



In Dreams

by Lisa Ricard Claro

I see Lieutenant's Island in my dreams. It calls to me from my childhood—a summer friend with ready laughter and suntanned skin that smells of salt and sea.

In family lore, my mother's extended kin of aunts, uncles and cousins were the first to discover this Cape Cod paradise. Mama spent her childhood summers in the 1930s and '40s on Lieutenant's Island. To my knowledge, only family members owned cottages on the island back in those early days. My grandparents honeymooned there, a very private getaway back around 1912.



Honeymooners, 1912

Born in Arizona, I knew the Cape only as a fairytale born of my Mama's memories. By the time we relocated to New England in the late 1960's, the family cottages did not dot the landscape alone. A few "outsiders" had moved in. Still, in all the times we vacationed there, I only once met someone to whom I was not somehow related.

The summer of my tenth year is the first Cape Cod vacation I remember. The year was 1970. The Carpenters ruled the airwaves with the song "Close to You," and Tiger Beat magazine crowned David Cassidy "Big Star of Tomorrow."

I walked the endless flats at low tide and dreamed of David while singing, "Why do birds, suddenly appear. . ." The sea birds cawed their approval, and I raced them to the beached oysters as the tide ebbed. The seagulls usually beat me to the prize.

Sunshine illuminated the cottage by day and gas lamps performed the task by night. After dark, the island invited wind that blew eerie whispers through the brush and dune grasses, and set me to shivering.

Visits to the bathroom before bedtime meant flashlights bobbing in our hands as we walked over cool sand and the pungency of the outhouse—day and night—wrinkled our noses and tested the ability to hold one's breath. Fresh water, always cold, arrived only with physical effort: via hand pump at the front yard well.

The lack of electricity, running water or indoor facilities presented no hardship. I viewed it as the price paid for walking the beach at high tide and following the sea for hours as it receded.

Shovels and buckets became tools to dig for and haul steamers. I hoped to spot burrowed crabs before they grabbed hold of my toes, and horseshoe crabs always commanded my attention.

Barefoot, I sloshed through the saltwater wetlands looking for wildlife. The shy hermit crabs peeked from

borrowed shells, and soldier crabs, dressed in their smart blue coats, entertained me for whole afternoons.

There sat far out in the flats a huge boulder to which I would walk and aspired to climb. It became approachable only during low tide, as high tide covered it completely. To my memory, the rock was gargantuan. It lay like a beached whale, solitary and immovable. I don't recall ever being able to climb it, though my brother did, and pretended to be King of the World. And maybe, in that enchanted place, he was.



Lisa (far left) with her beachcombing cousins, 1975

The only available phone hung in a weathered booth near the dwarf-sized bridge that connected Lieutenant's Island to the rest of the world. Too narrow for more than one car to pass at a time, the bridge became impassable during high tide, and represented the door to the outside world.

My sister trekked to the phone booth once or twice during our island stays, though the phone rarely functioned. I never understood her need to communicate beyond our little paradise.

When I dream of Lieutenant's Island those concrete things take form: the gulls, the crabs, the rock, the bridge, the outhouse, the cottage. But there are other things, too—joy, peace, and a profound sense of being.

At 10-years-old I soaked up the sensation of belonging to something vast, and at the same time being nothing but a speck upon the sand.

For those moments I understood I was no different, no more special to the universe, than those crabs and birds and wetlands teeming with life. It is no lie to say that I saw God's face in the landscape, felt His breath with every sea breeze that kissed my skin. I embraced it, absorbed it, and will carry it with me always.



Mama, Lo-Lo, Paul and Bert, Lieutenant's Island, 1934

Memories of Lieutenant's Island include bonfires on the beach long after the sea swallowed the sun; walks with my parents and siblings; digging for clams and steaming them for dinner; my first taste of a fresh oyster, slick and salty and delicious; hot days that painted my skin, and nights chilled by wind that molded clothes to sun-kissed limbs; stars shimmering with secrets and promises while Wellfleet glimmered as a distant jewel.

In spite of progress and modern comforts, does that sense of wonder still exist on Cape Cod? Is there perhaps, at this very moment, a 10-year-old girl walking the sticky flats and singing to the wind and the greedy gulls? Does her heart swell when the water licks at her feet and a regiment of soldier crabs

marches past? Does she hear the rustle of the dune grasses and feel God's touch in the sun and the breeze and the salty sea? Is she there?

The last time I stood on the sand of Lieutenant's Island I was 17-years-old. More than three decades have passed, and I know the magical paradise of my childhood has grown and changed.

My husband asked me if I'd like to go back, and I said I would. But not today.

For now, it is enough to hold it in my dreams.



Lisa Ricard Claro is a freelance writer who lives in the Southeastern United States and dreams of one day living at the beach.

Her work has been published in Writers' Journal magazine and various other media including newspapers, online, and in multiple anthologies such as Chicken Soup for the Soul.

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