

## Beach Bum

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Dad would wake me up at 5 o'clock. Breakfast was a bowl of rice bubbles with sugar on top. I would try and trap my finger underneath the bottom of the bowl when I put it down on the table, so that it wouldn't make a noise and wake up my mum or sister. The windows are covered in water pimples and the sky hasn't turned orange yet. Jumper, jacket, jeans, beanie. Sometimes mum would wake up in time to make me put on a scarf before we left.

Dad wanted to get to the beach before 6 o'clock, when the water looks grey and deadly like it's full of sharks and bin bags filled with disposed corpses. I would sit on a towel and watch him cast out, standing so far in that the waves soaked the edge of his shorts. If he were confident that a fish wasn't going to get off the hook, he would call me over to reel it in. In the meantime I would dissect the bits of white bait with my fingers. When we caught one I would beg Dad to let me check out the guts as he bled the fish.

On this particular day we caught a couple of fish. Dad put some seawater in a bucket and carried them, along with the rod and tackle bag. I was allowed to carry the filleting knife but only if I kept it in its case. The sun was up fairly high now; nearly 8 o'clock, and my layers of clothes were feeling unnecessary. I wasn't alone, as at that moment a middle-aged woman walked past my Dad and I wearing sunglasses and nothing else.

At first I thought that the sweat collecting at the edges of my beanie had rolled into my eyes and made them go blurry. After she passed I turned to have a look; sure enough, there was a bare bum, dimply and flat like a two pikelets. My eight-year-old mind was perplexed by this situation: the only bums I'd seen at the beach belonged to babies or four-year-olds that had taken their pants off to catch fish in. Adults didn't walk around in the nuddy. I looked up at Dad to see the ashen face of someone who had just realised that they'd taken their child to the nudie beach.

About 20 metres out to sea, I spotted a bald man skinny-dipping, his bum fur visible even from dry land. Before I could peel my eyes away I caught a glimpse of cold-effected senior-aged penis. Turning away from the old man's old boy, I turned my head to the direction of the sand dunes. This was similar to that scene in *The Birds* where Tippi Hedren turns around to see the playground is covered in crows.

Bodies were scattered about the sand. An array of carefree bums. Big leathery boobs swayed in the fresh sea breeze. Genitals of every size and fur level were out, ready for the sun to kiss them good morning. I was bewildered by it all. These were proper grown-ups, not just the kind of token grown-ups that you can ask to supervise you using a knife. They seemed to be people that would recognise someone at the supermarket and talk to them about whatever nearby set of traffic lights had been particularly inconvenient that week. And here, in the early hours of the morning, they congregated to feel the freezing salt water against their bare skin, and the sand in between their

bum cheeks. As we walked along a man crossed our path heading into the water, and looked at me with a face that seemed to say "This is no place for a child," and I looked at him with a face that said "You've got your willy out."

Eventually we made it to the car. I can't remember what words passed between my father and me but it was probably something like:

"Why were there naked people on the beach?"

"It's a beach for naked people."

"Ok."

"I forgot it was a beach for naked people."

We had the fish for dinner. The chips were soggy.