So, all our kids were all enrolled in Green School and everyone is thriving. Great lifestyle, surfing every day, eating amazing food at one tenth of the cost in Australia. After one year had passed, Sarah and I were ready to return to our old life back in Melbourne.

Over dinner, we informed the kids that we were planning to go back to Australia and they would be heading off in the next few months. I have never seen such a scene of defiance! They made it clear they were not leaving - because of school. As a parent that statement is gold, something I bet all parents would like to hear. How could we refuse such a love of learning and willingness to learn?

So, when the second year came around and we had the same conversation over dinner, we got the same reaction, only worse. The kids were older now and at this stage were riding motor bikes to go surfing, had the freedom to be young and adventurous, ate locally from the street vendors, spoke the local language, and had a great clan of international friends.

Finn, our second oldest, was not really enjoying school like the others. We had a lot of discussion with the school who said it was related to his confidence. They suggested that we encourage him to start reading books on subjects he’s interested in like surfing.

Well, that sent my dyslexic brain into overdrive.

If the school was saying he can learn by using a passion like surfing, then why could the whole process of learning not be focused on surfing? So, Sarah and I, with lots of input from others, designed a program that would teach Finn about how to learn with surfing being the foundation of the structure.

With the full support of Green School, we set up a home school. We found an ex- windsurfing professional who was a qualified secondary school teacher living in Bali and needed a job. The two of us worked on the curriculum, making sure we covered every aspect of the requirements of the Victorian education system, but we had to relate to it all to surfing and the local community - and it had to be fun. We called it Brain Wave.

So, Brain Wave began with two kids, Finn and his mate Zeb. Zeb’s Mum who is a gymnastics teacher saw that Zeb was in the same position as Finn and was willing to try this crazy educational process. You have to remember this was about 20 years ago.

I bought a mobile whiteboard, and classes were held in our villa. And it was on.

I bet you’re thinking how can you create a whole curriculum based on a genre like surfing. Easy, all the books that must be read are about surfing. Maybe they’re not reading long chapters but they’re still reading words. Then there’s math. Fucking genius! How many paddle strokes are required to go from one point on the beach to another? They used all types of math to work out the answer. But the real beauty of this new learning occurred to me when I arrived home at the villa to see how excited the kids were. Their teacher had taken them to the beach to check their calculations and their math worked! Gold.

So, Finn’s day would start at 6:00am with a surf coach that would video the boys surfing and work on their mental and physical health as well as helping them improve their surfing. He would run special fitness programs and all types of cool stuff that was teaching the kids about their body and how to get the most out of it. Today Finn is so healthy and although not a gym person, he really treats his body like a temple. After surfing and a massive feed, class would start at 10:00 am and go to 3:00 pm. Lunch was supplied and there was no uniform. The kids didn’t wear shoes, not for four years, and their feet were tough as nails.

Brain Wave surf school lasted about 18 months. There were seven kids from around the world before we decided it was time for Finn to return to Green School. To be able to change the system and still achieve a great outcome was a very cool experience and something we are really proud of. One thing that stands out for me is that the older kids in the group had to work on a specific project all year through and I got to listen to their most amazing Ted Talks which would blow your mind.

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My son Finn has written his own view about having a spicy Dad. Read on.

“For my entire childhood Dad constantly taught us by doing. Any chance he got, he would take us outdoors and outside our comfort zones. He began to teach us all the wild things that had made him happy throughout his life. He would take us rock climbing in the renowned Australian Arapiles, fishing in Bass Strait, surfing in Indonesia on reefs four kilometres out to sea. He taught us how to skate, ride bikes, drive cars. And how to navigate the bush, use tools and build things all before the age of 14. He also always taught us that it's okay to cry, never to fist fight and how to skip a line you don't need to be in!

I think he did this because that is how he had always learnt, by doing and experiencing. Being spicy, he had no other choice. He couldn't read and write so he placed himself in the centre of whatever he was interested in, and then he did that with us. His approach encouraged us to understand things based on our own experiences which I think is very powerful. Like the time we were at Green School, and they started homeschooling me with a group of my friends. The curriculum was completely integrated around how to teach kids by using what we were all passionate about. At the time it was surfing. We would surf before school, then do four hours of intensive learning, then go surfing again. There was a good balance and I was actually glad to be learning. Maths, for example, involved calculating volume through surfboard size dimensions. Geography was about paddling out into the water while our teacher pointed at the mountains we surfed next to each day and explained how they came to be. We learnt how waves were formed and why they break, how they cause erosion and create land formations. I believe I learnt a lot more here than any of the other four schools I went to in my life.

