Big Pond Beach

 Kelly MacNeil

My Uncle Arthur has lived in British Columbia for approximately sixty years. He comes “home” almost every year. For many years, he would fly into Halifax then drive to Sydney. One his way to Sydney, he would always stop at Big Pond beach for a swim. Before seeing his family, he needed to dip himself in the water of his childhood.

It holds the same draw for me. After all these years, I can still remember my excitement when I was told we were going to the beach. The only beach we knew was Big Pond. As a child, you didn’t venture in without old tennis sneakers because of the rocky bottom. I thought later, why didn’t I invent the water shoe? I would have been a millionaire!

We would always pass Ben Eion and would ask dad why we couldn’t go there because it was such a sandy beach. His reply was “We are going to God’s country”. Apparently, God’s country contained rocks. As we were unable to drive ourselves, we took that comment as gospel.

The beach is my happy place and has been as far back as I can remember. It was always joyful and as time went on, my place of peace. I cannot remember a day at the beach that wasn’t “a day at the beach”.

When I arrive, it is the view that takes my breath away every time. It is the same view as my childhood. Although the landscape and tides have shifted, it never fails to give me the feeling that I am where I should be. One of my favorite memories I have of arriving on Big Pond beach is the memory of my siblings and cousins. The drive from Sydney with seven kids ranging in age from five to ten and sometimes eight if my cousin from Montreal was in town. My Aunt, the saint, driving us in her little orange Pinto. No seat belts to be heard of, just squashed in like clowns in a Volkswagen. That isn’t even the best of it. When we arrived at the beach, all stuck together, we would peel ourselves away from each other and catapulted out the car, all wearing our flippers, mask and snorkels. We would make our way to the beach beyond excited to see what treasures the water held for us that day. It was quite a scene and I am sure it gave the viewers a smile at least.

There is the smell. The fishy smell of the rotting seaweed that has washed ashore. I find it strangely comforting. When I see seaweed and shells, I feel that the water is keeping itself healthy and I am so grateful.

Seaglass can be found on some beaches. Big Pond beach not being one of them so when you stumble across the tiniest piece it is considered a great find. I am amazed at these little pieces of history, or so I think, and always go sea glass hunting when I can. I keep it all and plan to create a magnificent art piece with them. So far, I have made coasters which really don’t make sense since the sea glass has bumps, so a cup or glass does not sit very well on them. Back to the drawing board!

The best part of a beach day is the complete relinquishing of your body to the water. Entering can sometimes be difficult as you work your way into the water depending on the time of the year. Knowing what awaits is worth the gasping as the cold water moves its way up your body. What you hope for is one good wave to make the decision for you and you can stop the torture of the baby steps you are taking to become submerged.

You become weightless and your problems become weightless if only for a short time. This will sound corny but when I am floating in my favorite saltwater beach, there is a sense of euphoria takes over my whole being. When my family gathers at the beach, we all get ducked, as we say, then you see heads bobbing over the water and we gather in a circle and have a discussion, all the while treading water.

I see my uncles and dad bobbing and chatting with each other and think this must be so unbelievable for them. All in their eighties, all these years later and the memories they have of this magical place.

I think that because I feel the very same way. I remember my grandfather swimming with us. When we swallowed a large mouthful of water and started to whine, he would say it was good for us. That was taken with a grain of salty water, but I believed him. I took my children to this place and now I am with my daughter and granddaughters in our magical place. When my granddaughter says that Big Pond is her favorite place to swim, it just confirms its lure is real. She should know as she has stated she is a mermaid and can speak dolphin. I would say that is a pretty solid reference.

Last weekend I received a text. It said, “Do you think the waves will be big after the winds last night”. I replied, “We should check them out, pick you up at 10”. The text was from my sister. She is fifty-eight and I am sixty-three. Like our eighty-year-old uncle, we may be aging but our love of our favorite place on earth will remain as it has in our youth. A place of laughter, joy and beautiful memories of family members of the present and past.

