

GrowingUP

IN SANTA CRUZ

**Timbo
Phillips**

ARTAGEOUS ARTIST



Back to School
Guide

SLOW STREETS
HEALTHY EATS
MUSICAL MEETS

Visit us at GrowingUpSC.com

Parenting 101 for Artists:

The Phillips Family Nurtures a Third Generation

BY SUKI WESSLING



The making of a dynasty might not seem obvious when you're in the middle of it.

"He started off where his kind of art was a little underappreciated, so he wasn't making very good money when I was little," says artist Jimbo Phillips of his dad, artist Jim Phillips who is famous for his Screaming Hand and Santa Cruz logos. "He'd be like, 'You should go to college and be a doctor or something and make good money'."

Good thing Jimbo didn't take his dad's advice.

The Phillips family has nurtured three generations of artists, so we here at Growing Up set out to find out how you do that. When other parents fret about motivation and commitment, the Phillips family seems to have it in the bag—so how do they do it?

SKATING AND SURFING

"He took me surfing when I was young and skateboarding, very Santa Cruz-type things," Jimbo remembers. "I didn't really play sports when I was young, but I started skateboarding when I was about five, which was mid-70s, so it was when skateboards were in their infant stage."

Because his dad's job happened in the living room of their home, he was an unusual 70s-era dad who was deeply involved in his son's life.

"He was always doing art," Jimbo remembers. "He was always drawing, so you kinda want to do what your dad's doing when you're little so you're like, Dad's drawing, I'm gonna draw."

Jimbo describes his dad as "very critical" of his art, but when he goes on to describe their relationship, it's clear that the elder Jim was skilled at nurturing the child as well as the artist. Jimbo enjoyed sharing his work with his dad, and relished the feedback and respect that he

got, despite his young age.

"I'd draw something and show it to him: 'Look at this Dad, what do you think?' Sometimes he'd give me little tips," Jimbo remembers. "I didn't even realize that the stuff he was telling me was soaking in. But over the years it kinda added up."

It added up to professional level artistry by the time he was a teen. The elder Jim's work had finally taken off to the point where he needed to train some apprentices, his son Jim among them. Dubbed Jimbo by his co-workers to distinguish him from his father, the son says he has no regrets.

"I've been able to raise my family in Santa Cruz," he says, joining his parents to raise the third generation in Live Oak. "Things are going better than ever—I'm stoked I chose it."

A PORTRAIT OF GENERATIONS

Jimbo says his parents have been married—"55 years? 60 years?"—and the family legacy has clearly influenced him. He lives in Live Oak with his own family: his wife, Jenni, and his son Colby (19). Daughter Cassidy (23) lives nearby. As a kid with an enduring adult relationship with his parents, he says that he always liked children.

"I always liked kids' creative playful energy," he explains. But it didn't really hit him how important having a family was to him until it took a long time for him and his wife to have their two children. That time of pondering life without kids left him knowing that being a dad would be very important to him.

From the sound of it, he paid close attention to his own father's parenting skills.

HOME BASE GUY

"My dad worked at home when I was young so he was always home," Jimbo

remembers. "And that's what I did, I worked at home so when my kids came home I'd always be here. It worked out really well because my schedule's flexible, so I could jump in the car and give them a ride somewhere, come home and do some more work. I was the home base guy. My wife works at a bank so she'd have to go to work and I'd stay here and hold down the fort."

His influence on his children is as clear as his parents' influence on him. Cassidy recently graduated from college and is working to establish her career as a photographer. Although her art is in a different medium, that hasn't kept her out of the family business: Jimbo hires her to shoot his work.

Colby is taking classes at Cabrillo and setting up his own territory in the Phillips brand, designing stickers with his own twist on the look and feel established by his dad and grandfather.

PARENTING 101

So how did the Phillips family do it? Clearly, neither of the Jims was the task-oriented elder Mozart, standing over their children and working them to perfection. In fact, Jimbo's description of how he and his wife raised their children paints a portrait of an idyllic beachside childhood quite similar to his own.

Blue Ball Park was an extension of their home base. "We had a good run there for sure, a good vibe for eight years!"

And he reminisces about family road trips spent as skate park tourists, checking out half-pipes in towns around California. (His own teen skating locations were not so officially sanctioned: "We would go looking for all kinds of stuff: curbs, smooth parking lots, shopping malls. That kinda gets you into conflicts with security guards!")

But with both of his children

embarking on careers in art, he has succeeded where many parents fail: he has instilled a love of his calling in his children. And apparently, he did it with the same casual flair that his finished products project to the world.

"I tried to encourage them and be supportive and give them the tools to do what they wanted to do, try to give them some constructive advice here and there but not be too intense about it," Jimbo remembers.

He says that he's lucky that both of his kids had an interest in and talent in art, but that wasn't enough.

"I didn't want to make it seem like they had to do it, I wanted them to but you kinda gotta let them do what they wanna do."

Like his dad before him, Jimbo set up an atmosphere of fun and encouragement in their home.

NATURE'S FINE, BUT NURTURE LETS NATURE SHINE

Jimbo says that he believes that having a natural aptitude makes learning anything easier, but it's not necessary for success. He likens art to music, where the important thing is not some innate musical skill, but the will to play music and get better through enjoyment.

"I think anyone could do it if they really want it enough," he explains. "That's the biggest part, really wanting it."

When it came to his own children, he made the learning process fun and encouraged them to find the art that spoke to them. He is thrilled that his daughter has chosen photography, even though it's not his medium, and that his son can step into a thriving business if he chooses to.

"Whatever he decides to do ultimately is fine with me," Jimbo says of whether his son will follow in his footsteps. "I am still trying to guide him in the art direction. He has some designs that are earning him some money right now so that's always a good motivator."

But when it comes to encouraging other kids, his advice can be boiled down to "have fun, and keep doing it."

"Kids always ask me, how do I get into art?" Jimbo says. "The biggest thing is if you like drawing, draw a lot, if you like painting, paint a lot. You do it for your enjoyment, do what you think is fun to do, and through the process of having fun you end up getting good at it."

For parents, the advice is clear: Nurture and support your children's passions, and enjoy their company. Everything else will follow.

Learn more about Jimbo Phillips's art at jimboPhillips.com. Hear a podcast of this interview at tinyurl.com/jimboGUISC.

► Suki Wessling is a local writer, teacher, and musician. Learn more about her work at SukiWessling.com.