

On the Beach by Harry Friedland

It's 8a.m. Friday morning. Another hot day coming (+/-26°C). We're on Milnerton beach. It's not a pretty beach (I prefer Blouberg, Muizenberg – in fact anything else, but this is closest. At least this is a doggie beach, and Becky's getting big now and needs her morning walk.

The beach is practically deserted at this time of the morning. There's a lone surfer about 20 metres out (probably a learner) and one couple under an umbrella. Otherwise nothing for 2 km to the hotel in the South and nothing and no-one for several kilometres to the North, where the beach disappears into the morning haze. The Atlantic, crystal clear and cold, coming to the end of its long run all the way from the Equator and far beyond, down to Cape Agulhas, where it will finally collide with the Indian Ocean, is just about flat, save for waves of a few cm (why do the damn tour guides insist on showing the tourists that straight line of turbulent white water stretching out South from the further most tip of the Peninsula, at Cape Point and telling the suckers, "See that line? – that's where the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean meet." It's all a lot of balls but like tourists swallowing legends the world over, they buy the story.

The truth – the actual scientific truth – is that the oceans meet at Agulhas, and there's a beacon there to mark the place, and Visitors who Really Know love to have their photos taken with one foot on each side of the line. Hell, even I have a photo of myself like that. And that, dear reader, is the very Southernmost point of the continent of Africa.

But my thoughts have wondered. The beach is peaceful and almost completely silent.

And then I hear it. It's a kind of booming, drumming sound. A very slow, very deep beat. You'd need an ultra-low bass loudspeaker to replicate that sound. It's so low that it's right at the bottom end of the audible sound spectrum. I've never noticed it before – there's usually too much noise pollution on a beach. Boooooom, it goes, at about four beats per minute.

Boooooom, and the individual particles of beach sand virtually vibrate. I remember a high school science class experiment where we'd lay a loudspeaker on its back, put pieces of gravel on the diaphragm and then turn on the sound and watch the gravel dance with the frequency of the sound waves. Boooooom. I tried to see if I could see the sand particles dance. I almost imagined that I could. Boooooom. What the hell?...

And then it struck me. It's the waves breaking. Every time a wave broke, there'd be a little delay, presumably as the sound carried through the very earth itself, and then up to my ears and the ripples of sound and movement would then carry on up beyond that to the end of the beach and eventually dissipate on the fairway of the golf course beyond. Boooooom – since forever, and out into the future, for as long as this beach has existed and will exist. The rhythm of the very earth itself!

I remember, once on a beach in Sea Point, watching those mighty rollers coming in, in turbulent water – two-metre, three-metre heavies, quite deafening in a storm (I love going

down to the water in a storm and considering God's awesome power in these things, when the wind screams like a pack of demented banshees, the seagulls take their chances and risk their lives in crazy air currents, and the fearsome creatures of the deep hunker down and wait for it all to pass. I have a really heavy old Czechoslovakian army surplus coat, which I'm sure could stop an AK47 bullet, which I like to wear in that weather – but the wind whips it around like a ladies' handkerchief. I stand there in the wild storm and my thoughts, like those deep-water creatures, hunker down deep inside me, and the scene becomes a backdrop for wild imaginings.

These little waves before me today are nought compared to that, yet still they produce that deep booming sound and the same question as occurred to me then, occurs to me now: how heavy must a wave be, to produce such impact?

If a wave is, say, ten centimetres high, and a hundred metres wide, how much water is in it, and how much does it weigh? An awful lot, I guess. And if it travels at so many metres per second and therefore has so much momentum, then with what force does it strike a rock, or the sand, or any immovable object?

Boooooom!

And if it does that, say, four times a minute, and that has and will happen for all eternity, it keeps shaping and reshaping the earth like a coppersmith beating copper – he could shape and reshape a copper bowl endlessly in shapes that are sometimes similar but never quite the same.

I have lived with the sound of the sea all my life. I need that sound. God knows why, because I am not a sailor and I am not a very good swimmer. But I need to know that it's there. I need to hear it. We think we know the world, but there is another world – an entire other world – beyond the shoreline, and we know pathetically little about that. It seems quite bizarre to me that we are reaching out to space when we still know so little about the world below our feet. Perhaps it's because we know that we can't live there, and we're hoping that we can find a place somewhere out in space where we can live, before we have made the earth too toxic to live in!

These are just random thoughts early in the morning. We'll go for coffee at the beach café, and then the day will begin.

~~~~~

## **On the Beach**

**Written by Harry Friedland in January 2024**

**Posted on the CHOL Share Your Story Site in March 2024**