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Bob Burnquist Interview.

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BOB BURNQUIST

WHAT ABOUT BOB?
The Bob Burnquist Interview
By Atiba Jefferson

BOB BURNQUIST IS A NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD SKATEBOARDER FROM SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL. HE NOW LIVES IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA WITH HIS OLDER SISTER MILENA AND YOUNGER SISTER REBECCA, WHO HAS JUST ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES TO ATTEND SCHOOL. FOR CLOSE TO A YEAR NOW BOB HAS SPENT HIS DAYS HANGING OUT WITH HIS SISTERS AND LEADING VERTICAL SKATEBOARDING TO A NEW LEVEL.
Bob's At Home Everywhere, That Includes Hubba Hideout.

180 Nosegrind. Torin Photos.

The razor cutter kicks on with a loud electronic blast. Atiba's voice starts out nice, cool, and mellow, but quickly comes under control. This is Bob Burnquist's interview. It's 11:15 on the nineteenth of March, in the nineties [1996]. Let's do some basic shit real quick.

How old are you?

Nineteen.

Where were you born?

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Where do you live now?

San Francisco.

How long have you lived here?

The first time I came to San Francisco was in July of 1994, but just to visit. Then in December of that year I came back. My sister was with me, and she rented this house. She stayed, and I went back and forth for about a year and a half. Now I've been here permanently for about three years. So you're a dual citizen? How does that work?

My mom is Brazilian and my dad is American, so I have a Brazilian and an American passport.

Where's your dad from?

He's from L.A., California, but he grew up in the Bakersfield area. He lives and works in Brazil now. He is a lawyer. He was a lawyer before he became a resident.

Did he lose his American citizenship?

No. He got Brazilian citizenship when he married my mom.

Do you like one over the other (between Brazil and America) to live?

There are different aspects I like about each place. I like the States because of skateboarding—you can do anything anywhere, and I've made new friends now, so I like it and enjoy it there. But Brazil is where I grew up, it's where I have my roots. I like hanging out there and talking about the past.

Where do you see yourself living in the future?

We were talking earlier about how Neotraditio predicts a huge earthquake in 1999 in the Bay Area or wherever. I don't think I'll be here in 1999, just because of that prediction. But I also think it's just going to be crazy, but I'd be going crazy.

So where would you go?

Back to Brazil, or back to Brazil for a year or so?

But most likely I'll be somewhere in California.

How long have you been skateboarding?

Almost nine years. Eight and a half, to be exact.

How long have you been pro?

In Brazil I've been pro since I was fourteen. I'd go to this skating thing—amateur contest and all my friends and the parents would come. As far as I know, it's a decision that you have, not something you have to ask like, "Do you want to be pro?" [Atiba both laugh.] In the States I've had a board and gotten paid for the sponsor contests [May, 1992].

Were you getting paid in Brazil?

Yeah, about 50 bucks a month—really if we got paid, yeah.

Who are your current sponsors?

They are aint too, at shoe, independent, Spitfire. I guess that's all.

You ever skate an amateur contest in the States before you turned pro?

No.

Is it a whole different world being pro in the U.S.?

It's paradise, dude.

Do you like getting paid more than 50 bucks a month?

Hell, yeah. I love it.

Do you get more travel opportunities here?

A lot more. They pay for everything. In Bay Area they [sponsors] would only pay half, and you'd have to make all your reservations and come up with some of the money. It's real being with Deluxe—[they have Mickey [Rayes] to take care of all that shit so you can just think of what you want to do.]

How many people are in your family?

I have two sisters, my mom, and my dad.

Are you pretty close to your family?

Yes.

Do you like them?

Yeah. I love it. I'm closer to my mom and my sisters because I've lived with them. My dad moved to Rio when I was thirteen or fourteen, so I didn't really live with him. I always talked to him on the phone, though, and I was always going to Rio and stuff. It was always the first days with my mom, two days with my dad.

Does your family support you in your skateboarding?

