

LONGBOARD THERAPY



It all began one night in 2012 at the Soho Beach House hotel in Miami Beach, Fla. I was at a gathering for a friend's engagement when I overheard Joner Strauss talking with a bunch of our mutual friends about his most recent project. I initially tuned out the conversation because I assumed he was talking about another Board-Up Wakeboarding event, which I had attended in the past. But a particular word drew my attention back: "longboarding." Hearing how passionate Joner was about longboarding made me even more intrigued. After overhearing him respond to someone's inquiry about what a longboard is, I immediately remembered skateboarding as a kid and thought about how much I would like to do it again. I recalled how I had

given up on skateboarding when I was young because I couldn't do all the tricks my friends could do; so I was glad to hear Joner mention that longboarding is more accessible than typical short-board skateboarding, since it is less focused on doing tricks and is more geared toward transport, cruising and exercise.

After asking Joner 101 questions about longboarding, I purchased a board, a Kryptonics pintail, at a local sporting goods store. I was immediately intrigued with my first longboarding experience. At first I had to adjust to riding again, but I got the hang of it relatively quickly and began riding a few times a week after work and on the weekends. The more I rode, the more I began to notice some positive changes.

- I noticed an increase in my overall athletic abilities, which was reflected in the improvement of my skills as the quarterback for a competitive flag football team.
- I started to see longboarding as a way to spend more time outdoors and be present with the environment.
- I felt more joyous, energized, confident and centered.
- I felt more relaxed in both mind and body.
- I was able to challenge myself each time I rode — so I felt accomplished after every ride.
- And when I wasn't longboarding, I was always thinking about it and wanting to be back on my board.

I started to wonder why all these changes were happening. Was this yet another new venture that I would begin but not finish? Or was this something that would stay in my life?

To give you some background about my occupation, I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist (CCH). I own a private practice in North Miami Beach, where I work with individuals, couples and families of various ages. Clients come to me for support with the hope of discovering solutions to problems with anxiety, stress, depression, terminal illness, grief and loss, pain management, substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, insomnia, phobias, eating disorders, confidence, focus, relationships and more. As you can imagine, I have considerable responsibility in my day-to-day work with clients.

My job is extremely rewarding and humbling, but it can also be tiring and stressful at times. I began riding at night to calm my mind and release any stress I had taken on throughout the workday. Once I realized how successful this was for me, I wanted to share with others what longboarding has to offer. I became curious about who else might have similar experiences. After searching the Internet and reading different forums and articles, I realized that tons of people had discovered how therapeutic and helpful longboarding could be.

I arranged to meet with Joner for lunch to discuss my discovery and hypothesis on longboarding and therapy. When I told him I



Isaac Farin shares the stoke of longboarding with numerous people.

thought there was something healing about longboarding, he agreed without hesitation. He explained that longboarding involves a “flow” and “stoke” that are absolutely healing, and he told me he had no doubt that others would love to share their healing experiences with me. We then spent an hour brainstorming ideas about the next step we would take, finally deciding to work together on developing something called “Longboard Therapy.”

Joner and I developed two components of Longboard Therapy: I searched for a way to include the action-oriented sport of longboarding as an intervention in my work with clients, and Joner continued to grow and expand the International Distance Skateboarding Association (IDSA). According to Joner, “The goal of the IDSA is to make sure that people see skateboarding as organized, safe and as a viable source of transportation, via events, clinics and races, with hopes of spreading the stoke to the community at large — to position longboarding as one of the most accessible sports around.”

Together, Joner and I are spreading the word that there is a healing aspect in longboarding and that the growing longboard community is entirely inclusive and welcoming. Joner suggested that we conduct a series of interviews with people who could assist us in our endeavor. He set up our first interview phone conference with Don Tashman from Loaded Boards.

