

A Boy, A Surfer, A Board, and A Wave

The day it happened is one that I'll never forget. Being 865 miles from home starting a new job, in a new city, with no friends and no family, I was as stressed as could be. Fear of failing, fear of missing out on opportunities, fear of being so far away with no support, and fear of having made a mistake coming here were all swirling in my mind. However, what I didn't know at the time is that this day, this place, this event that I was volunteering at, would end up helping me and would become the highlight of my time in this foreign land.

This day did not start off like every other morning. Instead, this day started off with a blaring alarm clock ringing like no other at 6 o'clock in the morning. I manage to climb out of bed and head to the closet, throwing on the clothes I had laid out the night before. My morning routine was simple: closet, bathroom, kitchen, and out the door. By 6:30 I was on my way, but not on my normal route to work, instead on route to the beach for a day I would soon never forget...

Once I arrived on the beach it was chaos. People directing volunteers here and there to finish the last-minute preparations for this day that was (hopefully) going to be a huge success. I found the volunteer registration and signed in. I remember the woman asking me, "Have you ever been here before?" I replied, "to the beach yeah, but never the event." She said, "Thanks for volunteering. We're so glad to have people like you," and added "be sure to keep your eyes on the waves because you're not going to want to miss it." In my head I remember thinking what is this "it" that she is referring to? However, I didn't need to think hard for very long because soon "it" would be cemented in my brain forever.

An hour later the sun was shining, and the first group was out to sea. Professional surfers and their boards were out looking for high rise waves to catch. I remember standing on the shoreline, feet sinking in the sand and each wave coming up just enough for the water to touch my toes. The growing crowd behind me full of anticipation. I felt as though the simple medals clanging around in my hand were not just participant medals, but more like Olympic gold medals. The crowd and I waited for what seemed like forever, however in reality was only a few minutes, and then it happened. The first surfer went for the perfect wave, with a small boy who was non-verbal and diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in front of him kneeling on the board. They paddled like their lives depended on it and managed to catch the wave. The surfer hopped up on the board like he was surfing in the finals of a huge event and then lifted the boy up by his life vest to stand alongside him. The crowd roared with excitement. My world paused as I took a mental picture of this moment. The smile on the small boy's face was as bright as the sun with the surfer behind him just as excited, almost like it was the first wave he had ever caught. Both riding on an endless wave, with a stranger each had just met, that hit it's wall in the place where the dry sand and ocean waves meet. I could tell everyone; the child, the surfer, the volunteers, and the families, were loving this moment. With happy tears filling eyes and rolling down my face, I had finally found out just what that "it" moment I was told I would never forget was.

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