

The Island

By Becky Jones 10Z

I remember the island; or what little part of it that I got to see before I left.

We lived on a cul-de-sac in a fairly large, family house among a winding stream of others. It was quiet. There was never really much sound other than the ongoing calls of the gulls and the whisper of the waves that hit the shore but a few hundred meters from our front garden.

You could taste the salt in the air; the flavour getting stronger as you made your way down to the beach. I made that walk often, accompanied by a younger version of my mother, my sister and my baby-group friends. At the end of our cul-de-sac was a narrow, sandy path which before long transformed into a steep, concrete stairway leading down to the golden stage below. As you plodded down the steps – two strides to each one when I was that size – thick grass sprouted from the rocks on either side. It blew constantly in the wind making the island always feel somewhat alive, though quiet, never quite silent. It seemed to take forever to reach the beach – the ultimate playground – for I was so small at the time that the walk was a great challenge for my stubby legs and I grew impatient, in fact, by the time that I finally felt the sand beneath my toes, I was more than often too exhausted to play for another ten minutes or so.

Still, the beach was a paradise. A wondrous play area with more entertainment than a young child could experience in a single day. The sand was perfect. It was that thick, golden kind, not so rocky that it hurt the soles of your feet or was uncomfortable to lie on but not so fine that it blew as dust into the air. No, it was perfect, the kind that when mixed with just the right amounts of sea water would stick like a paste and form the ultimate sand castles fit for a true king. Often we would bury one another within it; comical mermaid personas emerging around ourselves.

Or perhaps we would build a boat. Big enough for all of us to sit within it and have fairytale adventures out to sea, further than the boundaries of the skyline would allow.

Looking back I always recall it being the ideal temperature with no chilly winds but not so baking hot that we would all sunburn and become uncomfortable on the strand. It was possible to spend hours upon hours on that beach; running up and down whilst clinging to kite strings, splashing in the shallow water, jumping over the waves as they crashed onto the shore all while the parents reclined and enjoyed our happiness, discussing matters that we could not possibly understand.

The best part however, was the rocks. Dozens of miniature mountains, sculpted by the gestures of the ocean itself, rose abruptly out of the surf. After high tide, the craters would fill with the freshest of ocean water and the rock pools would teem with life from the most ordinary of green seaweed to brightly coloured crabs and fish that made the island seem all-the-more exotic. I was captivated by those creatures and could have watched them going about their business all day and all night long, insisting on fishing

about in the watery depths, trying to grab at whatever I could get my hands on as though by means of touch, I could enhance the experience even more.

It wasn't long before my father, seeing this fascination, first took me crabbing. He bought my own line – a thin, clear string wound around a neon orange, plastic handle. On the end he attached a circular weight before showing me how to prise mussels from my mountains, crack them open and hook them onto the line for use as bait. He took me onto the farthest of the rocks, those on which I was not allowed without supervision, so far out that the floor of the ocean was no longer visible beneath the dark water. The water licked around our bare feet as my dad threw the line out to the mercy of the waves. "It won't be long" he promised.

True to his word, several minutes later he passed the plastic handle to me and instructed me to draw it back, careful to wrap it neatly around the handle so as not to create knots and tangles. I did as I was told. As carefully as my unsure fingers would allow, I drew the line in, feeling the weight on the end as it grew closer. Before long, it surfaced; a great crab, bigger than both fists, clung to the end.

I can still remember the surge of elation that passed through me at that moment as I gazed in awe at the magnificent creature with its spotted orange and brown shell. My father passed it to me, warning for me to be careful as I turned the creature over in my hands. I was holding life, right there, life from beyond where the eye could see. Strange to think now that a common crab could have brought such realisation and emotion to my former self. But it did.

And after studying my new friend for the best part of an hour, showing it off to my reluctant mother and her friends who squirmed uncomfortably at the very sight, I took it back to the sea in a bright red bucket. Here I said my tearful goodbye and re-introduced my new friend to freedom; watching him suddenly fade beneath the waves. He was gone, but his impact was certainly felt.

To this day I have not forgotten that single crab, the first foreign creature that I ever saw. Before then I had been restricted to the confines of the island and the life there and now I knew of another world, beyond my wildest imagination.

Though I have long since left the island and moved on to a much different style of life in the Midlands, far away from any beach, the impact of the experiences of my few, short years among the splendour that the island contained within all the nooks and crannies of my favourite places will reside with me forever, eternally etched into my subconscious.