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Every Day Is Mother's Day

by Georgina Burrows

I swim in the sea every day, and I have my mum to thank for that. Come rain or shine, thunderclap or sea squall, storm or fog, I pull on my bathers and head into that dark blue unknown.

I was brought up swimming, a 'water baby', happiest when I was by the sea, or, even better, in it. I was brought on a small island - being surrounded by water is my natural state, swimming all year round, because Mum does.

Mum strides into the water, absolutely refusing to emit even the tiniest squeak of discomfort, even when the waves are crashing around her and the wind whistling like a manic parrot - and so do I. 'Nippy' is the worst I've ever heard her describe the sea temperature - that was when snow capped the sand dunes. 'A bit blowy' in a gale force wind. It was 'bracing' when my lips were blue.

Like mother like daughter - now I feel undone if I don't swim in the sea every day. A bad mood melts the instant my shoulders slip under the surface. Like her, I scorn those in wetsuits. I, too, roll my eyes when swimmers shriek at the cold water, ankle deep on the shore in July. I, too, snort under my breath when I see swimmers zipped into wetsuits in September, tentatively touching a toe into the shallows, when the sea temperature is actually at it's most clement, after a summer of waves warmed by the sunshine.

Honestly, I prefer winter swimming. The challenge and the adrenaline high afterwards, of braving the waves when most sensible people wouldn't dream of removing their woollen mittens, let alone bundle all their clothes into a pile on the shore and run into the water.

Mum and me, emerging jubilant and laughing from the winter waves, the January sun breaking through grey clouds, reflecting the wet, rain-lashed sand as dog walkers zip up their jackets and look at us incredulously. Tea from a flask afterwards, in mugs that always taste of plastic, sugar gritty in Tupperware.

From Mum I've learned to count my strokes as soon as I enter the water ('less than 30 doesn't count as a swim'). From Mum I've learned about tides, currents, rips, drifts, reefs and wind direction – which beach is best in an easterly and how to dress as fast as possible in a force 5 gale (never wear jeans, pin your pants down under a rock).

I send photos to her every time I swim in a new spot and return to the island at least once a month. Mum picks me up from the airport, swimming bag in the back seat - we head immediately for the beach. 'Westerly today, bit of a swell.' I have her to thank for the pure pleasure the sea gives me, and every day that I check the tides, throw my towel into my bag, and return afterwards, grinning, to hang my bikini over the bath to dry, is mother's day.