

Sand

The sands of time. I've heard that phrase and written it off as a cliché. It makes me think of rocks being worn down into tiny fine grains, and of hourglasses. But the sands also flow through my life, poignantly.

I remember the sand box in my back yard, under the tree house that my dad built, in the corner next to the rabbit hutches and the swing set. It had railroad ties as the edges, and I think my cat used it as his outdoor kitty litter. My sister crunched on pinchfuls of sand as we swung on the swing set because she liked the texture. She also ate the bubbles from the bubble bath for the same reason. We only ever played in the sandbox after we read Sandbox Betty. Sandbox Betty, she builds them tall. She builds them all; Sandbox Betty, she can't be beat!

I remember the sand piles ready to be shoveled, when I was five. I took off all my clothes off except my underpants when my parents had their roof-building party in the heat of summer. I hopped all around the sand piles on all fours, pretending I was a lion. Our house-in-the-making was built into the hillside and had a turf roof. It leaked after that party, and had to be rebuilt twice more before we got it right.

I remember the sand, the pure white sand, shining through the clear Bahamian water as we shone a spotlight on it to find our anchorage in the dark. We had been dead reckoning in the Gulf Stream for a day and a half and didn't know where or if we would land. The water had been dark along the intracoastal waterway, and the bottom mud. The change to this crystalline environment was exciting, welcoming, and almost unbelievable. The next morning we went to customs, and played on the white-sand

beach. Dad tossed my sister around in the shallow water while Mom sunbathed and read and I made a sand-carving of a fish coming up out of the beach.

I remember the sand of the Pink Beach on Eleuthra, where we played with a boy and girl from *Sunsinger*, and carved sand houses out of the beach. The sand was indeed pink; I can't imagine how many billions of shells were ground up by the sea to create such a place. Sometimes, for a thrill, we children would swim out until we couldn't stand, take our swimsuits off, and feel the currents of the water eddying around our naked bodies. The trick was to put the suits back on before the parents came out.

I remember piling sand on top of our heads with two girls from *Valcarra*, after a day of exploring with the adults aboard the *Erma B*. We swam along mangroved canals that day, saw nurse sharks placidly undulating below us, and washed our hair with Dawn dish detergent. The sand came off my scalp under my fingernails every time I scratched it for months thereafter.

I remember sand stinging my face and bare legs as we took a walk on land, trying to escape the horrendous hemming and yawning of *Feather*, as a storm blew through from the north. We were anchored on the lee of an island, but the weather was so foul that the island offered little protection and our sloop rolled like gimbals with every confused swell of the Atlantic. We were getting seasick, even at anchor, on the boat and went to land to escape the motion, only to be faced with the sandstorms that the wind was kicking up. It was bitter and miserable.

I remember sand all over *Feather*, continually, for a year. Our kittens had joined us on our voyage and the cheapest litter for them was what we could scoop from the

beaches at every port. Not only did the litter box spill in the cockpit, but the cats tracked it in their toes all over the cabin and the decks. We did too. Not from the kitty litter, but from land—it was inevitable. We slept in damp, salty and sandy sleeping bags, sat on damp, salty and sandy cushions, lived in a damp, salty, sandy environment. Nothing was ever dry, even after hanging on the stays in burning Caribbean sun and wind for days, and everything stayed gritty. We only took a proper shower twice during our three and a half months in the Bahamas, but we swam in the ocean every day.

I remember sand so hot underfoot that it burned. Cumberland Island had wild horses, ruins covered in ivy, and hot hot sand beaches to run on. The sand was dry and you had to run twice as hard to get half as far because your feet would slip out from under you as you moved.

Later, I remember sand in a sepia colored photograph. The memory that goes along with the photograph is of sailing in Nova Scotia with my haggard family. It was falling apart but still bound together on tiny little *Feather* for our summer month. That evening we rowed from *Feather* to a spit of land, made a fire of drift wood, didn't speak much to each other but tried to enjoy the presence of the family. I took a portrait of us all sitting in our polarfleeces on a large driftwood log. No one looks happy, everyone looks tired and exhausted from pretending to be happy for so long. There are half-smiles adorning our faces, but our eyes belie the upward turns of our lips. As the fire burned out that night, my sister dragged the logs to the sea, embers glowing in trails on the sand, steam rising as they hit the cold water. I felt like an ember, glowing with hurt, and longed for the soothing salve of peace to wash over me like water.

Our family had lived a beautiful life together. We raised rabbits in town and built a house in the country to live in. We dropped everything and went sailing together for a year. We did those things, and so much more, but our family was wearing down, little by little over time, like shells worn to sand.