

Kids and human spirit

I just thought I would share something with you that I thought was very amazing. My 7-year-old son Edward has been swimming a great deal this summer and today he announced that since he could swim in the 5-foot water that he thought it was time to go off the diving board. Well, anyone knows that first time is a HUGE deal. I was fully prepared to have him walk up the stairs, stand on the board, refuse to let go and then have to climb down much to the disgust of himself and, I was certain, every kid standing in line. Well, let me tell you what happened ...

Yes, Edward did climb up and did stand there and did refuse to jump and he did walk back and climb down. He repeated this exercise many, many times. To say at least 25 is not an exaggeration. Each time he climbed up he stood at the near end of the board trying to let go and inch out a little farther each time. As he stood there, the line of kids backed up, as expected. Each time I gave him some time and told him he needed to jump or get off because of all the kids waiting. He repeated this routine each time – up the stairs, stand out on the board, refuse to let go and walk back down and get at the end of the line for another try. After the first five or so times I stopped telling him to get off and figured the kids on line would grow tired and tell him to get off or the guard would blow the whistle at him.

What happened was completely unexpected and it stunned me as I watched it unfold. As the line of kids backed up about 10 deep, at first they were silent; NOT one kid said a word. They didn't tell him to hurry up, get off the board, nothing. They silently waited for him to get off and go the end of the line to try again. Then the kids started to say things, but certainly not what I expected. They all started to encourage him, telling him he could do it, to keep trying and that it's OK to be frightened.

One of the boys told him, "It's OK, Edward, I must have walked back at least 20 times before I did it." Then they started to give him tips and some even went on the other board to try to get him to jump at the same time. This continued for at least a half hour. I turned to see Edward out the farthest he had gone on the board, not holding on, just standing kind of paralyzed as to what to do next. The group of kids at the board were all saying: "Now jump, you can do it!" I looked into his eyes and he so wanted to jump but just couldn't bring himself to do it. He just stood there.

They continued to encourage him, then slowly I heard it, and it got louder and louder: the chant of "Edward, Edward, Edward." I turned to see about 15 kids lined up in the pool chanting his name louder and louder. As it got louder, you should have seen the smile on Edward's face as he realized they were calling his name. He took a quick look at me and I yelled, "Jump!" and he flung and I mean flung himself off that diving board into the air and right into the water safe and sound. The pride in his face was priceless as he swam to the side and climbed out of the pool. All the kids were telling him congratulations and giving him high-fives, telling him that they knew he could do it.

I was and continue to be amazed by each and every one of those children. I later asked Edward who they all were and you know what he told me? He only knew one of them; the rest were just kids at the pool. That blew me away. These kids were more patient and kind than most adults (myself included) would have been. They didn't mock him but instead encouraged him and stood by patiently each time he tried. And after he did it, they followed up with congratulations. I learned a great deal today from a large group of small people. I was so overwhelmed by each and every one of them, that if I see their parents, not even knowing who they are, I will go up to them and let them know what wonderful children they raised. It was the most amazing thing and I just wanted to share something good.

– Cheryl Mignone