

 ilkley literature festival

**Be All Write**

**#ILFWritingChallenge**

**Prompt: Write about a UK summer holiday memory.**

**In Years To Come**

I shall go back to Porlock Weir,  
perhaps have afternoon tea  
at the Millers at the Anchor  
as I did on my last family holiday.  
Will I find the hideaway  
home of my favourite author?

Back then I hadn't read her,  
couldn't remember the village's name  
when I wrote up my diary.  
Will it be another clear day,  
with a view of the coast of Wales,

where I never thought then  
I'd be at college next year  
reading Wordsworth and Coleridge?  
Nor did I know that they  
ever came to that part of Exmoor.

What I shall do is walk  
to Culbone Church  
like a pilgrim.  
Will it be for research  
I wonder? That thought, I know, is grim.

— Peter Donnelly

## Warm Concrete and Summer Cardigans



Golden wheat fields splashed with red poppies fall away on either side. As our rusty Nissan draws nearer to the coast I have a sense of being propelled into a comfortable, familiar-feeling past. The shop signs are older; the petrol stations smaller; the roads narrower; the days simpler.

We compete to be the first among us to catch sight of the sea; each time a deeper Prussian blue to my young eyes than I remember. We strain for a clear view out of the windows, so tightly packed is the car's interior with suitcases, cool bags of food, beach blankets and buckets, and feel a thrilling hum of anticipation when finally the dark ink-line of the North Sea horizon emerges above the rolling fields.

Destination reached; shoes are replaced with sandals. Summer shirts and dresses layered with woollen cardigans and jumpers. My skinny bare legs are left defenceless against the relentless sea breeze. August holiday attire for the east coast.

I scramble down the cracked and crumbling jetty, grazing my knees in eagerness as I clamber over the pebbled concrete remains of anti-tank blocks, pitted memorials to the war which feels much closer here than back at home. The past is more immediate, or maybe time moves differently. The men who manned the pill-boxes that squat along the cliff top are older brothers, not white-haired grandfathers.

A few feet from the beach, I sit down on one of the block's gritty sun-warmed surfaces and slip off my sandals. My feet hit soft dry sand. A jolt of pure joy. By this time our labrador is already in the waves. Behind me come my parents, the soaring of their own spirits weighed down with blankets, sun lotion and spades, with paperbacks, picnic food and Thermos flasks.

We find a quiet pitch and stones large enough to hold down the corners of the blanket against the restless wind. The cardigan stays on. We paddle in the breakers, holding hands as we jump the waves. We huddle together to eat potted meat sandwiches and pass around plastic cups of hot sweet coffee. We build increasingly ambitious sculptures in the sand. No castles for us after the first day, instead we excavate speedboats and steam trains and, one time, a crocodile with a smile of small white shells.

My mother takes a photograph. You look happy, someone comments, decades later. Yes, I answer, surprised, the gaping chasm of the long years since, of the myriad mundane days spent simply living, closing instantaneously in a rapid rush. Yes, we were.

– Anon.