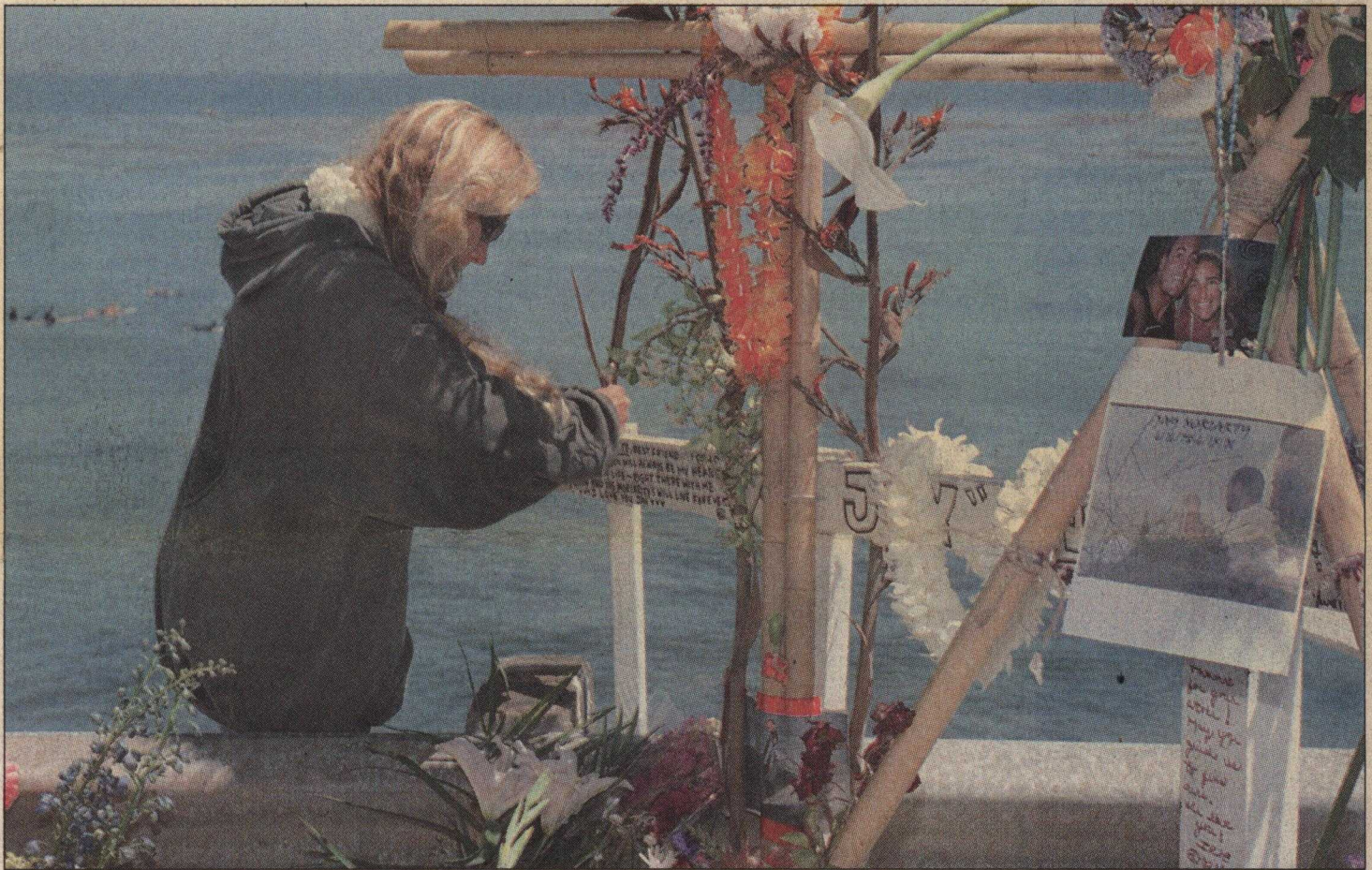


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But words will never do him justice.'*

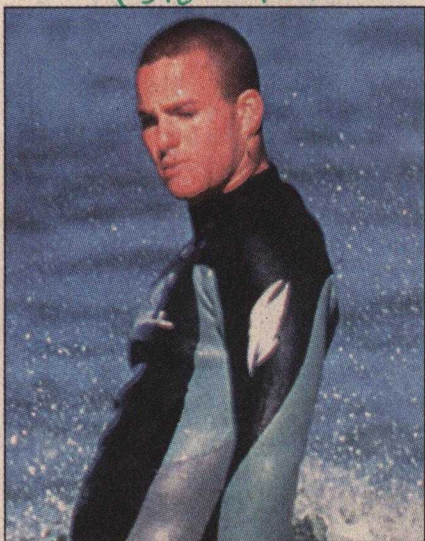
BOB PEARSON, SURFBOARD MAKER

Grief, shock follow famed surfer's death



Janine Collins/Sentinel

Kim Moriarity, widow of famed surfer Jay Moriarity, writes a tribute at a memorial that mourners erected along the coast in the Pleasure Point area. Moriarity, 22, pictured below, was an internationally known big-wave rider.