There's another story from our time living in Indonesia that I think is a great example of how Dad gets an idea in his head and how he then acts on it without fully thinking it through.

I was about 14 and getting to the age of wanting to experiment with drugs. Dad felt he couldn’t really get the dangers of this through to my 14 year old mind and wanted us kids to understand the terrible consequences of getting caught with drugs in Indonesia. And he was right, I wasn't listening much to his warnings and was being pretty reckless at the time.

So, this one day, when I was supposed to be in school, he took me, my older brother and two of our friends to Bali’s Kerobokan prison. This is the main prison in Indonesia and is pretty infamous for its chaotic conditions and for the likes of its inmates, convicted drug runners Shapelle Corby and the ‘Bali 9’. Dad wanted to show us first hand what the consequences would be if we were to get into, or even just be around, drugs in Indonesia. His aim was to scare the absolute shit out of us.

We arrived at the prison, and as we had no official reason to be there, they told us to fuck off. Dad then started walking around and talked to someone else at the desk for about 30 minutes, convincing the guard that he was interested in buying land from him. He and Dad were best mates now, and with probably 300,000 rupiah later ($30 AUD), the guard took us straight through the front gate, where we had our bags checked and then were pointed in the direction of a darkened room and were told to just keep walking. I'm sure at this point Dad finally came to the realisation that he hadn't really thought this through. We were all shitting ourselves. The memory of this is still so vivid in my head as the whole experience was really frightening, intense.

There had just been a riot at the prison where around 30 prisoners escaped. It was started by a lit cigarette that burnt the front entrance of the prison, so as the guard pointed and nodded his head in the direction we were supposed to go, we stared directly into a scorched black room that had been burnt from the inside out. This entrance had little streams of light coming through holes in the roof, with water dripping from pipes making puddles on the cracked tile floor. The only real light was coming from the open door on the other side of the room and there was a good ten seconds where we couldn't see each other’s faces in the darkness. We walked through there without any guards, directly into the visitors’ room which also had no guards. There were only mats on the floor and about 15 prisoners inside spending time with their families and friends. Some of them were crying, some were just chatting and there was one couple pretty much giving each other hand jobs in the corner of the room.

We waited there with plastic bags full of gifts for prisoners in case we were to meet one. After about 10 minutes, Andrew Chan, a member of the Bali 9 walked into the room. He grabbed a drink from the vending machine and sat by himself waiting for his parents to arrive. Andrew was a part Chinese part Australian man from Sydney who was caught with eight others smuggling heroin out of Bali, strapped to their stomachs. At the time we were there, he was six months away from being executed after receiving the death sentence that would eventually take his life and create a significant moral and political debate between the Australian and Indonesian governments.

Dad asked him if we could wait with him and told him why we were there. Andrew agreed and then politely, yet emotionally, sat down with us and began to tell us his life story and all the things that had led him to Kerobokan. As he sat there with a sort of saddened smile on his face and a massive scar that ran across the top of his head, he told us how it was hundreds of wrong decisions that landed him in prison, not just the last one. He explained how he was friends with the wrong people at the wrong time. And how most of these wrong decisions were made from the idea that they were cool. He explained to us kids they we shouldn't be followers of people who think they are cool because they do dangerous shit and that’s how he ended up in an Indonesian prison. He told us all about his prison experience, that it's the last place on earth you want to be. He also told us that he was no longer filled with any anger for his situation but only acceptance for what he had done and that he had deserved it. He explained that whatever outcome he got from the impending death sentence, he was completely reformed and at peace with the possibility of his life ending at any moment. He only felt sorry for his parents.

After about an hour of chatting to us his family arrived. We gave him and another prisoner that was sitting with us our gifts of toothpaste, chocolate, chips, and Skittles that he said he hadn’t had in four years. They were very stoked with them and thanked us.

It was a day like this, when I was supposed to be doing my normal Wednesday at Green School, that shows how my Dad approached life and education. Although his spicy condition caused him lots of trouble, as well as sadness and trauma in the traditional education system, I think it was this trauma, that also led him to live a very different life from many people around him. A life filled with unique experiences, and not over-thinking things. I think he had become scared of thinking as that was what had always got him into trouble.

I want to say how lucky I feel to have a father who was spicy. He was different, and that is a beautiful thing. He is an example of how beautiful being different can be in this world. And that when difference is seen as a threat, that’s what causes the real harm. I think when he had children, Dad recognised the importance of education but how wrong his experience was. He also showed us the strength that humans have when they feel they are being wronged and wish to live in their own way. And that when a spicy person has children, it is the ‘flavours’ that exist after the pain that are passed on.”