Don was generous and cooperative, sharing his appreciation of both components of Longboard Therapy and what they have to offer. He related to many of my therapeutic views on change and agreed with me about the importance of using both mind and body to create change. He also thanked Joner for all the hard work he had put into the community, calling him an innovator. Don shared many interesting perspectives and insights on flow, stoke, the expanding of stoke, the breaking down of fear and the long-term potential of the longboarding community. I was particularly enlightened when he shared his view on stoke, linking it to an idea he read in social psychologist Erich Fromm’s 1956 book *The Art of Loving*. Don explained, “Stoke is a feeling of a pure sensation that you want to share — because it is natural to want the best for another person without condition.” He also said, “Stoke is a spark of infinity, and we all have the potential to be infinite. Stoke is challenging yourself in your own way while gaining a sense of control and pushing its boundary. It is very personal, so find your own flow.”

Although Don’s personal story is a great one, this was clearly more than just an interview with a man who makes longboards. This was a conversation with someone who truly believes that longboarding has infinite healing properties and who is extremely passionate about sharing this belief with others. This conversation was exactly



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what I needed to begin formulating my ideas about the relationship between psychotherapy and longboarding. Don’s ideas about the mind and body concepts of stoke and flow were very consistent with my therapeutic approach, which I call Solution Informed Mindful Therapy (SIMT). This approach adheres to the belief that clients have resources to discover solutions to their problems within themselves. It is based on the notion that the present moment has a great deal of healing to offer, and that linking both the conscious and unconscious mind can lead to holistic change.

After talking to Don and reflecting some more on my ideas, I created a plan to incorporate longboarding as an intervention with particular clients. In learning how to longboard, I came to understand that it involves developing balance, focusing intently on the task at hand in the present moment, learning to let go in order to become one with the board, learning to get back up after falling, and taking on new challenges that arise in the environment. This seemed to me like a parallel process to life, which requires learning how to balance different emotions, developing a relationship with the present moment, learning how to let go of things that are no longer relevant, taking calculated risks toward making change and facing fears and challenges. I hypothesized that if these concepts were understood and practiced through a combination of longboarding and traditional talk therapy, it would lead my clients to improve in some of the following areas:

- confidence
- focus
- a sense of physical and mental balance
- resilience
- patience
- joy
- the ability to address fears and challenges
- the ability to deal with anger, stress and problematic behaviors.

My first Longboard Therapy client was Antonio*, a 47-year-old man who first sought counseling when his wife passed away after a yearlong struggle with cancer. My work with Antonio started with a few sessions in the office setting. We spoke about how he could examine the pain from his loss and — when he was ready — make one small change at a time in order to become more hopeful. When I described Longboard Therapy to Antonio, he let me know he

wanted to try it out, since it would allow us to have our sessions outdoors. He had no prior experience with skateboarding, but he was eager to explore how the exercise of longboarding could help him move through his grief. Antonio and I worked together for seven sessions, which I conducted in both the office and outdoor settings. In our last session together, Antonio shared with me that Longboard Therapy had helped him manage his emotions, release stress, focus on the present, accept his pain and sadness, begin the healing process and rediscover his love of sporting activities.

Since working with Antonio, I have conducted Longboard Therapy with several other clients of various ages, levels of longboarding experience and therapeutic issues. I typically begin Longboard Therapy sessions by leading the client through a mindfulness breathing meditation while we both stand on our boards on the grass. The intention behind this exercise is to help the client become one with the board and the surrounding environment. Once I’ve taught the client the fundamentals of longboarding, we take a series of silent rides, after which we sit together and discuss the experience. We talk about the small changes they notice in each of their rides and discuss how they can notice small changes in other areas of their lives. After more challenging rides, I lead the client in a discussion about facing fears and overcoming obstacles. The combination of traditional talk therapy with longboarding — a sport that involves getting centered, becoming focused and establishing a mind-body connection — helps clients experience and enact solutions in dynamic new ways. **AXS**

** The name of the client has been changed to maintain confidentiality.*

Isaac Farin is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist (CCH) who owns and operates Isaac Farin Therapy LLC in North Miami Beach, Florida.

Jonathan “Joner” Strauss is the founder of the International Distance Skateboarding Association (IDSA).