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Accidental Icon: The Real Gidget Story

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List Price: \$14.95 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

Review by [Kurt Dahlke](#) | posted October 10, 2011 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

Accidental Icon: The Real Gidget Story: Call me a 'grebbie' or a 'ho-dad' if you will. Maybe just a stone drag; as in they would have to drag the sea floor for my body after I dropped like a stone after trying to surf. You see where this is going, not only am I not a practitioner, I'm not even a surfing fan. I do love pop culture, though, leading to certain expectations for this hour-long documentary about the eponymous women's surfing pioneer. But probably, if you aren't a serious surfing fan or aren't taking a women's studies course at the University, you'll find this DVD something like a calm day with no waves.

The point to this release, of course, to hip us all to the fact that there was a real Gidget - Kathy Kohner - who hung out in Malibu learning to surf from the guys in 1956. All that stuff with the movies and Sandra Dee and the TV show and Sally Field sprang from Kohner's natural athleticism and curiosity, as she kept diaries which she and her father parlayed into a franchise. Gidget as an idea, and Kohner as a personality, are both inherently potent. Even if the media character was soft-pedaled a bit when compared to Kohner's real-life adventures, the idea of a girl surfing with the



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guys, and a short girl to boot (girl + midget = Gidget) was quite neo-feminist for the era.

Brian Gillogly's documentary, as narrated by Jorja Fox, gets you that information. You'll find interviews with many beach habitués from back in the day, including the real Moondoggie, as well - though he'd prefer to be known just as Moondog, the way it was before the movies came and jazzed everything up. Even Sally Field talks at length about the role that made her a star as a teenager. Archival pictures and footage from the '50s, clips from the movies and TV show, and contemporary footage from those Southern California beaches augment the material well.

Yet from my perspective, that's about all there is to say. Unless you're the aforementioned surfing fan, you'll find it easy to glide through this simple doc without making much of a connection. Maybe it's the SoCal vibe; not much more than relaxed, easy-going humor is on display. That feminist angle? It's there, kind of chuckled about; pictures of, and interviews with current lady hot-doggers intimate how Gidget made it easier to surf. Grin and move on. As far as the impact of the Gidget character in popular culture, well, none of that work exactly carried much weight then, nor does it now. The deal breaker is Jorja Fox's somewhat dry, matter-of-fact narration; narration bland and generic enough that *Accidental Icon* begins to resemble an infomercial at times.

Documentaries are sometimes tough business, if the subject isn't zingy enough, people won't even approach, and if the information isn't delivered in engaging enough manner, viewers will tune out. Unfortunately *Accidental Icon* suffers from both problems. The Gidget movies and TV show were slight and central to a manufactured fad. Kohner's proto-feminist stance isn't examined much beyond its expansion of surfing horizons, and the whole thing is wrapped up in bog-standard documentary style with drab narration. Only super-serious surfing fans or Gidget fetishists will take this documentary to heart.

The DVD

Video:

This documentary comes in a 4 X 3 aspect ratio, and it looks OK. There is plenty of grainy archival footage, while contemporary footage has a digital crispness and often hot-looking colors that aren't totally appealing.

Sound:

Digital Stereo Audio does a fine job keeping interview audio, narration and music mixed appropriately, meaning interviewees on the Boardwalk, especially, are easy to understand.

Extras:

Four minutes about **Jamie Budge** supplement the title subject, **Rohloff on Rohloff** grants son Chris six minutes to talk about his dad, surfing documentary director Grant, which is a nice

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supplement. A seven minute scene represents the **Extended Ending** for the doc. **Gidget and Rabbit at Duke's** is an odd 40-seconds, a cut scene allowing Gidget to show us where she works. **Trailers** finish off the extras.

Final Thoughts:

Unless you're a big surfing enthusiast or real lover of Gidget, there's not much to make you hang around this beach. Detailing the impact of enthusiastic, proto-feminist-surfer-girl Kathy Kohner - the model for the Gidget franchise - this documentary assembles the usual documentary elements for a slight look at the 'accidental icon'. Interviews feature cheerful older folks reminiscing and chuckling, footage old and new shows people surfing, while the narration smoothes everything over with a bland sheen. **Rent It.**

- Kurt Dahlke

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