

The Boundless Sea and Me

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Oldest Uncle of Zack & Jacob (requested for school project)
Put online (with a few corrections) at the urging of Gillian McCarthy



My first memory of the seaside was so very long ago that I can't now say for sure what year it was – only that it was sometime in the late 1950's. What I do remember of that day was that I was grumpy and fidgeting about impatiently in the back seat of my father's big jet-black car. It was one of those ancient looking cars with big shiny spokes in the wheels and a long standing step which ran along the length of the car on both sides just below the doors. I also remember that it was very hot and sunny that day and that I was absolutely bored stiff with what seemed like a never-ending drive from Glasgow where we lived. My next memory is that I was just about to complain loudly about something or other when suddenly - out of nowhere - there it was; the vast and seemingly endless sea! And my little awestruck jaw just dropped wide open in silent wonder...

Our car had just come to the top of a fairly large hill and suddenly the fields, and the trees, and the houses, and even the car I was impatiently fidgeting in, were gone in a flash – as the front windscreen of the car magically filled in the twinkling of an eye with the awesome sight of the vast and boundless sea!

Never had I ever seen anything even remotely like it before, except as pictures in books, but they in no way prepared me for the sheer size and majesty of the sight before me. I was immediately enchanted. Filled to the very brim with an indescribable sense of freedom, exhilaration and a wonderfully new sense of growing excitement. I sat, as quiet as a tiny mouse then, in the back seat of that big black car - everything else in the world suddenly forgotten - watching the vast and boundless sea get nearer and nearer...and somewhere - deep inside - I ached with a new and powerful longing...



When I was 8 years old we left Glasgow and moved north to Arrochar at the head of Loch Long. Although situated many, many miles inland I was amazed to discover there that the beautiful stretch of water that was almost on my very doorstep was actually the sea! Loch Long is a sea loch and on my very first day there I stood on Arrochar pier and watched a large pod of porpoises leap in groups into the bright summer air as they rode the flowing tide in.

I had thought they were dolphins and had cried out “Look! Dolphins! Dolphins!” but my father quickly corrected me saying that they were Porpoises. This made not one tiny jot of difference to me as I drank in the strong smell of the sea and the amazing sight of many Porpoises torpedoing through the water before me as mountains towered on every side and gulls screeched loud along the incoming tide line. It was like some kind of magical dream come true. I kept quietly whispering to myself “This is my new home...this is my new home...over and over and over again, to help me understand that this wonderful dream was really – really - real. My eyes drifted up past the flocking gulls to the mountain peak of Ben Arthur (above) and I felt as if my happiness was so big that it filled the whole valley.

The first time I went up Ben Arthur I didn't go very high. I sat there a long time though just drinking in all the sights and sounds and watching the tide go out on the sea loch below. I had hoped then to be able to see the course of the loch run south west all the way to the boundless sea itself but either I just wasn't high enough or the sea was just too far away. The scent in the air up there was new and exciting. You could still smell the sea in it - but that was well mixed there with a stirring blend of heather, bracken, and the tall mountain pines.



On my second climb up Ben Arthur I went much higher than before. Although the boundless sea itself was still too far away for me to see Loch Long flow into it I was surprised to discover that, looking west, I could see Loch Lomond with Ben Lomond towering over it. Soon I was to learn that my school was right on the banks of Loch Lomond and that its playground ran right down to the waters edge there! This was no sea loch though. Loch Lomond is a lovely, sparkingly clear fresh water loch and they say that it has huge forests growing way out in the depths of it!

My third climb up Ben Arthur would take me right to the very top and teach me much about the sheer vastness of the earth and the boundlessness of the sky too. That however, is another story for another day...



Going back to Ayr beach as a full-grown man many decades later I was very much aware of a great many changes. There were more people. More cars. More buildings. More signposts. More litter bins. And, sadly, more litter. There were more noises and smells too that were not of the boundless sea itself. Many of these changes were not for the better. Despite all those things however, on gazing out beyond all sight of land to a horizon that contained nothing but endless waves, I still found again that deep and rare feeling of awe that only the vast and boundless sea can bring forth in me. And the very special “first time magic” ingredient of my childhood wasn’t, as you might think, long gone by then either. I realised it had simply changed as I had changed; it had grown and matured step by step with me as I had grown and matured and now it had become something even more priceless: The realisation that the boundlessness of the universe “out there” can nurture a move towards awareness of a boundlessness of the me “in here” that time can’t ever touch.

I have also returned to my beloved in-land sea many times since my 3 short childhood years of living and growing there. It too has changed. But not too much. The march of time has been much kinder to my memories there. Strangely, for me the sea was always at its most beautiful there - where it had pushed the furthest inland that it possibly could. More mysterious too - and much more mystical. The balance of land, and sea, and sky always seemed just right there – where the boundlessness of each would seem to merge - with me - into a unifying “Boundlessness of All”.

