



Dear AMPSurf;

My twin 7 year old daughters and I attended your 9 June 2018 surf clinic at Pismo Beach. We live in the Arizona Sonoran Desert. We drove close to 700 miles to attend your event. As desert people, we have little experience with substantial bodies of water. We are developing our swimming skills, seeking adventure, and adapting our abilities where we can. Naturally, we gladly accepted AMPSurf's invitation.

As I drove the last 90 miles, I questioned the wisdom in my decision on many levels. I wondered how successfully the day could end; I'd only seen surfing being done. I'd never touched a wetsuit, much less wriggled into one. How I would fit my midlife body, and the decades-old post-traumatic stress anxiety resulting from my military service, then haul the lot of it into big, cold, scary water in front of my children with an encouraging smile on my face seemed like it would end as a cautionary tale. Instilling a lifelong fear of water into my children seemed like a real possibility. Despite all of that, my enthusiasm for the potential creation of lasting memories with my family propelled me further north up the California coast. I'm many things, but not a quitter.



How Dana Cummings, another military veteran, greeted me as we walked up to the event, with a big grin of recognition and an even bigger hug changed everything. AMPSurf volunteers and staff helped my children and I suit up. My firstborn twin daughter has symbrachydactyly; her right arm did not fully form, so she is single-handed. AMPSurf knew how to protect her little arm from the cold by adapting her wetsuit. We were offered snacks to nibble, and made to feel welcome.



I faced many moments of doubt and uncertainty that day. Many times, helping hands reached in to pull me out of my tumbling spins when I crashed. That water humbled me. The kindness of so many genuine people humbled me even more. I saw my daughters together on a board being carried into the waves by four adults. I realized that each of us was a respected participant, and my daughters were well attended. AMPSurf volunteers encouraged and guided me as they broke down a watersport in such a way that I could learn and

understand.

My AMPSurf experience was symbolic. Some waves carried me to the beach, some tossed me aside. In the midst of the two extremes, adapting my expectations to my abilities to be my best in each moment was how I overcame those initial doubts. There is a lot of poetry in that. Speeding on my knees atop a board toward my cheering daughters? Well, that was just plain old fashioned great fun!

AMPSurf is the only adaptive sports opportunity that has included all of my family members. Our lives were impacted in a positive way. Each of my daughters and I felt included, and we were given much dignity and respect. As a woman veteran who has often been overlooked or excluded by the statistics of gender and service dates, and the mother of a visibly different female child, I cannot describe how valuable this opportunity was. The enthusiasm of the volunteers was contagious!

AMPSurf gave my girls and I a day of inclusion and fun! My family thanks AMPSurf and its corporate sponsors for the gift of our day at Pismo Beach. Your investment in our family has strengthened us. That imaginary, cautionary tale I was writing earlier that morning ends like this:

“Dude, I actually surfed!”

See you at the beach!

Caryn, Rumi, and Halo Walsh

