

Fearless George: the Life Saving Surfer

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In the sunny country of Hawaii,
a baby boy was born on November 9, 1883.¹
His name was George Freeth.

George lived on the island of Oahu²
with the ocean at his fingertips.

Even as a baby, he loved the water.
His family soon realized that George was born to swim.

When George was a young boy,
he was given his first surfboard.³

Water made George feel unstoppable.
He loved to glide across the waves
and feel the spray of the ocean on his face.

After many years of surfing, George was spotted by
a famous writer named Jack London.⁴
Jack wrote about George and the art of surfing.⁵

As the world began to read about George, he became famous.⁶
A railroad company realized that George's
talents of swimming, diving, and surfing entertained many.
He moved to California and was hired to amaze crowds of tourists

¹ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

² Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

³ *Waveriders the Untold Story of Big Wave Surfing in Ireland*

⁴ London, Jack "Riding the South Sea Surf"; Marcus, Ben "From Polynesia, with Love: The History of Surfing from Captain Cook to the Present"; Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"; *Waveriders the Untold Story of Big Wave Surfing in Ireland*

⁵ London, Jack "Riding the South Sea Surf"; Marcus, Ben "From Polynesia, with Love: The History of Surfing from Captain Cook to the Present"; Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"; *Waveriders the Untold Story of Big Wave Surfing in Ireland*

⁶ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"; Marcus, Ben "From Polynesia, with Love: The History of Surfing from Captain Cook to the Present"

and attract more Americans to travel west.⁷

As time passed, George started his own rescue crew⁸
where he taught other young men the skills
he had learned from growing up in the ocean.
Together, George and his crew set out to save people from drowning.

The biggest test of George's career came on December 16, 1908.⁹

A powerful storm hit the coast of California
where now-Captain George was stationed with his life-saving crew.¹⁰

Waves crashed angrily as the clouds turned black.
Fishermen didn't have time to head back to shore.¹¹
The ocean played with them as if they were toys,
threatening to smash the boats on the rocks.¹²

The power house siren called George to action.¹³
He dove from the wharf into the foamy sea.¹⁴

George swam and he swam.

He first approached a small boat belonging to two Japanese fishermen.¹⁵
Climbing aboard, he steered the boat through the storm and to safety.¹⁶

⁷ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

⁸ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

⁹ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

¹⁰ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

¹¹ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

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¹³ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

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¹⁵ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

¹⁶ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

On another boat caught out at sea,
two Russian fisherman waited to be saved.¹⁷
George swam back out and rescued them, too.¹⁸

Back and forth George swam, from shore to sea and back again.

As soon as George had the chance to take a break,
he had to dive back in and save yet another boat of fishermen.¹⁹

More than one hundred volunteers waited on the beach
for their opportunity to help the fishermen, too.²⁰

At the end of the day, many of the fishing boats had been destroyed.²¹
Wreckage was scattered across the beach.²²
George and his lifesaving crew
had rescued eleven men from drowning.²³

Donations poured in from people living nearby
who wanted to support the heroes.
The Japanese fishermen were especially thankful.
Their village gave George fifty dollars and a gold watch.²⁴

Following the daring rescue, life for George went on as usual.

¹⁷ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

¹⁸ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

¹⁹ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

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²¹ "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

²² "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

²³ "Exterior and Interior Views of Magnificent New Bathhouse and Plunge at Redondo Beach" *Los Angeles Herald*, "Hero Receives Medal" *Los Angeles Herald*, "Single Handed Rescues Seven from Drowning, Plunges from Wharf into Boiling Surf: George Freeth Shows Heroic Daring and Skill" *Los Angeles Herald*

²⁴ "Grateful Give Thanks to Their Saviors: Japanese Fishermen Thank Life-saving Crew" *Los Angeles Herald*

People continued to come from far and wide to watch his performances on the waves and in the pool.²⁵ Lifeguarding, surfing, and educating were always priorities. George coached four swimmers all the way to the Olympic games, never charging them for his time.²⁶

Three days after George's thirty-fifth birthday, the first World War ended.²⁷ The city of San Diego was overflowing with wounded soldiers home from fighting.²⁸

Sickness spread like wildfire in the crowded conditions and the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 swept across America.²⁹ Not even strong and youthful George could escape the grip of the deadly disease.

No wind, wave or storm had ever proved too powerful for George to conquer. All the same, after nearly four months of battling the flu, George Freeth died on April 17, 1919.³⁰

In his passing, George had quietly left behind a legacy.

Not only did he infect a nation with his passion for the water, George brought surfing into homes around the world.³¹ Through his tireless efforts, the fearless Hawaiian had placed his own life on the line for the sake of countless others.³²

George was a true hero.

²⁵ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

²⁶ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

²⁷ "Timeline of World War One", Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

²⁸ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

²⁹ "The Great Pandemic: The United States in 1918-1919", Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

³⁰ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

³¹ Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"

³² "Trains Will Pull Out February 16" *Los Angeles Herald*, Verge, Arthur C. "Legendary Surfer: George Freeth"