

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Life's a Beach

by Sho Botham

On 26 March 2020, life, as we knew it, changed. Perhaps forever. Stay at home, was the message given to us all. Busy streets became quiet and empty. People stayed at home.

Looking out of my study window, I noticed the beach was much quieter than usual. An occasional person walked along the path. Very few dog walkers appeared. I wondered where all the others had gone. The usual buzz of life had changed. A quietness had descended.

From my window I could see the beach was still inviting. It beckoned me for my permitted daily exercise. Standing, looking out to sea with my back to the harbour houses, my life felt the same as usual. The horizon that looks like a fine line painted by an artist dividing the sea and the sky, looked no different. It felt the same. That sense of openness and freedom and spaciousness was still there. Behind me closed doors kept people in. But on the beach, there were no doors, no restrictions, no loss of freedom.

I walked along the harbour paths, naturally people dodging if an occasional human being passed by. At low tide the outer harbour was often a favourite feeding place for the Little Egret, a small white heron with black legs and beak and fabulous yellow feet. Little Egrets hunting for food, in the pools amongst the sculpted mud that emerged at low tide, were often captured by my camera. It was my constant companion on all of my walks.

Lines of, feathered fishers sat on the railings of harbour steps leading into the water. These large, brownish, black cormorants with their hooked, yellow beaks were easily recognised by their wings hanging out to dry. They were not aware of life's changes. They continued their endless games of edging along the railing until the last cormorant had no option but to fall off the end and drop into the sea. Some managed this much more elegantly than others.

The resident family of seals of the outer harbour paid no attention to life's changes. A head would still pop up in the deep water at high tide and look around with large watery eyes. Or they would drag themselves out of the water to have a snooze on the beach or a mud bank. Where there used to be small crowds of people ahing and awing over the seals - during lockdown, these crowds became socially distanced individuals of maybe two.

Crossing over bridges at the locks I noticed boats were still coming and going. Clouds of loudly squawking seagulls danced around the fishing boats as they returned home with their haul.

Walking past the flats, I continued along the path towards the Martello Tower. Once there I located my favoured spot beside the rocks at the entrance to the harbour. I would rest my camera on a flat rock, take my reading glasses off my head and put them on the rock too. Then I would face the sun overlooking the small, secluded beach. Here I would, breathe in feeling my lungs expand, open my arms upwards to the sky and enjoy the sun shining on my, uptilted face. Breathing out was equally productive. It involved folding my body over, lowering my arms and feeling my fingers brush across the pebbles and rocks - my neck releasing tension as it felt the natural weight of my upside-down head. A few self-styled Qi Gong-type exercises followed ending with the same open arm, face tilting towards the sun, posture.

Picking up my camera and returning my reading glasses to their home on top of my head, I would then be ready to continue my walk across the last part of the harbour beach heading towards the start of the seafront and beyond.

Memory believes before knowing remembers.