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## A special day at the beach

In the summer, if the weather's nice, I go to the beach at least once every weekend. When you factor in all the days I have hit the sand and surf, from childhood through middle age, that's a lot of beach time.

Despite the seemingly countless number of days I have spent at the beach, I can easily say which one was my favorite.

It was a summer day five years ago when I attended my first P.S. I Love You Foundation's Day at the Beach. I was there to help an 8-year-old at-risk child named Franco enjoy the sun, sand and sea for the very first time.

I have no memory of the first time the ocean lapped over my young toes. When you grow up at the beach, that's like trying to remember the first time you took a breath.

But I do have a precious memory of Franco's first encounter with the sea. His face lit up with the sensation of chills and thrills that only an endless body of water can inspire.

It helped that he was fearless, and it was remarkable that he was fearless, considering that he was then living in a shelter. I didn't know the details of his life, but I knew they were far removed from anything I had ever experienced. On the surface, the only thing we may have had in common was that we were both Hispanic, although he spoke far more English than I did

### SIGNS OF LIFE

by Paul Silva



Spanish.

Of course, the whole point of the P.S. I Love You Foundation is going below the surface, not just literally with a dip in the ocean, but figuratively, connecting at-risk children with caring adults through the common joys of fun and the freedom of a day spent in the sun together.

"The beach is the perfect place for these kids to get away from the problems they face, whether it's abuse, neglect, gangs or just poverty," said Patricia Jones, founder

of the P.S. I Love You Foundation. "When you are at the beach, you can feel removed from whatever is going on in real life. There is a freedom and a peace there, for the kids and the adults."

This Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the sands between Sixth and Eighth streets in Manhattan Beach, P.S. I Love You will hold its 10th annual Day at the Beach for 250 children from local shelters, foster care programs and other organizations serving at-risk youth. The children will be matched up with more than 250 adult mentors.

The sprawling event will be a long way from the outing for 10 children from the Richstone Family Center and the Good Shepherd Shelter that marked the first Day at the Beach a decade ago. The programs of the P.S. I Love You Foundation have grown as well, with weeklong summer outreach camps, health and fitness instruction in schools, and other activities designed to help children living in challenging circumstances reach their full potential and have hope for the future.

Over the last 10 years, Jones has been joined by a core group of dedicated volunteers who keep P.S. I Love You running, and hundreds more who have served multiple times as playful companions for the children attending the Day at the Beach.

"To have lasted 10 years when so many nonprofits close in the first few years, that says something about the happiness that comes out of this program, for the children and the volunteers," said Jones. "Volunteering doesn't work unless you get something back, and when you do something like this, it comes back to you a billionfold."

Thanks to generous sponsors, at the end of the Day at the Beach, every child gets a "goody bag" that includes toys, educational products and, best of all, a boogie board for all the days at the beach that will hopefully be ahead of them.

The adult volunteers get something more precious: the privilege of helping a little boy or girl experience the kind of joy that should be commonplace in childhood but is far too rare for too many children.

That's what Franco gave me, and it's a gift I treasure to this day.

All the mentor spots are filled up for Saturday's Day at the Beach, but other volunteer opportunities are available. Go to [www.psiloveyoufoundation.org](http://www.psiloveyoufoundation.org) for more information.

*I'm always interested in hearing from you about how we're doing. I can be reached by e-mail at [psilva@tbrnews.com](mailto:psilva@tbrnews.com).*

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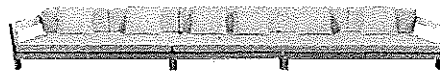
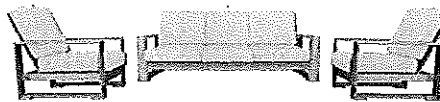
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