Bob Barbour/Special to the Sentinel

By DAN BOLLWINKEL
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — Confusion and grief hung over Pleasure Point on Saturday, a day after the news of local surfer Jay Moriarity's death reached the Santa Cruz area.

Throughout the day, friends and other mourners stood dumbfounded along the seaside bluffs. A memorial was erected at the corner of 36th Avenue and East Cliff Drive, several doors down from where Moriarity and his wife, Kim, lived. Hundreds of well-wishers left flowers and wrote their goodbyes on the white railing over the cliff. Flowers and a note were left atop the stairs at Steamer Lane, the fabled Westside surf break.

Moriarity's family and friends were planning a bonfire to celebrate his 23rd birthday, which would have been Saturday.

Details of Moriarity's free-diving accident off the Maldives Islands on Friday were scarce Sat-

urday. No more was known besides the initial report from O'Neill Inc., the local company that sponsored Moriarity and the Deep Blue Open surfing contest last week in the Maldives, a small group of islands in the Indian Ocean.

Free diving involves descending to extreme depths without air tanks or other diving equipment. It is a common practice among big-wave riders as an exercise to increase the chance of survival in the event they are pinned under water by a succession of large waves.

Moriarity was no stranger to ocean survival, a fact that added to the shock his family, friends and fans felt. He was one of a handful of surfers in the world known as a "waterman," someone who tackles dangerous wave conditions and swims great distances in either competitive or rescue situations.

Moriarity once paddled from Santa Cruz to Monterey on a longboard with several friends

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Moriarity: Famed big-wave surfer dies in Maldives diving accident

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and fellow watermen.

His surfing career began in Santa Cruz as a youngster competing in National Scholastic Surfing Association events as well as local club contests. His prowess on a surfboard attracted the attention of his eventual sponsors, and his professional career began at age 12. But hanging ten on a longboard soon took a back seat to big-wave riding.

His search for the world's biggest waves began at 13, when he asked his mentor and fellow waterman Frosty Hesson to train him to ride the monster surf at Maverick's, an offshore break near Half Moon Bay where waves can reach 30 feet and higher.

Hesson took the young Moriarity under his wing, and at the age of 16, Moriarity paddled out to the break alongside Hesson for the first time.

That day, Dec. 19, 1994, would put Moriarity on the big-wave map. On his first wave he free fell nearly 40 feet down the face of a wave in one of the worst and most widely photographed wipeouts in the history of the sport. The image was featured on the cover of Surfer magazine in May 1995.

Moriarity got back on the board and, in the next six years, would rise to the top ranks of global big-wave riding, appearing in Surfer and Longboard magazines with consistent bar-raising rides.

Despite global surfing success, Moriarity remained a Pleasure Point resident, never leaving the neighborhood where he grew up.

Hesson, who lives two doors down from the Moriaritys with his wife Zeuf and their children Lake and Roque, learned of his death on Saturday morning.

"He touched people's lives," said a visibly devastated Hesson. "Inwardly and outwardly he was a person who loved life, and he touched so many people. I know some hard-core guys, and he touched them all. They really respected him. He was a son to me."

Moriarity's father-in-law, Russ Ward-Williams, was out at the Point to comfort his daughter. He recalled Moriarity's affection for her.

"I met him years ago when my daughter took him to the prom," said Ward-Williams. "I remember when they went to Lake Tahoe to elope, they tried to find the same chapel my wife and I went to. They missed it by a block but the result was the same. Those two are soul mates. I can't believe he's gone. It just doesn't seem fair."

Mark Nelson, father of local pro surfer



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Jay Moriarity finishes a ride during last year's Men Who Ride Mountains surf contest at Maverick's, off Half Moon Bay.

CJ Nelson, watched Moriarity grow up alongside his son.

"What makes this so hard is that Jay was part of everybody's family, we all raised him," says Nelson. "CJ and Jay have been friends since they were little kids.

"He stayed here, he didn't take off like so many others. This was his home. He's had so many adventures and so many laughs with all the kids in this town.

"Jay never turned his back on anybody, you could always count on him. You just can't say enough good things about him. He was a great waterman and an even better person."

Local surfing legend and board shaper Bob Pearson had a special relationship with Moriarity. Pearson was Moriarity's first and only board shaper, as well as a lifelong friend.

"I can talk about Jay for hours and hours," said Pearson. "But words will never do him justice. Humanity, let alone the surfing world, has suffered a tremendous loss.

"Guaranteed, he was one of the best surfers in the world. He loved the water, and he was a great waterman. I've known the best watermen in the world and he was



Family, friends and fans of famed local surfer Jay Moriarity gather Saturday near Pleasure Point. Moriarity was killed Friday in a diving accident in the Maldives.

Janine Collins/Sentinel

equal to all of them. Whatever happened down there, it was a freak accident that could have happened to anybody because he was an accomplished diver.

"I don't care who you were, Jay wanted to be your friend. If you hung with him, you became a better person. I dropped him off after an international contest that we went to not long ago in Southern California, and I thanked him and told him how lucky I felt

to be his friend.

"Jay would want us to put a smile on our faces and be happy now. He would want us to take care of his wife and each other. Jay Moriarity is deep in our hearts and in our minds and it feels good."

An anonymous message in bold black letters amid the tributes and farewells on the rail at 36th Avenue reads simply: "Jay would go."