



Polar Bear Plunge

by Mariah Orchid Kelley

I'm walking down the beach, buttoning up my jacket against the sea breeze, and I cross paths with the Grim Reaper, three pirates, an astronaut, and a six-foot-tall black dog. It's okay, though, they're perfectly normal.

Today I've chosen to attend the Polar Bear Plunge, an event where a bunch of crazy costumed locals jump into the sub-zero temperature water in a frenzy of chattering teeth and blue lips.

I stand in the crowd of bundled-up onlookers snapping photos of some of the costumes, when an elderly woman next to me turns to her husband. "I'm getting cold just looking at them," she whispers to him. He smiles. "Brave kids," he muses quietly.

Several of the plungers were students and faculty from Sturgis Charter School in Hyannis, with jumpy eyes and nervous laughs they interacted and eyed the ocean hesitantly.

"This is pretty crazy," one of them admitted. "I mean, right now we could just pretend that we're in the Bahamas. That would be really nice."



The Polar Plunge took place at noon on Sunday, March 7th, on West Dennis Beach.

Photograph by Mariah Orchid Kelley

Soon enough they were all lined up. Some in bathing suits, others still in costumes.

There was no buzzer or countdown or anything like that. Nervously, everyone looked at one another, as though to gauge who would give the ultimate signal.

But then, suddenly, it was a mad dash to the water complete with shrieks and yells and exclamations of the most popular four-letter word of the day, "Cold!"



Wait for me Photograph published courtesy of Sturgis Stormwatch: <http://www.sturgismedia.com/stormwatch/index.php>

"I'm so pumped, do we get to go again?" a Sturgis student asked.

Everyone was smiling and laughing with one another, sharing 'you should have seen your face' comments, or towels for warmth.



The water was about 37 degrees. Photograph by Mariah Orchid Kelley

"It's not so bad," one young woman commented when I approached her. She shivered in her towel as a friend poured her a cup of what smelled like coffee from a thermos. "I love animals, and it's only for a few seconds, the cold."

The event benefited CARE's Sampson Fund, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing financial assistance for the rehabilitative veterinary care of animals who are found without an owner, or whose owners are unable to cover the cost of care.

Helping those animals offers an alternative to euthanasia and allows for the animal to enjoy a happier life.



As I walked down the beach after the event, the sounds of the excited plungers echoing behind me, I smiled. The eighteenth dog that I'd counted that day sidled up to me, straining its leash as the woman on the other end apologized.

"That's all right," I assured her. I reached down and patted the head of the small chocolate lab. I'd made friends with so many dogs that day, I was positive that my two year old Cockapoo puppy would hate me 'til next year.

Sturgis Charter Public School faculty and students prepare to enter the frigid water at West Dennis Beach to raise money for CARE's Sampson Fund.

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She plans to attend college for creative writing or journalism, and to live in London, England after she graduates.



The Sampson Fund is a non-profit charitable 501(c)(3) organization established to benefit companion animals of Cape Cod and the adjacent Islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. The Fund is a member of the Community Foundation of Cape Cod.

The Fund is named after Sampson, a very friendly, once homeless yellow cat.

Sampson's adoptive-owners made a modest donation to their veterinarian requesting that he use it to aid some less fortunate animal.

The gift, in turn, generated the concept of a community supported fund to help other companion animals and strays receive critical veterinary care.

The Sampson Fund is presently seeking volunteers to help with its programs, activities and events. No special talents or experience required, just a desire to help animals in need. If you are interested, please contact:

The Sampson Fund For Veterinary Care: www.sampsonfund.org/home.htm

**P.O. Box 1756
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**508-240-PETS (7387)
SampsonFund@yahoo.com**

**The next fundraising event to benefit
The Sampson Fund:**

**Saturday, May 15th
"The Sampson Fund Goes Retro" at
the Harwich Junior Theatre**