

Beach Babes

An occasional jaunt to the ocean (or anywhere else in the natural realm) gives us a healthy reminder of all we have to be thankful for.

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It is important to a child's development to occasionally break out of civilization and allow them the freedom to experience the natural realm on their own level. A trip to the beach is a rewarding natural experience for young and old alike.

Pictured is a gorgeous Pacific Ocean sunset.

The famous rugged Pacific coast of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Sometimes we just need to take a cue from the youngsters in our midst and slow down and, in my case, "smell the ocean." During the recent July 4th holiday weekend, I promised to take my youngest daughter, Hailey, and her friend Becka to RAT (Redondo at Torrance) Beach after church. By midafternoon, I found myself curled up in an easy chair reading Nixonland (I'm on a quest to read a book on every one of the 43 presidents [President Obama is the 44th chief executive; however, Grover Cleveland served two nonconsecutive terms, which explains the disparity] of the United States), hoping my daughter and her friend would find some other activity to busy themselves with. But Hails would not be denied, "When are we going to the beach? You promised."

There have been times when I've gone nearly a year without making it to my local beach. Now that's taking something for granted. So, I figured if I was going to cart myself, two little girls, various buckets, beach towels and snacks to the beach, I was going to do it in fine style – add three folding beach chairs, Nixonland and a kite to the mix.

As much as I thought the whole affair was going to be a bunch of fuss and work, I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

A constant sea breeze kept me well-fanned as I relaxed in my beach chair and read while Hails and Becka did an in-depth inventory of our little patch of beach. It was fun watching both girls, each in their own whirling-dervish way, skip about as I peered up from the pages of Nixonland every couple of minutes.

As soon as we hit the beach, the girls immediately transformed into "kelp farmers," as they flitted around collecting strings of the slimy seaweed as in washed in on successive waves. They made one large pile of it. Why? The girls were inspired in some way by the kelp, with its limp, serrated leaves, ropey stalk and hollow bulbs that enables it to "stand" in forests just offshore. Nature has a way of inspiring, particularly young children.

Becka became entranced with the waves as one after another rolled and crashed ashore. I had to wave her back several times as her fears abated and she ventured further and further out.

In the meantime, Hails vigilantly remained on kelp patrol. She reminded me of those stilt-legged shorebirds that constantly move their feet as they dodge incoming surf. She would periodically pay me a visit, with face-wide grin, and breathlessly share about her latest beachcombing find.

While the girls busied themselves with a new activity, seashell collecting, I snapped Nixonland closed, and unfurled my kite, which the steady sea breeze took right up. Perfect kite-flying conditions. I let Hails fly it for a bit, but she is tiny and the kite was all she could handle. Stick with the shells, kid. Anyone for ice cream? We brushed the sand off ourselves, packed up our belongings (in case you're wondering, we left the kelp), hiked back to the car and headed to 31 flavors.

Fish Out of Water

OK, I confess. I'm a mountain guy – always have been, always will be. I spent much of my formative years angling through the coulees and climbing up the sides of mesas that pepper the central Montana plains. When cresting a hill or mesa, I would often stare off at the horizon and the blue bumps of the Little Belt Mountains, outliers of the Rocky Mountains, another 100 miles further west.

The year I started eighth grade, my father, who was an officer in the USAF, was transferred to Colorado Springs, Colorado, which is spectacularly situated at the base of Pikes Peak (elev. 14,110 ft. above sea level). At more than 6,000 feet above sea level, Colorado Springs has the highest elevation for a mid-sized city in the United States (you could argue that Flagstaff, Arizona, at more than 7,000 feet is the highest, but it is also a much smaller burg). Even with a base

elevation of 6,000 feet, Pikes Peak still towers nearly 8,000 feet above Colorado Springs at its base.

Cary, a junior high friend and my neighbor from across the street, got me interested in rock climbing. This was circa 1975 and they still sold 150-foot hanks of braided nylon “gold line” for about \$40 bucks or so. My friend created much buzz when he was allowed to show a film in “shop” class about a couple of famous rock climbers working their way up a rock formation in California’s Yosemite Valley. It wasn’t long before we checked out the \$450-dollar Super 8 camera from our school’s AV department, and with our day packs, meager climbing racks, ropes and the camera, headed 10 miles across town on a city bus to North Cheyenne Canon, a local rock climbing mecca, with many routes pioneered by members of the U.S. Army in the 1950s and 60s. Remember, we were only about 13 or 14 years old at the time. My, how times have changed. We climbed “The Pinnacle,” filmed ourselves and starred in our own climbing film, which we, oddly enough, premiered in shop class.

In 1993, I left Colorado and moved out to Southern California and have been here ever since. I live about three or four miles as the crow flies from golden-sand beaches and the mighty Pacific Ocean. And yet, I still find myself often looking at the geological undulations to the east (the Pacific is west of my house; the nearest decent-sized mountains about 50 miles due east). I’m a mountain guy – always have been, always will be.

That’s probably why I even enjoy earthquakes. They remind me of the mountain-building processes tirelessly at work beneath my feet. Recently, we experienced a significant 4.7 shaker that caused my house to pitch and roll like a boat at sea, made my 12-year-old squeal and frightened my 7-year-old daughter to tears. Of course, I don’t enjoy any of this, but once these geological commonalities subside and everyone’s fingers and toes are accounted for – it enlivens me just a bit.

An Ocean of Learning

Nope, still a mountain guy, but after my recent beach-and-ocean visit – I won’t soon take for granted the incredible, publicly accessible, free, natural resource, the Pacific – that’s literally lapping at my back door.

Maybe I’m like that famous Donny and Marie song “I’m a Little bit Country, I’m a Little bit Rock and Roll.” Perhaps, now, after my beach visit, I’m a little bit mountain, I’m a little bit ocean. Why not?

I’ve already established that in spite of myself, I had a wonderful, relaxing time visiting the beach and breathing in the salt air of the Pacific. Could the company have had anything to do with my experience? Most indubitably.

The kids took home some shells – here’s what I took home:

- 1) Kids need to get out and commune with nature. It’s good for them: body and soul. My visit reminded me of a great book – The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places by Nabhan and Trimble – about how children process the natural realm and how adults will look at nature in a whole new light through the example of children. On my visit, I focused on the “big” – horizon, ocean, miles of beach, bluffs. I missed the “small.” Hails and Becka focused on shells, sand, stinky kelp, waves. I think their way is much more fun.
- 2) Even if you live in one of the largest cities in the world, the natural realm is just outside your door.
- 3) The best things in life (family, friends, fresh air and seashells) are free.
- 4) I renewed my appreciation and awe for the bounty of the sea, the great natural storehouse for all of the things we harbor and hold dear in our aquariums (at least for those who keep marine tanks).
- 5) Hobbies and careers often have simple origins – maybe something as simple as a visit to the beach.
- 6) One of the most important things you can do with and for your children is to build memories, which don’t have to cost a lot. They can begin as simply as a trip to the ocean.

That’s what I took home.

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