

A Day at the Beach

I was five years old and excited about a day trip to the beach. We caught the coach early in the morning. Two hours later and we were setting up on the beach. No wind breaks and cardigans needed today. The sea front smelled of fish and chips and candy floss. The shops along the promenade were full of buckets and spades, windmills, and rubber rings. I could see a fun fair in the distance and hear the excited squeals of the children. Time for all that later! First things first and I ran down to the edge of the water to paddle and look for shells.

A while later I decided it was time to cash in on the promise of an ice-cream and looked for the steps near to where my family were. But there were several flights of steps along the long beach and I couldn't find them. I started to cry. A kind lady guessed what had happened walked up and down the beach with me. I was worried about what would happen if we didn't find my mummy and daddy before it was time for the coach to leave. They would have to catch it of course and I would have to stay in a children's home until the next time they came for a day trip. I comforted myself with the fact that I knew my address (11 Brunswick Road) and I could ask someone to write and tell them where I was, but we soon spotted them, also walking up and down the beach looking for me.

Several years later and we have swapped Scarborough for Torremolinos. That day we were later down to the beach than normal so our usual beach beds had been taken. "Look", I said to our three kids, "we are just next to these palm trees, OK?" Their attention was already drawn to the sea and they ran off. Leaving their dad in charge, I went off to buy some drinks and snacks. When I returned I could see the boys playing bat and ball, but where was Ellen? No where to be seen. I tried not to panic, it was a busy safe beach – no strong currents, no sharp rocks. But I couldn't help thinking of other families who set out on a normal day only for it to end with grisly findings and a lifetime of grief. I tell the lifeguard and the crackle of radio messages travels up the beach. A woman tries to comfort me, telling of her young son who had been missing for two hours the day before. They had even scrambled a helicopter to look for him before they found him asleep under the beach bed that they were all sitting on.

Then there is a ripple of relief down the beach – they've found her and she runs to me, arms outstretched and I try not to scold her for giving me such a scare.