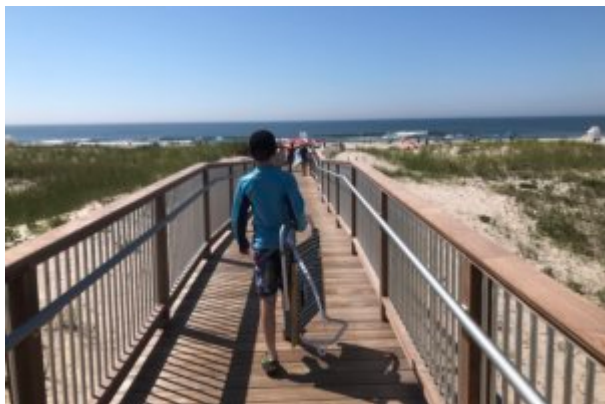


The perfect cure for beach-sickness (or what we did on our summer vacation)



We weren't really planning to go to the beach this year. We had decided we would go visit my sister Maureen and her four children, who live north of New York City. Maybe we would make a few day trips from her house or spend an overnight somewhere together.

Then Maureen heard about a friend of a friend who owned a house on Long Island. She sent me the link to the house, and I texted it to John.

The message came back: "Let's do it."

The house was just the right size. We could drive to the beach every day, and there was a pool in the backyard—and a swing set, too. We were sold.



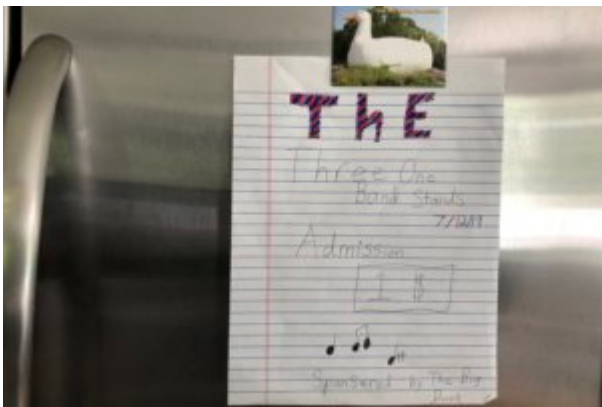
When I saw my niece Elise a few weeks before the trip, she told me she was "beach-sick." She was longing to be at the beach. Weren't we all?

As it turns out, it's hard for us to imagine a summer without a beach. In past years we have gone to Rehoboth, which we always enjoy. This year we tried something different—and Ponquogue Beach was lovely.



I was in awe of the natural beauty of the area. It reminded me of Assateague with its marshy spots for egrets and exquisitely blue bay. The sand along the beach was sprinkled with the biggest shells we had seen, along with horseshoe crabs and crab claws and seaweed and a long translucent sting-ray-shape.

We had stayed at my sister's house on our way to the beach, and somehow we managed to leave all our dirty laundry there. When we arrived at the beach house and I realized that we had remembered brass instruments, but not most of our clothes, I had a feeling we were in for a memorable vacation.



I was right.

The children who had insisted on bringing their instruments set up a whole concert. They charged admission and then played 11 songs, each dramatically introduced by our younger son. They offered autographs after the concert was over.

Everyone enjoyed the beach, but our boys loved the pool at least as much as they liked the sand. They dropped into bed every night exhausted—and the grownups were right behind them.

We played Telestrations, which is my favorite board game for the beach, and we laughed until we couldn't speak or breathe.



We read book after book after book. Elise, who is 12, persuaded me to try Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, which I read and then we discussed together.

When we ran out of books to read, we stopped by a used bookstore we found near an ice cream parlor we just had to try, Candy Kitchen, which dates back more than 90 years.



What a vacation it was. We went fishing and explored the area and ate ice cream every day and swam and played and slept. We talked and talked, sharing memories and ideas about the future and lots about the memories we were making right now.

The last morning our older son asked if he could bring a book to the beach. He sat in a beach chair and read. It was extraordinary.

I found myself remembering all the times I've followed children around the beach, making sure they didn't fall into a hole or fling sand in another child's face or steal the green shovel every preschooler wanted or get swept away in the ocean.

Going to the beach used to be anything but relaxing.



We've turned a page in our parenting story to the chapter where the children can carry their own beach chairs and shovels and beach towels, and then sit with their books and read quietly in the sunshine.

There's a twinge of sadness to that transition, but there's also great joy. My son and I sat together and read while the seagulls hovered and the breeze drifted toward us. I thought of the young man he is already and wondered about the man he will become.



I wished I could freeze time, but then I remembered that so many times I've wanted to pause—when the next moment has been even more wonderful than I could imagine.

The sun rose higher into the sky, and soon enough the children were hungry and tired and didn't want another dose of sunscreen. It was time to go.

The cousins wrote their farewell to the beach in the sand the way they always do, and we said goodbye to the beach.

There's just something about the beach.

Goodbye, beach, at least for now.