

HIPPOS CAN SURF?

The story of one perfect day and the surfing hippo

The day started out as many other summer days. I'm tossed in the bottom of the beach bag my boy's Mom carries everywhere we go. Just as I settle in for our typical boat ride over to Assateague Island, the whole family gets into the car. I start to wonder, what does Nate's Mom have in mind for today?

Nate cries a lot in the car on our drive. He really doesn't like when his Mom has to stop at red lights. I'm wishing I wasn't in the bottom of this bag, because sometimes when Nate holds me, he calms down. When the car finally stops - Nate's parents unload the car and we are walking down the beach. Nate is really scared now. He is screaming and crying, saying, "no, no, no." I think he wishes we stayed home.

Once we get settled at the beach and Nate has found a little tide pool to play in, he is happy again. His Mom seems a little anxious because she is holding onto me real tight, just like Nate does when he is scared. The beach is crowded today; seems like something really special is going on. I see lots of families like ours. There are kids everywhere and some of them remind me of Nate and some of them remind me of his sister, Carly.

Nate's mom carries me down to where he and his Dad are playing in the ocean and says, "its time." Everyone seems a little anxious. We walk over to a big white tent and she puts Nate's life jacket on and settles me into Nate's little hand. She gives Nate a big hug and says "I love you, buddy". He squeezes me real tight. Just then someone we don't know takes Nate's hand and leads us down toward the waves. I hear lots of kind humans saying things like "Hi Nate! Its ok, don't worry, it's time to catch some waves..."

Then I hear a guy say "you ready to go?" His voice sounds really funny, I've never heard anyone like that before. Nate is squeezing me real tight and another guy picks us up and starts to carry us out into the ocean. The man with the funny voice lays Nate down on a surfboard and starts to paddle out over the breakers. I'm so glad Nate is holding onto me so tightly. We are going up and over the waves as they come in. Now it's calm and the guy with the funny voice is talking to some of the other guys out in the surf. He sounds really happy to be here. He had to fly on an airplane and it took a really long time for him to get from California all the way to Maryland.

I can't believe how calm Nate is. He is just lying on the surfboard when all of a sudden the board turns towards the beach and I hear our buddy say "here we go". He stands up on the surfboard and pulls Nate up with him. We are surfing! Yes, we are riding a wave into the shore and Nate is holding me so tight with his little hands. He's not crying, he's not screaming and he's not hitting. My boy Nate is surfing!

As soon as the wave hits the shoreline, our buddy, the guy with the funny voice turns us right back out into the ocean, over the breakers. I'm really excited now, because I think we are going to surf again. We are floating around in the ocean waiting for a wave when he turns us towards the beach and we are riding another wave. This time Nate doesn't want to put his feet down, but that's ok cause our buddy doesn't seem to mind. He's got a big smile on his face and it feels like we are floating over the water.

We rode four waves that day, my boy and I. When we came out of the ocean everyone was cheering "Yay, Nate! Awesome! Way to go! Good job, Nate!" Nate's Mom rushes over and gives us a big hug. She cries and thanks the man with a funny voice. He said his name is Morgan. He tells her how much he loves taking kids like Nate surfing. She hugs him again and again, saying, "Thank you! Thank you so much!" When she bends down to hug Nate again and tell him how proud she is and that she loves him so much, she says, "You still have your hippo! He made it! Your hippo went surfing too!"



As we head back to our spot on the beach, there are surfers everywhere taking kids just like Nate out into the ocean. Moms and Dads are standing on the shoreline cheering and crying. People taking pictures and everyone seems happy, especially Nate. Nate seems so happy. He likes when his Mom and Dad are so proud of him.

The rest of the day is perfect. Nate doesn't cry in the car on the way home, even at the really long red lights. His Mom keeps telling him how proud she is of him and how amazing she thinks all the guys from Surfers Healing are.

When you think kids with Autism can't do things like other kids, just remember, on one perfect day in August they can surf and hippos can too! Look real close at our picture. There I am in Nate's little hand catching a wave with our new friend, Morgan.