Yeah. They always have. My dad bought me my first board for my eleventh birthday. We bought it all separate—the board, the graphics, the wheels, bearings, and everything—it was a workboard, and put on the rails and the noseguard and everything. He knew a lot about skateboarding, and even now he probably knows more about the industry part because he reads all the TransWorld and Thrasher. This last time I was in Rio, he came up to me and said, "So, then I'm still working on this trick?" I was like, "I don't know, Dad." [Bob laughs.] Then he's like, "He's been working on this trick, and you gotta think about that." He's got a competitive mind, which I understand, because he's probably just proud of what I'm doing. He just wants me to do better, and that's the way he sees it.

Does he tell you to watch out for Tony Hawk?

No, he doesn't say that.
Really, he'll say, "Watch out for Tony Hawk," or whoever's skating really good. And I always tell him, "You know, dude, that's not true." I just want to skate and have fun, and that's it. Whatever happens is good. I'm good when I'm just out there and I'm having a good time. And when I'm not having a good time, I'm just out there and trying to improve. And that's what I like. I just want to have fun and enjoy it, and that's it.

Did you graduate from high school?

I took my GED here in the U.S. I didn't graduate in high school until the second year. I had three years in Brazil. After those three years, I just wanted to move here. If I was in Brazil, I would have been my last year in high school. If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't have been able to go to Europe, and I would have missed a lot of skating. So, I decided to take my GED test and go to college here.

[Interviewer and interviewee pause for a moment.]

My parents are supportive—my mom was always afraid of me getting hurt, but she didn't want me to give up skating. She said, "Mom, I learned how to fly when I was young, so I can take the risk." She was happy when I first learned fastball. She said, "Mom, I learned how to fly, and I can take the risk." She said, "Mom, I learned how to fly, and I can take the risk." 

What do you do in your spare time?

I love to play soccer. I played in a lot of soccer games, basketball, and baseball. I was always doing something. I loved to play soccer. I loved to play basketball. I loved to play baseball. I loved to play skateboard.

Is fastball big there?

The fastball, you know, is big in Brazil. There are a lot of people who really enjoy it. I know it's like baseball, but you play on a hard court. I also work out sometimes. I like to train.

[Atiba interrupts.] Getting buff? Not to get buff, just to make some muscles, so I can take the risk.

Have you had a lot of injuries skateboarding?

Yeah. A lot.

How many broken bones? Probably ten?

Or more. I broke my foot badly when I was nine months old. Some guy ran into me, and he cut me. Since then, I've broken my ankles, and I've broken my left leg in Germany. I injured my right ankle twice. Once badly, once not so badly. I've broken my ankle twice. The first time, I broke my left wrist and four fingers on the hand that was at the same time.

While you were skating, you probably had a lot of injuries?

Yeah.

Ever break your collarbone?

No. I got lucky—never [the collarbone].

You better knock on wood.

Uh.

[Atiba bursts out an order.] Knock on wood! I don't need to knock on wood. [Laughs.] If it has to happen, it will happen. It makes you tougher. What kind of music do you like?

It depends on what I'm doing. If I'm about to go to sleep, I like reggae, jazz, and slow Brazilian music called MPB. If I like metal and punk to skate to, I listen to heavy metal. If I like to dance, I listen to MPB. If I like to skate, I listen to reggae, too, and that crazy stuff.

When you go to a contest, do you have them play a certain song during your run?

No. Actually, I probably have once or twice, but I never really think about it. If you did, what song would you want them to play?
Where do you picture yourself in the year 2000?

I'll have a house in the country, with a ramp in the backyard.

In the U.S.?

Yeah, but not in a big city, just small-town in the woods. Escape. "Jebus goes frommelon to spinning 180s!"

Do you consider yourself a vert or street skater?

Yeah, please! I consider myself a skater. I'll skate whatever, but I do like skating vert more.

Do you see a lot of kids coming up like you, Colin (McKay), and Danny (Way) as more well-rounded skaters?

Yeah, but in the vert skating it's a lot of time. Not generalizing — because there could be a wonder kid who always skated street. Then in two years you would be the biggest vert skater, you never know — but I think that you have to want to vert skate, not just do it because everyone else does. It's probably harder to stay dedicated to vert skating.

Yeah, you've gotta start when you're young, and then street skating just comes with dabbling.

Who were the first American pros you ever saw in Brazil?

