

Fathers and Sun

When the wave crashed with an explosion of white foam, beachgoers watched as novice and expert surfers alike were tossed from their boards. Chasing the thrill of an August storm, the 109th Street waters were dotted with wetsuits bobbing in the wake as the watchful shadow of the cross atop Villa Maria sent blessings to the surfers savoring a Stone Harbor afternoon. From the safety of the white sanded shore, a man jumped up when he saw one of the boards go down. His face was as white as the foam. Next to him in a family encampment of beach chairs and colorful umbrellas sat an older man who looked at his son with knowing empathy. He could not help but chuckle.

The elder's gaze fell on the fading Eagles tattoo on his son's calf betraying a once rebellious soul now begging for a sight of his own son on the horizon. The older man thought about how fast life moves no matter how much Stone Harbor tries let folks slow down. Already his grandson had traded the days of drip sandcastles for a surfboard and an expeditious desire to grow up. He cherished his grandson's basketball games under the lights on 96th Street and knew that the days were numbered when a Springer's ice cream sundae would hold the same priceless value after a win or loss on the court. He let his heart ache for the worry in his own son's eyes, keeping his knowing secret that his grandson was going to be just fine.

In no time at all, that boy would be stocking shelves at Hoy's or hauling guests' luggage at the Reeds. He would cherish a beach cruiser bicycle until the rusty wheels and hundreds of miles were forgotten for the luxury of a used car to shepherd friends to this paradise by the sea. His father had won friends and broken hearts with the Jeep he bought from his summer savings, but Grandpa had a scheme in the back of his mind to make sure that his grandson had it just a little bit easier than his old man. With any luck, the Jeep he had earmarked for the youngster would one day be packed with all the trappings needed for move in day at Villanova. It was the boy's dad's job to worry; a Grandpa's job is to dream.

But today, father and son were once again side by side on the shore, looking out to the break to see their future emerge from the salty water. The old man put his arm on his son's shoulder and the concern faded away just as the latest addition to the family popped out from the ocean with a seven-mile-wide grin on his face. The days ahead had plenty in store for this latest lifelong lover of Stone Harbor. Plenty more basketball games under the lights at 96th Street, plenty more Springer's sundaes served at the back counter, plenty more pancake breakfasts at Uncle Bill's, plenty more movies at the Harbor Square theater on rainy afternoons, plenty of cold beers at Fred's in the not so distant future, and plenty of more waves.

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Writing Contest 2022
Adult