfing competition. Heldreich Winstedt entered in 1956, slotted in a women’s division featuring the era’s very best. She came in second place, behind Ethel Kukea, another trailblazer.

“And then they both went to Peru,” Durand says, as members of a coed team that included Conrad Cunha and Albert



Snapshots from the life of surfer and poet Betty Heldreich Winstedt, including her championship trophy and late-life artistic endeavors.

“Rabbit” Kekai. The group was invited to compete at Club Waikiki, the famed hangout for dilettantes and magnates, on the Lima shoreline.

“Mother was so competitive,” says Durand. “She took first and came back with the big silver cup.”

Durand was still in high school then, and Heldreich Winstedt didn’t mind using stick-and-carrot with her daughter: “If you could win the Mākaha in 1957,” Durand’s mother told her, “I know we could head down there together.”

“So I won [Mākaha] in ‘57, and Ethel took second,” Durand recalls. “And Mother and I were invited to Peru together in 1960. I was 18.”

*Surfing is great fun
Riding speed of the water
Conquering one’s fear*

— Betty (2009)

When asked to explain what made her mother such an original and an inspiration, Durand shares the following words:

“She was understanding . . . a good listener. Her philosophy was: Just do it. She was fearless and incredibly strong, but never overpowering. She wanted people to believe in themselves. She really wanted women to have a career, to be able to support themselves. And she always talked to people, so as to bring out the best in them.”

And more:

“She had no limiting beliefs. She just believed that whatever she wanted to do, she could do it. She loved work. She was creative. She was thrill-seeking and fun-loving. And she saw life as one big adventure.”

What resonates when Vicky Durand speaks and writes about her mother, their island time, their connections to the ocean and the surf, is the idea



Vicky Durand, the author of *Wave Woman*, with her mother, the book’s subject.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY

of dreams. How the gloriousness and goals—when embraced with a true sense of appreciation—can make the world an easier and better place.

“[She] loved the small things in life, like the sound that the ocean makes after it comes in and it retreats,” Durand says. “That fascinated her.”

There is no shortage of fascinating material in *Wave Woman*. Durand is generous in sharing treasured tales, detailing the intricacies that bridged her daughterhood and athleticism with the life of her mother. Heldreich Winstedt was an athlete too, of course. But she was also a sculptor, a jeweler, a fisher, a potter and a poet. She worked as a dental hygienist. At one point, she owned a

walnut farm. And she did all of this while nurturing a love for her Pacific, her family and her friends.

So here is one more story. Before she rode waves, Betty Heldreich Winstedt soared through the sky. By the age of 22, she had obtained her pilot’s license, flying a single-engine biplane. Once, she decided to solo a glider above Los Angeles Municipal Airport. She felt “free as a bird”—until the high-tension wires came into sight. Trying to pick up altitude, she lost too much speed, induced a nosedive, and hit the ground hard.

Leaving the crash site, she told the ambulance driver: “Shhh, don’t tell my mother.” ■