Sergei (Ventura) and Christian (Hiata).

Did you ever think you'd be skating with those guys?

No idea. Never did. Sometimes I think, I look at Sergei and remember being in the crowd, and those dudes skating, and I'm like, 'Yeah, that's right,' but I didn't have a good view of the ramp or anything. I could see those dudes flying.

I remembered in Vancouver (Star City Jam Contest), Sergei came up to me, and he said, "Dude, you can take..."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 188
Who’s your favorite skater?

Who was your idol when you were young?
Danny Way. Was my idol, he stil is. Did you have photos of him up on your wall?
Yeah, dude! [Bob soundsömized that Atiba would even ask.] I used to try to burn his just because I had these.

When vert skating was on the down-low in the U.S. a couple years ago, was it the same in Brazil?
It was the same, dude. The only difference for me is the style, dude. In Brazil, skateboarding as a sport is still kind of an underground sport. The style that used to skate in the Ultra Skatepark—was gone. My friends’ dad sold it or rented it, or something. That was the only wooden skatepark—only where I am grew up, I would go to. The rail at the end, full of kinks, the coping was small, it didn’t have enough bank, it made me feel like, “F***! I loved to skate Ultra, because I just loved the style. It was a big-tramp-ramp that was perfect for airs. To skate Prestige you had to skate streetvert. You had to pop your tail on every air. The kinks and the concrete made the style feel so unique. We all were like, “Ah, duude!” You’re not going to skate that day. I got bummed and stopped skating vert for like three or four months. I was just street skating, because I didn’t want to kill myself skating that cement thing.

Then Diego [Rodrigo Menezes] started skating—he was the downhill skater first. He was my inspiration, and he always, skatepark cement. You know, he didn’t care, he was skating by himself, every day, and was still having fun. So, I started skating again, it was just him and me every day. Then, gradually a whole bunch of people started skating again. That was it. I was like, “This is what we’ve got, let’s deal with it and build something.”

Did you ever learn pressure flips?
Yeah, I used to love them.

On vert?
Yes or no? Maybe once. I can’t remember. I remember doing roosted front-foot flips.

Did you grab?
Yes.

Did you film it?
No. I had almost no control at all. It was a lucky trick. You just hit it, and land it. [laughs] When you finally do it, you’re like, “Yaasss!”

Have you ever invented a trick?
I don’t know if I’ve ever invented anything that’s never been done before, but I remember this one trick I did—that I never done, and I’d never seen anyone do it. This was in Brazil in about 1985, and I didn’t look like much. I was about 16, and I was at the park, and this guy wanted to shoot a sequence for some skate magazine. I wanted to do something crazy—something that was a total shit and so came up with an allie body vario. So you come up regular, go for an allie to-fakie, allie, then in the air turn your body.

But no grab, right?
No, but you just get the board back on your feet again and come back in like you did a fakie allie.

What did the guy call it in the magazine?
The dude ended up calling it Bob Switch-stance. [Both chuckle.]

Do you follow a certain religion?
I’m really spiritual, I have a pretty devout faith. I believe in god, and I believe in god as a higher level of yourself. You’re your own god in the highest level. Someone who takes your higher self. That’s what I believe in.

Did you have any autographs yet?
I did, dude, in Vancouver, and it was rad. You wouldn’t tell a kid to beat it, would you?

Are you going on tour this summer to do demos and stuff?
Yeah, we probably are. In Brazil I did demos... for free. [laughs slyly.] It was the boys. F*** yeah! When I first came here it was the Fourth of July, and there was a party at Jake’s [Phelps] ramp—the Widowmaker—and I was just skating there with a whole bunch of people. I went to a couple of shows, and I was still stoked that he was there...

Who flew you over here?
For an vacation. Okay, let me tell you the whole story. Jake [Phelps], Joey [Teresly], Julien [Singer], and John [Cardiel]—the tour Js—went to Brazil in 1997. They just went down there and hooked up with the locals. I met them down there and traveled around skateboarding with them. I was stoked. I went everywhere. We went up to Jake’s phone number and address [in the state], and I told my dad I wanted to go up and skate. I asked if he’d send me and pay because I didn’t have any money. He let me go, so called up Joey and he said I could stay at his house, so I came over to stay at Joey’s for a month.

