

Everyday Magic

By Eliza Kennedy

On June 1st I boarded a plane for Hong Kong with unclear expectations. What little I did know about my place of employment, Adventure-Ship, came from reading their old web site—it left me with many questions. I knew I could use my skills to vastly improve their site, giving them a much more professional presentation to the public. I went to Hong Kong planning out what I would do for Adventure-Ship. I was unprepared for the amount that Adventure-Ship would do for me.

The first component of my effort to construct a new web site consisted of spending some time on the *Huan* to get a feel for the aims and attitudes of the organization. Although the entire staff, especially Captain Ming, was very generous and shared their visions of Adventure-Ship with me, it was a young boy who showed me the nature of the true magic that takes place aboard the *Huan*. This boy's name is Jason. Jason is a bright and spirited 11-year-old student at the Winifred Mary Cheung School who has mild mental disabilities. Even though we did not speak the same language—besides the simple questions Jason knew from his English classes—I got to be Jason's buddy for a day on the Adventure-Ship.

It was not his first time on the ship. With energy and ease he shouted out the answers to the crew's questions during orientation, offered help to his classmates who were less sure of themselves and effortlessly took my hand and yanked me towards where he wanted to go. Jason was the first to volunteer to

jump off the trapeze and to steer the motorboat. Even though he could not swim, when we were at the highest point on the ship and told to “Abandon Ship,” I motioned for Jason to go first and he bent his knees and jumped. I waited nervously for his head to bob up once he hit the water and when it did, he waited patiently, floating in his life jacket, while I mustered up the courage to follow him. I never knew when I was heading towards Hong Kong in a 747 that I would be inspired to test my own limits of comfortability by a socially marginalized child who could not speak any English.

Not all the children aboard the *Huan* that day could match Jason’s courage or daring. I believe his ability to try new activities and help other who were afraid to try stemmed directly from his previous experience aboard the Adventure-Ship. He is living, breathing, gutsy evidence that the dreams held by those who toil to keep Adventure-Ship afloat come true.

Needless to say, I gained an understanding of the unique aims and structure of Adventure-Ship in order to build a useful web site. Very often during the days spent in front of my computer in Adventure-Ship’s Aberdeen office I thought of Jason and his willingness to push his personal boundaries to gain more confidence because of the unique environment on deck of the *Huan*. As I created a more efficient application process and created arenas on the web to communicate the magic of Adventure-Ship, I could only think of how important it is to get as many children aboard Adventure-Ship as possible, and then to have them return for second, third and fourth visits, maybe to stay overnight. The technical difficulties that arose in Adventure-Ship’s small office, the long hours

streamlining the information to appear online, in essence, all that I gave to Adventure-Ship was easily overshadowed by what I learned from the dedicated administrators who work in its office, the enthusiastic crew and board of directors and most importantly from all the children like Jason who showed me the embodiment of courage.

People ask me what I did over the summer. When I tell them that I flew to Hong Kong and worked on a web site, they assume I joined the millions of people who rush onto the MTR every morning to large companies in Central and sat in front of a computer all day in a fancy office. I did ride the crowded MTR, and I did thoroughly revamp a web site, but it is hard to explain that what I actually did was see the world become a better place through the efforts of a small number of people of all ages and abilities, working for and spending time on the Adventure-Ship. So even though I can point to www.adventureship.org.hk and show others what I did for Adventure-Ship, it did far more for me by showing me the inspirational effects that volunteerism can have on people and the courage it gave me to try new things.

Even now, when I find myself faces with adversity, I think of Jason's unhesitating jump, and metaphorically take the jump myself. The magic is that I know Jason, as well as the hundreds of other children who have successfully made that scary jump off of the Adventure-Ship deck, remember that moment when they are faced with adversity, and they too go ahead and jump.