

Love of the beach at first sight: would it be a shore thing?

As we were preparing for Daniel's first trip to the beach, John and I both suspected our younger son would enjoy himself, but we didn't consider that a given. He often needs time to warm to new experiences.

He comes home from preschool with his sneakers full of sand, so we were fairly sure he would like building sand castles. And he is a huge fan of what John calls "Splashtown USA," the sprinkler, water table, and wading pool John sets up in our yard. Still, it took Daniel a few weeks to find the courage to climb into the wading pool.

Walking onto the beach for the first time last week, Daniel's eyes lit up. He laughed and laughed and repeated the phrase he had heard John use, "Big sandbox!" It took me back two years to when Leo first saw the beach—also at 2 1/2—and marveled in those first moments, his face aglow. But this experience was very much Daniel's, not a re-run of Leo's, but rather an entirely fresh and riveting sequel.



As Daniel strutted onto the beach with his brother and four of their cousins, it was obvious he loved the sand. And that first day he stood happily in the waves, smiling and watching them crash against his legs.

Then the next day came, and he wouldn't go anywhere near the water.



As his brother and older cousins leapt and shouted and performed karate chops on what they call "King Kong waves," Daniel insisted on keeping a good distance from the ocean. I'm not a water person, so I was fine with playing in the sand instead.



Still I knew that Daniel was missing out on something he would actually love. So as

the week continued, and he enjoyed collecting shells, burying his father in the sand, and sending me and his aunts for bucket after bucket of water, I decided it was time to persuade him that the waves were also part of the fun.



So I carried him down to the water. He clung to me in fear, as he used to do whenever he saw his brother ride a carousel. Inching bit by bit toward the water, we watched the waves together. As they hit my ankles, and Daniel realized he was still dry, he started to relax and laugh. Then I held him down so he could dip his fingers into the water. Soon enough he had squirmed off my hip to stand in the waves, jumping with my hands under his arms, helping him leap.

That's our boy. He has his fears. He still shivers when he sees the Penny Pony at Shoppers, and he can't understand why terrifying swings are included on otherwise fantastic playgrounds. But he can also be brave. He showed unimaginable courage when we met him in China 11 months ago. And watching him overcome his fear of the waves was one of the highlights of a fun-filled, exhausting vacation.

The next day, of course, we had a new problem. Daniel didn't want to be anywhere except at the water's edge. Even when a larger wave caught us unawares and he ended up with a mouthful of saltwater, he just laughed and said, "Again! Again!"



Too bad the next "again" will have to wait for next summer for our family of four. For now, we'll be enjoying our very own "Splashtown USA."



Most of these photos were taken by my talented younger sister Treasa Beyer, who also knit the lovely beach blanket Daniel is sitting on.