I got here on the Fourth, Tommy called me up and the party was that night. So I wanted to grab some boards and stuff, and file to Deluxe [Distribution]. I was stoked. He gave me a box [of product] that I took with me to Brazil to skate on. Then I came back in December, and that’s when the anti-hero thing came up. Julien wanted to start a company, and John wanted to be a part of it, so he was kind of pushing that. The anti-hero thing was definitely happening, and they said they wanted me to ride for them. I really wanted to do it. It’s anti-hero forever.

It’s nice to see someone stick with a company through thick and thin. You don’t see that much these days. What’s the Dreamer’s Workbook? It’s something I bought cause it went to this git book—real nice—I’m just stoked.

Really?
Yeah.

You don’t call the Psychic Friends Network do you?
No. Not even. I’m just into mind stuff and dreams. I believe in fate, that your destiny is already traced before you’re born. If you’re going to have a wrong turn, you’re going to have another fate. Like, there’s not just one fate. There’s so many roads, and when you choose one, you cannot just go back to the main road. That’s how people get stuck together. And if you’re just having a turn, then they’ll turn you’re right. So you control your own fate?
Yeah. You have to listen to yourself to make the right decisions, and the way to make the right decisions is to interpret dreams. Dreams are trying to tell you what’s going on. I remember—this is a long time ago—dreaming of coming to the United States, and meeting John and being good friends with him. It was a really clear dream. I can remember it now. It doesn’t mean it will be exactly how you dreamed it. How I see it, and see the party, and tell me that. Real life. You have to interpret dreams. I’ve been writing down dreams—I have a dream diary—and I read it and think about what it means. But it’s not something you can’t analyze that. [Is that] so you can go back and analyze it?

The other day I had a dream that I was going up a mountain to go snowboarding, and this chick was with me. She was beautiful, and I didn’t even want to look at her because I’d fall in love with her. Then she grabbed me and said, “Why are you so shy?” Blah, blah, blah.

Then she grabs me, kisses me, and says, “Why don’t you want to go to school?” Then I woke up. It was weird, dude.

Is there anything offhand that you could think of, so you could have it in your interview, anything you think is interesting about the future? [Atiba tries to hold back laughter, while Bob answers very seriously.] Now, no, no. [He tries to think of something for a sec- ond, but you’ll only know something after it happens.]

Deja vu?
What?

Do you ever wear striped socks?
Yeah, I like matching colors. I like matching shoes with socks when I’m skating.

Do you ever match shoes with boards?
Yeah, I did for that Spitfire photo. Green board with green wheels, green fishtail, and I had green hair too. It didn’t really look. I worked doing stuff like that.

Do you think of yourself as a pretty boy?
No. I’m pretty clean, but I’m not paranoid with it.

Being a hero, do you feel pressure?
No.

Contests, people watching you, expecting things from you?
No. I don’t. I’m just a skater, and I’m just a skater.

I’m serious and professional when I need to be. Do you have any good-luck charms or habits that you use during contests?
Yeah. I try to touch my necklace a lot. I like to have something to hold onto before my run. It helps with confidence, you know. Do you ever get mad and focus boards?
Focus means break.

Yeah.

So, did when I was a kid, and it was cool, once or twice. If you break boards on purpose, you’re an idiot, you’re wasting wood. [Atiba laughs, Bob doesn’t.]

Do you have a girlfriend?
Sarcasmally! You’ve never had a girlfriend?
I’m serious, dude. I’ve never had one. I really liked and stayed with for a year, at least.

What was the longest you ever kick it with the same girl?

Shut the F*** up!
I swear to god!

What about that girl in Brazil?
I know her, but I haven’t seen her for a long time, but I haven’t found a girl yet that I want to be with for a long time.

Have you met any girls here?
No. Not really.

So, you don’t see yourself getting married and having kids?
Yeah, I do.

What do you see yourself in the future?
In skateboarding, of course. What kind of question is that?

Is there anyone you’d like to acknowledge?

Yeah. That’s weak. [Both laugh. Tape recorder shuts off.]