

## Carlsbad Boy Featured In Film About Traumatic Brain Injuries



*David L. Brown films Ian McFarland, age 8 at the time and now 15, for the “Going the Distance” documentary. (Courtesy)*

By Brittany Woolsey Carlsbad

Ten years ago, then-5-year-old Ian McFarland’s life changed forever when he and his family were involved in a car wreck that killed his parents and threatened his ability to surf ever again.

Ian, now 15, suffered a brain injury and was in a coma for months. When he awoke, he could not talk or sit up. The left side of his body was also paralyzed.

Miraculously, the prodigy surfer — who would hop on a board alongside his father as a tot — was able to move his left leg once his feet entered the water, even though the limb was limp while on land.

The Carlsbad boy tells his story as one of four traumatic brain injury (TBI) survivors in “Going the Distance: Journeys of Recovery,” a documentary by filmmaker David L. Brown that will be part of a triple bill of Brown’s movies at the La Paloma Theatre in Encinitas on May 19. This will be the West Coast premiere of “Going the Distance,” which features Ian surfing alongside a dog named Ricochet.

“[‘Going the Distance’] is pretty interesting and brings a lot of joy to people that have disabilities,” said Ian, who filmed the movie when he was 8. “This will be good for a lot of viewers to figure out what TBI is and more about the people who have it.”

Brown considers Ian, as well as the other three TBI survivors featured in the film, as “inspirational.”

He said Ian has become well-known in San Diego because of his poignant story.



***Ian and Ricochet***

*Ian McFarland with Ricochet the Surfing Dog, as seen in David L. Brown's documentary, "Going the Distance."  
(Larry Brambles)*

"He was an extraordinary youngster," Brown recalls of filming Ian over two days in Cardiff-by-the-Sea seven years ago. "I really appreciate his determination and sense of humor. That really comes through in the film."

Today, Ian attends physical therapy four times a week and is an eighth-grader at San Elijo Middle School, said his aunt and legal guardian, Melissa Coleman. Ian also remains an avid surfer, his aunt said.

Coleman believes Brown's film accurately depicts what living with TBI is like and the triumphs of the survivors.

"The brain is such an amazing thing that you can keep progressing," said Coleman, who also cares for Ian's younger brother and sister, who were also in the car at the time of the accident as toddlers but were unharmed. "There's a lot of hope, and that's what I really love [about this movie.] David Brown portrayed that hope so well. I'm inspired every time I watch it."

Ian and his aunt, as well as several of the boy's therapists and caregivers, will answer questions following the movie. Ricochet will also be present.

Brown, who is based in the San Francisco Bay Area and has directed 80 films in 45 years, said he wanted to premiere "Going the Distance" at the La Paloma after a successful screening of his movie "Surfing for Life" there 18 years ago. That film follows the story of 10 legendary surfers who are now aging yet remain optimistic.

"We wanted to premiere 'Going the Distance' at the La Paloma Theatre because Ian has this huge local community of support," Brown said. "It seemed perfect to combine that with my other surf films. They would have a definite enthusiastic audience in Southern California."

Also on the bill are two of Brown's Emmy-nominated films, "Surfing for Life" and "Of Wind and Waves: The Life of Woody Brown." The latter chronicles the story of the surfing pioneer from La Jolla, inventor of the modern catamaran and world-class glider pilot.

Each of the three films is about an hour long with Q&As following each screening. Tickets for the triple bill are \$18. Patrons can stay for one, two or three films. For advanced tickets, visit [www.lapalomatheatre.com](http://www.lapalomatheatre.com)