

We weren't there to surf or to fish



By Stephen Rusiniak

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For as long as I can remember, the beach and I have been the best of friends—the sun, the surf, the sand and me—that is until Friday afternoons and the approach of another summer weekend.

Suddenly, my BFF and I find our seemingly forever friendship mysteriously morphing into that of estranged acquaintances.

Summer Saturdays and Sundays means crowds, and while my oceanic pal may like the additional company, I don't.



Surfer girl, Tracy

So our friendship temporarily hits the pause button—only to resume Monday mornings when the sun worshipers camped along the ocean's edge are once again considerably fewer.

She knew this, and even mentioned it when she called.

Had it been anyone else, I would have immediately said no, but this wasn't just anyone else—this was our daughter, Tracy, inviting Karen and me to go to the beach with her on Sunday morning.

A summer Sunday? At the beach, seriously? My response was the same as my wife's: Absolutely. Let's go.

How could we not?

So there we were, driving over the sand, just short of the waves, early, before the arriving crowds would begin laying claim to their temporary pieces of salty real estate.

Tracy had mentioned that the tide and temperature might be favorable should I decide to bring my surf poles.

I was impressed that she paid attention to such things—knowing her information had more to do with surfing than with my desire to attract some fish to the business end of my two baited lines.

After watching the way the waves were breaking, Tracy chose for us the optimum place to park. I positioned my truck a safe distance from the surf, and then got down to the business of rigging my gear as Tracy began waxing her board.



Ahhh, my kind of surf fishing. Bait in the water, frosty beverage in my hand

Once our pre-water preparations were completed, we stepped into the sea simultaneously, for different reasons, but ultimately, with the same goal in mind.

I wish I could say that Tracy rode some awesome waves that morning and that I landed a record catch, but neither would be true.

The waves were gentle and my bait remained untouched, but none of this mattered because we weren't there to surf or to fish anyway.

We came to the beach that morning to spend some time together.

Although we'd plenty of phone conversations, Karen and I hadn't seen Tracy for most of the summer—even though she lived just eight miles away.

Working nonstop at a couple of jobs, Sunday would be her one day off and she wanted to spend it with her mom and dad, which is just what she did.

Following her college graduation, Tracy began working at one, then two, then three jobs—all in our little resort town. When the autumn arrived and her summertime positions departed, so too did she—for a job in Hawaii.

Returning last June, she found another local beach-based position, and when the summer season ended, she returned to Hawaii and Waikiki.

Oh, to be young!

I once wrote a piece about Tracy growing up and how I was looking forward to her many milestones yet to come: chubby little legs taking their first uncertain steps; first words, first tooth, first grade; of high school and boyfriends, driving lessons, the college years—things like that.

Suddenly, 5000 miles separate us and these milestones have come and gone—faster than I could've ever imagined. But still, my love and concern for her wellbeing remains everlasting—never to be relinquished by the passage of time, distance or circumstance.

And so, it's with a dash of melancholy and a dose of paternal pride that I reluctantly concede: my little blue-eyed blonde baby dear has indeed grown up, and to be perfectly honest, this pop couldn't be any prouder.

Had it been anyone else I would have immediately said no, but this wasn't just anyone else.

Should Tracy one day return and again ask if we'd like to spend another summer Sunday with her and my best friend—the beach, of course, you already know what my answer is going to be!

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(next page for backstory)

the backstory:

I can still remember that morning as we drove along the beach—the morning breeze wafting through the open windows of my truck, the salty-sweet scent that was surely the result of the gently breaking waves slowing succumbing along the shoreline.

Simply Intoxicating!

Sitting in my sand chair that morning I remembered something I'd once written from which I would eventually borrow a few lines when I wrote my "***we weren't there***" piece, specifically, the lines about firsts—first steps, first words, first grade—from ***Tracy's kitchen center***, which can be found on my "***other pieces***" page.

I knew right away that I wanted to write something about our time together, and to this end, when we returned home, (and then, while lounging poolside—tough life), I began making notes, lots of them, about the things that I was thinking; about the things that I was remembering. It wasn't until months later that I began the actual writing, and while vacationing in Waikiki, Hawaii (and visiting guess who), I finally completed the piece.

The message found within this piece I've shared previously in my writings and it's this: parenthood is not bound by the restraints of time. While my kids, Tracy and Michael, are now adults, (but will forever remain my *kids*), I will *always, always*, be their dad, and as such, my love and my concern for their wellbeing is eternal.

I wish I could have taken a few good surfing—or for that matter, fishing photos on that morning, but as you already know, conditions demanded otherwise, but it's okay. After all, while we weren't there to surf or to fish, and in spite of it being something that I'm usually not all that fond of—*Sunday mornings at the beach* that is, it turned out to be an awesome day!

This piece was featured in the regional Delaware-Maryland-Virginia newspaper, the Daily Times, as well as several other Gannett-owned newspapers.



Tracy completing a successful run
not so long ago in Maryland

(next page: Daily Times featured article)

the piece as published in the Daily Times:

YOUR VIEW

We weren't there to surf or to fish

The allure of the seashore offered an excuse to spend quality father-daughter time together



STEPHEN RUSINIAK
COLUMNIST

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SUBMITTED IMAGE

Tracy Rusiniak enjoys time with her father at the seashore, despite less-than-ideal surf conditions.

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Stephen Rusiniak lives in Wayne, New Jersey and West Ocean City.