

## Changing Visits

The sand felt soft between her toes. Her family had moved from the city to live by the sea. April watched the waves crashing in awe, tasting the salt in the air. She was ten years old. Shore birds nested in the small dunes of sand and glided on the ocean breeze. The shores of Mollymook beach were clean, all she left behind were footprints in the sand and all she took were memories.

At the age of eighteen, April and her friend sat on the beach again, its waves pounded the innocent shores as usual and the only piece of rubbish was a glass bottle. She picked it up without thinking twice. Her now waist-length blonde hair rippled in the gentle sea breeze as she talked to her friend happily, all they left were footprints in the sand, all they took were memories and a glass bottle.

April spent her twenty-fifth birthday on the same beach with a few friends and her boyfriend. They swam, surfed and played cricket, ending with a picnic. She did not notice a few shreds of wrapping paper blow away and her friends pocketing pretty shells as they packed up to leave. All they left were footprints in the sand and some wrapping paper, all they took were memories and shells.

Liam proposed to April on that very beach. They sat together watching the sunset paint the sky with beautiful colours. Less shore birds glided playfully in the breeze and more rubbish littered the shoreline. April picked up some rubbish as she left, forgetting her plastic water bottle as her boyfriend got down on one knee. They left footprints and a plastic bottle in the sand and took nothing but a very happy memory.

April returned in her forties with her husband, toddler and a golden retriever. Liam picked up the toddler out of harms way as a wave crashed in front of him. The toddler dropped his plastic teething toy, glimpsing it disappear in the wave. A dirty nappy lay forgotten in the dunes and the dog trod on a shorebird egg as April rushed to the car, realising she had an appointment. They left plastic, litter and footprints, taking a baby bird's life and memories.

The tenth birthday of her son happened on that beach. The traditional carrot cake was sliced and handed out, the napkins blew away and an immense gust of wind claimed the few helium balloons. The boys found one shorebird nest in the dunes and built a shelter around it, accidentally scaring off its parents. The dog, too old to chase birds anymore, dug up an old teething toy and sniffed the picnic basket. April picked up some plastic as she fed her three-year-old daughter. They left footprints, napkins and balloons in the sand and took some rubbish, a baby bird's protection and memories.

April celebrated her daughters sixteenth on Mollymook beach. Her present was a blue heeler puppy, which killed the only shorebird in sight. They lit sparklers at dusk and stargazed, forgetting where they put their rubbish in the dark. They left rubbish and footprints and took a bird's life and memories.

April took her first grandchild to that beach. She watched him stop at the rare pretty shell and put it on the sand castle. The beach was strewn with rubbish and April only had one bag to fill. Liam's cigarette packet blew away as he caught a large snapper from the shoreline. They left footprints, a cigarette packet and some fishing line, taking rubbish, fish, shells and memories.

April's last visit to Mollymook beach was accompanied by three grandsons in their twenties. One of the sons went fishing. The other put up bird boxes hopefully, for the absent shorebirds. The youngest filled three bin liners with rubbish. It had been eighty years since April's first visit to Mollymook beach. There are no more seabirds, there is rubbish in the graceful waves and less fish in the ocean. A fish and chip shop had opened, and dogs have been prohibited. Much has changed since her first visit, since humans began to leave more than footprints in the sand. What can you change with your visit?

By Charlotte Croker