



Llama Spit
By AJ Coyne

Take A Breath Already

"I come to the sea to breathe." I have read this sentence on t-shirts, cups, bags, postcard, bathroom walls, sides of buildings (alright maybe not buildings but the way it is headed I am sure it will happen soon), every time I see it I wonder what these people do when they are away from the sea...suffocate? If it is here where they find their peace why would they want to return to the city? Does the almighty dollar drive them back to the jobs and obligations that seem to take their breath away? Are they really breathing any better here? My guess is no, my guess is that the vacation they planned is as full of stress and overexertion as any day working in the city. I suppose they continue to think about the things back home that bring knots to their muscles and a pain to their (or is it our) heads. I know they continue to treat people as if they are still in the city. I have found out first hand that people can still be rude while they are breathing; I do it all the time. The thing that makes me laugh is that somehow tourists believe that if they buy a souvenir with the words, "I come to the sea to breathe" then they can return to the city and show all the other city dwellers how great and relaxing their vacation was leaving out that their wallet got stolen, the dog peed in the car and how that rude woman at the grocery store wouldn't let them stack their stuff on the counter while they shopped. OK, it is time to take a breath, go ahead, let it out, now don't we all feel better?

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FROM THE LOWER LEFT CORNER

Victoria Stoppello

Oh no! Beach driving...oh, yes!

If you want controversy, beach driving here on the Long Beach Peninsula certainly has it. Although I can see the merits of both sides, I never drive on the beach. I remember too well going clam digging with my mother up near Ocean Park. One time we parked next to a long line of cars, went digging, and on our return, our car was left all alone, half way up the hubcaps in sand. The surf wasn't even close, but you can imagine the ordeal that ensued. I'm not interested in repeating it.

I admit my disinterest in getting stuck keeps me from the more remote sections of beach for clam digging and it also prevents me from going out in the middle of the night, just when the wind has turned west after a gale, to look for Japanese glass floats with a spotlight.

My dad had a special vehicle just for this purpose, an old rust-bucket pickup truck. This pickup was in such bad shape, the cab roof was only attached in the rear. The other three sides had a quite effective crack that allowed you to check the weather ahead and to each side without craning your neck to look out the window. The flapping at 40 mph was audible, but my dad didn't even try to hold the thing down with "hippie chrome" (my husband's name for duct tape).

Of course my dad was far from a hippie; he just knew when he had the proper tool for a given situation. When his wife suggested he get rid of that disgraceful truck, my dad responded that he (and she) should feel lucky they didn't have to walk. Our household has two vehicles, neither of which is good enough, or bad enough, to drive on the beach. Neither of them is new, but we're fighting rust as it is, without taking them out where salt and sand can get the upper hand.

Besides—there's nothing to see on that long flat beach anyway. The dunes are pretty much the same all along, low risers with scattered pines on the uplands and some driftwood on the ocean side. The driftwood isn't very interesting anymore either, because there just isn't much good stuff coming down the Columbia—it's all been cut down. What remains, people keep hauling away for firewood or burning in bonfires right there on the beach.

Most of the flotsam and jetsam nowadays is made of plastic, not the interesting glass and corroded metal objects that used to float to shore. In fact, the detritus looks to me like a container ship of recycling plastic must have jettisoned a load, because that's all I see—and I see enough of that walking around town without going to the beach to see more.

No, I don't drive on the beach to get to some remote spot to see the same old thing—too chicken, too careful with my aging vehicles. But I ain't against riding. I did appreciate it when one of my neighbors took me in his truck to see how much of the beach had fallen in down by Beard's Hollow. I stood next to the scarp and the dune was at eye level, plus those little erosion study stakes were leaning and dropping toward the surf.

No, I don't drive on the beach, I walk. My favorite is Benson Beach in Fort Canby State Park. The view there is defined by the grandeur of north Head and its lighthouse on the north and the ruggedness of the Columbia River jetty on the south. The craggy outlines of the original basalt shore backing the dunes and covered with old forest is the most beautiful part of the southwest Washington coast in my opinion. The giant logs backed up from the jetty northward are spectacular and ever changing, given the ocean's recent incursions onto the beach.

Clambering up on the jetty, we have a good view of boats and ships crossing the bar and a great view of Cape Disappointment and its light. Plus, I'm sentimental. I always think of my dad and his dad when I'm there. This is where my grandfather was injured while helping build the jetty, leading to a lifelong disability. This is also where we scattered my dad's ashes on a blustery November day on an outgoing tide. You see why I don't drive on the beach. There's too much to see, to touch, to feel, without being distracted by a car.

Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco at the lower left corner of Washington State.



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