

Anna Hagan

Just Me and My Boy Going Fishing

The sun came up as it does most days in Provincetown, through a cool misty fog that gets burned off by 10:00 a.m. My four-year-old son and I had plans to go deep sea fishing that day at 1:00 p.m. I'm not sure who was more excited, or, for what reason. Somehow, I thought we may just have been there for the boat ride.

I crammed his already too large frame into my baby seat on the back of my bike and off we went, whizzing past the sand dunes. The pale sand sparkled in the sun and we both reveled in the sheer joy of our surroundings, of being alive and free together. As we approached the designated pier, we saw a large crowd gathered around the beach. Surely there were more than 200 people, looking most distressed. I had to blink three times to be sure what we saw, was really there before us. A large black whale, beached. Periodically blowing through the blow hole, it looked at us all mournfully. I had seen many whales out in the ocean and this one looked small comparatively. I was sure it was a baby whale and panicked immediately. Where was it's mother and why was it here? The whale suddenly became my baby, and I cried.

"The Coast Guard has towed him out three times, he keeps coming back and bashing himself on the boats in the harbor" a man said as we stood paralyzed looking at the magnificent creature with his smooth underbelly. "He's a Mincke whale, not a baby, just an old guy coming in to die" the man said again, as if he read my mind's questions. I stood and looked at the crowd and the concern in their eyes. A young boy continually bathed and splashed the whale with water, from his little yellow beach bucket. Of the hundreds of people there that day, there was one man I will never forget.

The sadness on his face, the pain in his eyes, the despair in his soul was so plainly evident to me. I stood transfixed, searching every deeply etched wrinkle

and gray hair he had. I cannot describe why I stared at this man so long except perhaps only to realize what he displayed so blatantly, felt so deeply. Death lurked above us and I felt unsettled.

My son, uncomfortable with the tragedy, and perhaps frightened by the fact that all these adults could do nothing for this helpless creature, yanked on my arm, asking that we not “look” at the whale any longer. I looked down at him weeping and I too felt the bitter sting of salt on my sunburned face as the tears rolled down my face effortlessly, like the endless slapping of the sea to shore.

The blast of our fishing boats’ horn jolted me from the trance, jerking me suddenly away from the whale and my focus on its demise, my young son’s innocence lost as he stood also helpless in the face of the whale. The boat was signaling its departure and I swiftly swept my son into my arms, holding on tight for a hug that we both needed. We had witnessed something bigger, of which we could not comprehend. We were left there speechless in the face of mother-nature. As we had reveled in the beauty of the dunes and ocean, we sat in horror within the same moment questioning the reality of life’s cycle and rebirth. I knew my son could comprehend the magnitude of this event and I looked at him with pride, as we had shared this horrible moment together. I could think of no one else but him that my soul could have survived such an assault. I still had him, I thought as he asked many questions. Many of which I could not answer but again I reveled in being his mother.

We climbed aboard and within minutes we were in the depths of the ocean. Nothing else around us. We were both enormously relieved to be away from the beached whale. We were together, and happy just to be. We caught no fish, but shared a lot of smiles and hugs. Quite honestly, I don’t think either of us could bear to have caught one anyway! Five hours later our boat docked and we smiled as the skipper threw bait to the seagulls who flew deftly to catch the minute morsels of clam.

The sun was going down and the whale, gone. My daughter and spouse waved madly from the pier, having missed us on our long journey. My heart warmed as I saw their smiling faces. The ocean and my young son, cleansed my soul of despair that day. I think back to that feeling frequently and remember the tranquillity and feeling of being one with my son, the ocean and nature. Sometimes when I can’t sleep I think of the quiet but dull, constant hum of the foghorn, at the lighthouse we saw jutting out of the rocks near the pier. There is no lullaby on earth that puts me to sleep faster than the memory of that sound and just me and my boy going fishing.