

The Seaside

BY JENNY BARRY

On hot sunny days in Dublin, in the middle of summer, my family liked to go to the seaside. This presented an undertaking of gigantic proportions. Firstly, it had to be on a weekend as my dad wasn't working then. Secondly, hot sunny days didn't happen that often in Dublin. If these two criteria were met, we were off.

During this time in my life, my family didn't have a car. We did have six kids. My mother packed lunch—always banana sandwiches for us, tomato sandwiches for the grown ups. We headed off on the bus—the 16A into town. Walking down the quays we then stood by the River Liffey waiting for another bus that took us to Portmarnock. The dark river had barges that went up and down to Guinness' brewery where my father worked. I felt possessive of these barges carrying barrels of beer. Also, this river had eels and these could often be seen just above the water line. In fact, Dublin eels were considered a delicacy. Not to us kids though. Pointing out the eels to each other, we feigned puking sounds and gestures. Mom said not to be rude and gave us the look that meant if you don't stop what you are doing this instant you would be in big trouble when you got home. We were afraid of this look. But our youthful exuberance was strong and resilient.

The bus to Portmarnock ran infrequently and on sunny days the queues were long, running along the quays and around the corner. Mothers with babies in their arms yelled at their kids running about.

"Paddy stay away from the road, Maura you'll fall in the Liffey if you keep swinging on that wall."

We kept asking Mom how much longer. As the second stage of our journey began we trooped upstairs on the double-decker bus. We sat right at the front, to see the sea sooner. The bus went through the suburbs on the north side of the city, then past farmers' fields and golf courses and lots of undeveloped land. The road was narrow and bumpy and went over many little bridges. We loved the way our stomachs lurched. My mother and father sat downstairs with my sister Paula. Sometimes she was sick on the bus. We carried paper bags with us just in case. A couple of times Paula emptied the bus and it had to be sent back to the garage to be cleaned.

The bus terminal was right at the beach. Mom and Dad carried a lot of stuff: baby pram, food, blankets, towels, and warm clothes. They divided some of this between us but we were off running in the sand. Paula and Susan held hands and kicked sand on people's towels as they raced

past. Anna and Marian pushed the pram, piled high with stuff. They kept leaving it to play. "Stop messing and keep going," yelled Mom.

Dad always led the way and the beach stretched out in front of us—sand dune after sand dune. Dad went for miles promising a better spot further on. Crying and begging him to stop and take this spot—any spot—he coaxed us along, further, further. Mom carried the baby and frantically kept track of all these little girls under eight years old. "Girls, get back over here this instant. How many times do I have to tell you not to run off where I can't see you? And as for you Anna Barry, you won't get to swim at all if you don't leave Marian alone and push the pram."

At last, we stopped when Dad found an acceptable sand dune that I was convinced was identical to the last five or ten we had just passed. As Mom unloaded the pram, we kids were impatient. "Mom, come on, where are our swimsuits?"

"Your father will need his lunch, so I have to unload everything very carefully."

Mom stayed at our sand dune to get lunch ready. Being the oldest, Dad gave me the task of getting the boiling water for tea. This meant walking all the way back up the beach to buy boiling water in a teapot from a vendor that we had passed at the bus terminal. I was so ticked off by this; why not buy it when we passed in the first place? And why on earth did we need tea at the beach anyway? But I could never answer back, so dutiful but seething, I went.

The queue was long. "Mrs., could I have a pot of boiling water please, my old fella is parched and won't give me any peace without his cup of tea."

Finally, with the pot of boiling water in hand, I made my way back. The trick was how to recognize which sand dune my family was behind. They all looked the same and we had to sit behind the sand dune to escape the sea breeze. Before I went for the tea, I had tried to imprint the outline of our dune on my mind—the one on the right had three tufts of grass and the left one had none. Also, there was a family of red haired kids right beside us. I found it.

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At last, it was my turn to go down to the water. Dad came with me. My sisters were running around screaming in the sea. At first it was always freezing and we stayed close to shore. Adventure pulled the others out further and further into the waves. Dad was a good swimmer and he went out even further than we dared. I was scared of the water and couldn't swim. Dad always teased me about this and I hated him doing that. He played with me and tried to get me under the water. It was terrifying. My sisters thought it was great fun and I remember Anna being particularly annoying. "Dad, show me, Dad, show me how to do it?" I hated her too. After awhile, they got bored with me and it was then that I began to relax. I loved walking in the water, avoiding the seaweed. Mom might join us and when she did I was happy. She didn't make fun of me or push me to go further. I found it strange when she and Dad had fun in the water together. They almost never had fun.

Then the hunger pangs attacked and we went looking for food. Tea, of course, with sand in it and sandwiches, also with sand in them. You could never escape the sand, it got into everything. After lunch Mom and Dad relaxed and we went back down to the water.

"Watch out for the tide," Mom shouted as we ran off into the breeze.

The tide came in and out and you could get caught off guard by it. We heard horrible stories about people getting cut off by the tide and never being seen again. Usually children. My parents believed that the worse the story, the better the lesson learned.

They decided when it was time to go. It was always too soon for us. Blue and shivering, we still complained. Dad became stern and told us to do what we were told and no arguing. So began the long walk back to the bus stop.

The journey home was not much fun and we fought among ourselves and called each other names for amusement—quietly, though, as Mom and Dad got very cross if they heard us. Again, we were upstairs and Paula the puker was downstairs. Cranky and tired, with sand still in our body creases, we went home.

Jenny Barry was born in Ireland and has lived in Toronto for 25 years.

SHELAGH GUTSCHE

Going For Treatment: Chiropracty's Second Chance

Bulwark, Alberta June 15 1921

"NO NO I DON'T WANT TO GO
NOT EVER AGAIN
I HATE CHIROPRACTY MAMA"

Mary looked up from the baby feeding at her
breast
Glanced at Joe nodded to him
Joe sighed turned away
His silent disagreement no help to Mary
He thinking how she just wouldn't accept the
paralysis
Five years gone by and still searching for the
cure

"Here Alice can you hold Elmo for a bit"
Distracting Mary distracting Alice with
Elmo Vincent the great distracter
Named for the saint Mary read about while
expecting
St. Elmo a good book a good saint
A good enough name for Mary
And a good enough name for the boy
At least until he was old enough to call himself
Larry

Alice beamed the tiny infant warm cud-
dling in her lap
"Chiropracty hurts chiropracty is very bad"
A nine year old philosophizing to a baby
small student of life

"You need my help with little Elmo
I'm such a big help"
Alice speaking Mary's words

"Well I'll just have to get along a little while
without you
Three months will go quickly Alice"

"THREE MONTHS THREE MONTHS OF TORTURE"
Torture Alice had learned all about it in
history class studying the great war
Great

*Shelagh Gutsche is a counselor who has published on a
variety of topics related to family therapy.*