

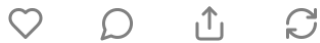
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## [Summertime in the shadows](#)

A holiday story of resenting the dog, not the beach

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It's been a summer of intermittent sunshine here in Kāpiti. Sunshine, then rain, then wind, then thunderstorms ...and that could be all in one day! The sunshine would usually return around 6pm while I'm busy preparing dinner. The sliding door to the garden is wide open and my daughter enjoys the last of the sunlight, iPad in hand. She walks around in circles, watching her shadow as she goes.

On the odd shiney day, I rush to peg all the washing on the line before the next rain shower comes. The neighbours light a putrid fire to burn their rubbish and before you know it I'm aggressively unpegging the washing, loudly ranting as I go. It's wheelibin day, which makes me think they've been confused by the change in holiday collection days.

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So even in the height of summer I've been using the dryer.



Recreation of my empty washing line, for dramatic effect

Yesterday I arranged to meet a friend who was visiting town. "See you at the cafe by the boat ramp," she text. I got the bus to the village shops, and was surprised to see that the quiet cafe my daughter and I go to before college was heaving with families excitedly ordering their lunch. There was a line outside the fish and chips shop, and a procession of people were making their way across the zebra crossing towards the park next to the beach.

So many shades of sunburn and beachwear! Bucket hats and crocs everywhere. I barely recognise this hive of activity I know as my sleepy little village.

I cross the road and walk over the rise through the park. The canopy of trees are a welcome break from the sun. Every picnic table is laden with lunchboxes, drink bottles and hampers. Every space is filled with pop up tents and cabanas. Mums are slathering their children in factor 50, dads are laughing loudly with other dads, kids are squealing with delight running through the splash pad, and the procession is slowing from a march to a meander as people stop to look for a space to set up their picnic.

The park is alive; filled with movement and excitement. Wrapped lunches and comfy chairs. Its overwhelming, and sadly unfamiliar. I imagine sitting there watching the world go by, as I queue in the procession - now at a standstill, as a dad in front of me talks loudly on his phone asking for directions on where to meet a waiting family gathering.

To my right is the communication board I advocated for with the local council. I feel a ping of pride as I approach it. Hanging off the corner of it is a small jersey with a daisy on it that someone has left behind. I'm glad its being used in one way or another.



My beloved communication board

I get impatient waiting for the procession to keep moving and decide to overtake it, instead walking out a side entrance that takes me straight to the beach. I pass the multi million dollar houses I have only ever visited on Trade Me properties, dreaming of where we would live if we won Lotto. I cross the crunchy, dry lawn and I'm at the beach.

Just like a Victorian lady with the consumption escaping the air pollution of London, I come to this beach for respite. Deep breaths of sea air and gentle calisthenics by the sea. I don't visit as often as I'd like to. To be honest it has been when I'm approaching the wall I'm about to hit, and I need to reconnect with something greater than my anxiety. This beach has magical qualities, I'm quite sure of it. I sit on the seawall, I cry, I throw stones, I walk and I regulate my breathing with the ebb and flow of the tide.

I like it best on stormy days where you hear the roar of the surf from the school down the road. I walk along the sand, crunching shells under my shoes and looking for sea glass and other oddities as I walk. You can walk for ages without passing anyone. When the world is churning around me I like to close my eyes and identify all the things I can hear

The crashing surf. Sea birds. Whistling wind.

It's a great eraser of all the other noise that fills my head. I think of my girl, who connects to all the elements so seamlessly, and imagine all the wind currents as musical notes on a sheet of paper.

But not today!



The sun is searing, there isn't a breath of wind and the ocean is glistening and gentle. There are so many people in the water swimming today - from small children digging holes and frolicking in the shallows, to an older couple bobbing around in the water up to their necks. The sand next to the



ramp is covered in beach towels, and the procession of people has been replaced to a circling procession of cars trying to find a park in a full carpark.

I text my husband “OMG there’s someone here in a bikini!” He replies “We don’t go to the beach very often.” Aint that the truth!

This could be Mars, or some other alien planet. I don’t recognise it, or feel ‘at home’ here.

I’m sitting in the shade under the balcony to the beachfront cafe. It’s been so long since I’ve been in the sunshine, it makes me panic feeling the heat on my exposed legs. So I retract them to the safety of the shade.

My girl has always loved water. She spends a lot of time playing with water, in the bath. As a small girl she loved the beach, and would run into the waves with no fear. She would return to the same patch of pristine sand that had no intermingling driftwood, seaweed or shells. It was such a sensory wonderland for her, and a source of respite for all of us. Natures reset.



Then, one day a few years ago we were on a walk along a familiar stretch of beach we liked to visit. It’s a designated safe space for walking as theres a sign prohibiting dogs off leashes. A fluffy, yappy little dog excitedly and repeatedly jumped at my girl, and she was terrified.

A swift kick from an unidentified parent ;- ) sent the dog flying and as the dogs owner came closer they explained “she’s friendly, dont worry.” But how do you explain that to a child in distress? Or a parent in protector mode, for that matter.

We got out of there super quick, but the damage was done. All future attempts to visit the beach - whether it was there, another stretch of beach, or even any of the roads leading to the beach were met with screams of terror, as she relived the moment. Just the memory of dog is enough to make my girl want to retract to the shadows.

Nowadays I enjoy beach views via friends shared pictures on instagram.

Home is a safe 'shadow' now, it's familiar and it's predictable. But home can be a sanctuary and a prison all in one. That's what my trip to the beach has reminded me.

I don't resent the fact we can't go to the beach. I resent the dog and its owner for making our lives a bit smaller, locking us out of a space that had previously given us so much shared joy as a whānau. I resent the fact that as a whānau that exists within the parameters of rules and commonalities, one person's choice to ignore one such rule, has excluded us from a huge part of our community.

It's one of those experiences that are so unique to our journey, I wonder if I am alone, or how many of us have ended up retracting to the shadows.

It was a reminder that life exists everywhere, and inhabits all the spaces around us. That makes me happy, even if it isn't my reality. Life can be a beach, but even in the height of summer, you can still end up using the dryer sometimes.

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