

# Seabright Beach memoirs

**W**e had planned it for months, or at least I had. These days my daughter is not sure she wants to go *anywhere* without her perpetual gaggle of pals. I knew it was coming, this transition to the preferred company of peers, but I wasn't prepared for it anyway. I suppose one never is.

This was to be a special one-week vacation, just the two of us. Her father had to work, and we've gotten into the habit, as is often the case in two-career households, of splitting up the summer child care among our respective, and respectively limited, vacation times.

He likes horseback riding and camping. My sole, entirely memorable experience with a horse was when, at age 10, I fell off one that wasn't moving, landed on my wrist and broke it.

As for camping, I've always detested staying anywhere I have to sleep on the ground and use a communal bathroom down a dark trail at night. So he takes her camping and horseback riding, and I take her to hotels.

Often her trips with me have been sandwiched in between business meetings. The first time I did that was when she was 7 and I took her to a conference in San Francisco. Attempting to expose her to all varieties of travel by land, we took the bus, which lost our luggage. The luggage came on a later bus, after we had survived a harrowing experience flagging a cab in the seedy environs of the San Francisco depot.

The cabdriver was a madman behind the wheel, careening wildly to the Hilton in \$1.55 flat. My daughter, wide-eyed and terrified, has since refused to set foot in a cab.

But we had a lovely dinner, just the two of us, in an overpriced restaurant on top of the hotel, where a wily photographer with a darkroom in the basement turned out precious photos of the big event, for which gullible parents such as myself paid ridiculous sums of money.

The next day at the conference, I set up my sweetie with crayons and drawing paper at an unobtrusive table in the huge banquet room filled with politicians and lawyers pontificating on affairs of state. At one point, I turned around to check on her, and was horrified to find she had taken off her brand-new patent leather shoes and put them in the middle of the white-linen-clad table.

"My feet hurt," she explained reasonably.

Now that she's 11, such events hold no appeal. I don't travel as much these days, and plan my trips — and hers — much more carefully.

"Mom," she said this summer, "I'd like to go to Santa Cruz and ride the roller coaster." Translated, that meant she wanted me to take her and a friend, since she knows I don't ride roller coasters.

"Mom," she said softly, "I don't want to hurt your feelings or anything, but ... well ... you know. ..."

"No, I don't."

I wasn't going to give her this one without some guilt. "You always used to go on trips with me, and we always had a good time. Why should this be any different?"

"Besides," I suggested, trying vainly to appeal to her pre-adolescent sense of justice (if there is such a thing), "I really can't afford to take you and somebody else, so why don't we just go together, like old times?"

"Will you go on the roller coaster with me?" she inquired with a sly smile.

I remember the last time, 20 or 30 years ago, when my younger brother persuaded me to go on the roller coaster at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, where our family used to go every summer of my childhood. Although I have the fondest recollections of our time at the beach, where my great-aunt and great-uncle had a wonderful house that we used for a week every summer, I hated the roller coaster.

The house where we stayed had one bedroom for our parents, and a large front room with couches that made into beds, a well-equipped kitchen, and a lovely patio where begonias and fuchsias grew in wondrous purple and pink profusion. We walked to the beach down a winding road rimmed by eucalyptus, and when we came back we had to wash off in an outdoor shower on the patio before going inside.

The house has long since been sold, and until

my daughter raised the issue I hadn't thought about going back to Santa Cruz for more than 20 years. Too many memories, and some ghosts.

Before we left, my father warned me that it had changed. "It is not the Santa Cruz of your childhood," he said.

I reserved a room at the Holiday Inn, and we set off one morning for our few days of "quality time." We went to the beach and to the wharf for dinner, and I kept seeing the faces of my long-dead grandparents, who ate at this one restaurant whenever they went to the wharf. We bought T-shirts and seashells and found on our return that our car had been broken into, a block from the boardwalk — the glass of one window totally shattered, though nothing was there to take.

**M**y daughter burst into tears at the sight of the car and announced she wanted to go home, but reconsidered when the nice people at our hotel cleaned out the shattered glass and taped the window with plastic. So that night we had dinner at a pricey restaurant surrounded by ferns, with a tree growing through the middle of the dining room.

"Have you been here before?" the smooth young waiter inquired, handing me the hors d'oeuvres menu. "About 30 years ago," I replied. "But that's not possible," he replied, as if I'd written the script. "You don't look that old!"

Bless you, sir, but I still don't want any hors d'oeuvres.

One day we drove aimlessly toward the beach from the hotel, and I parked by a long finger of sandstone stretching out into the sea near the boardwalk. A musician with Rastafarian dreadlocks was pounding a drum at the end of the narrow slice of pale, soft rock, and a workman was fixing a hole in the fence blocking passage to the beach by the boardwalk.

I assumed that the beach where I had gone as a child — a cozy enclave protected from the winds by a long stretch of sandstone, with a yellow "castle" that sold drinks and hot dogs — was gone. I hadn't been able to find it and was almost afraid to ask. I remembered reading somewhere that the old castle had been demolished.

As the workman repaired the hole in the fence, I looked down the narrow expanse of rock to the musician at the end, and had this odd sense of *deja vu*. I asked the workman if he knew where the old Seabright Beach would have been, and he looked at me strangely, pointed to the finger of stone and said, "Right here." □

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