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Generations



Beach Memories

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

I'm writing this column as I sit under an umbrella at glorious Myrtle Beach during a short 4-day vacation away from home.

It's been close to 20 years since I felt the pound of the surf and sand between my toes. Once I moved to Charlotte from New York, and then to Morganton about 11 years ago, the mountains had taken top slot in my places to be, so I didn't think much about the beach until my son and his wife invited me to join them right before Halloween. It would also give me some Grandma time with my granddaughter who had just turned 7.

It's not that I haven't had my share of beach memories. My first had to be that of Coney Island with my parents who knew well the thrill of the beach and busy fun-filled boardwalk.

When I was 8, and my parents purchased a split-level home for \$15,000 built on a potato farm on Long Island, we were surrounded by water.

Sunken Meadow State Park had become our beach escape as kids. It was blanket-to-blanket sandscapes and a mixture of ethnicity in languages and musical tastes courtesy of battery run radios, and tunes ranged from Frankie Avalon and Fabian to Latin music with a fearsome beat.

The beach was so much fun for my siblings and me, even the 15-minute car ride home sitting on towels that Mom had spread out in the backseat of Dad's old Chevy. We didn't care that sand was everywhere, even in our ears, because it was family time.

A Honolulu vacation followed when I was 19 and memories of glorious beaches and the majestic mountains of Diamond Head were clouded by the tired faces of servicemen on R and R from battle in Vietnam. It left me feeling sad.

I was next on Lumley Beach in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa, at 21. Taking what the Africans called a poda-poda (open-aired minibus) from the office to the beach on Saturday afternoons was quite an experience as we were packed in tightly, me in a tie-dyed dress attempting to converse in the spoken pigeon English of Freetown.

Lumley was always deserted except for an occasional fisherman, but I loved the tranquility. I found a cove that I labeled “my special place” and can still picture it in my mind some 48 years later because it was Mother Nature’s finest gift during a time of exploration for me.

I met many Europeans and Lebanese merchants on my trips to Lumley and, on one afternoon, I met a British couple and their daughter Christine who was 10 years old. After that, the couple always invited me to travel with them to the beach in their little air-conditioned Fiat, a welcome respite from the cramped poda-poda.

Lumley was special except for one afternoon when jellyfish washed onto the shore and frightened Christine who had swam out too far. They wrapped around her and she panicked. I’m not much of a swimmer, but I somehow got to her after grabbing a jellyfish that had wrapped around my arm and ripping it away from my body. We went to the Peace Corps physician on staff and were both fine, but Lumley had lost its magic after that day.

There were trips to Fire Island with the kids, another trip to Hawaii courtesy of a visit to Maui, and enjoyment on the crystal-white and light-pink sands of Bermuda.

And, now, decades later, I sit here at Myrtle Beach, marveling at the beauty of the pounding waves as the tide rolls in, watching my granddaughter build a sandcastle for her toy mermaid doll, and listening to the cries of the seagulls hunting for a scrap of food.

Which beach out of all of them would I call my favorite?

There is no answer to that because whatever beach I’m lucky enough to be sitting on is an amazing creation of nature and truly a blessing to all of us as long as we make time to enjoy it.

And, yes, I will return to Myrtle Beach next October because 20 years is much too long to wait to appreciate what I could have enjoyed all these years.

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