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A Children's Pool horror story

by Scott Waggoner

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My family and I recently decided to spend a relaxing day at the children's beach, where my twin 14-year-old boys could snorkel and my wife and I could relax. We were all looking forward to our day together, but upon arriving to the kids' beach I knew the day wasn't going to be picturesque. There has been a war brewing in La Jolla for some time now, snorkelers verses activists.

Now, before I go any further, let me stress to you that my family and I love the seals, and believe that they should be respected as well as protected. Yet I still do believe that the beach should remain a children's beach, as it was intended.

Now that I have given that brief point — back to my story: My family and I walked down the steps and onto the beach and began laying out our towels and ice chest, my boys began to suit up into their snorkeling gear. As the activists watched my boys get ready, they began screaming down to them awful things, things that you should never say to a child. My wife and I told the boys to remain respectful, but still to enjoy the beach. As the boys snorkeled and played on the beach, my wife and I were approached by several activists who proceeded to tell us that not only were we awful people, but horrible parents who are producing hateful, callous children who would one day be responsible for single-handedly destroying the planet by ridding it of seals.

My wife and I continued to ignore them, not saying anything at all, for these people were so upset I knew the slightest rebuttal could turn the situation from annoying into dangerous. The situation remained ridiculous but still manageable most of the morning. It was only when my wife and I were separated that the situation unraveled into something shocking.

We were headed up to our car, ready to go home, when we were overcome by a crowd of activists. Somehow, they managed to separate the four of us. I was surrounded by four people, each of them screaming and yelling, their voices overlapping each other. I continued to ignore them and began to look for my family. My wife was about 12 feet behind me, surrounded by people blaring obscenities. I looked forward toward my sons, who were being confronted. I pushed ahead toward my children, trying to break the circle that was surrounding them. I broke into the circle, to find a heated woman scolding my son. I got between her and my children, telling the boys to head for the car, and that I would be close behind them.

As the three of us began to get to the car, the woman reached out, grabbing me by the arm. I was shocked to say the least. We have always ignored the activists, hoping our silent approach would be like ice on their fire. I had never given thought to what would happen if one of them laid hands on me; I never thought that I would have to. I remained calm, taking in the situation. My wife behind me panic stricken, my children in front of me scared, not understanding what they did wrong, and I was in the middle, my arm in an activist's tight grip. It was then I said my first sentence to the activist: I told the woman calmly to release my arm or I would have to call the police. At his time, a lifeguard ran up the steps and to our rescue. He was able to get my family back together, and he stood watch while we loaded our car.

As we drove away, I took in the crowd that had gathered and felt an overwhelming sadness that this is what the child's beach has come to. How are we supposed to give our children a love for the ocean, and a respect for the

beach if this is what they associate the ocean with? I am sorry to say that after years of memories at the children's beach we haven't yet returned, and to be honest, don't know when we will. I hope one day the beach can return to the place that I remember as a child, a place where children can experience and grow to love the ocean. A place of peace and tranquility, it is truly a gift, a gift that we all should share.

— Scott Waggoner lives in Menifee, Calif. and often drives to La Jolla with his wife Theresa and two sons, Ethan and Austin. He said his kids have been surfing since they were two, and the beach is very much a part of his and his family's lives.

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