

A Sun Tea Incident

by Jeffrey Scott Pearson

The highlight of my childhood summers was often a weekend vacation to the crystal coast of North Carolina, a tradition I was happy to continue with my new family. We went on a beach trip almost every year as my son was growing up, often renting a connecting room for my parents. This story begins at the end of one such trip, on a Sunday morning while everyone was out.

I had been left in the room(s) to pack and bring the bags to the lobby while my parents finished their patio breakfast and my son was getting his final hour on the beach. As I finished getting everything together, I noticed a half-dozen unclaimed tea bags by the coffeepot – and these were no ordinary teabags. Turns out this was fancy ‘Celestial Seasonings Cold Brew’ tea, especially made for Southern ‘sun tea’ – a local favorite. I decided these would be my private beach souvenirs.

To explain, sun tea is a cold drink created by setting a glass pitcher of sugary water in the bright sunshine for a few hours with lemon slices, served in a tall, iced tea glass with a mint garnish. The result is a smooth, slightly tangy but refined beverage that is as addictive as it is refreshing. Excited by this prospect, I grabbed the lot and shoved the teabags into my cargo shorts without a thought.

Once the luggage was in the car, I found my wife and parents to ready them for the trip. My son Brandt was still on the seashore flying his kite, milking the last precious minutes out of a near perfect beach weekend. As I lumbered over the hot sand to find him, I noticed his kite was remarkably high in the clear blue sky. Tracking down the string, I finally located him standing in the tidal pools keeping his legs cool. I approached him and took off my sunglasses to talk to him.

“We gotta go buddy, let’s pull it in,” I said in reference to the kite.

“Thank God you’re here, I’ve had to pee for twenty minutes but I can’t it let go!” and with that he put the near empty spool in my hand and ran towards the hotel.

I barely caught the line during the handoff, and I was annoyed to be left to reel in his stupid kite in the hot morning sun. Nonetheless, I began impatiently winding the hundreds of yards of kite string onto the spool, whipped by the winds and burning up.

Despite my discomfort. I did notice a couple of elderly onlookers slowly coming my way. At first, they seemed friendly, strolling out perhaps make small talk or admire the kite. But as they got closer their expression changed from pleasant to disturbed. A few more steps my way changed them from disturbed to disgusted and they both stopped abruptly.

Looking intensely at me the old man pointed at me and said flatly “You are disgusting!” and they both turned and walked away. No explanation, nothing.

I was dumbstruck, kinda winding the kite string on automatic pilot, standing knee deep in the tide and trying to figure out what just happened. I was freaked for a long time until I was awakened by the kite now fluttering only a few feet away. I started walking back to the hotel and immediately noticed beach combers, guests and kids all began to avoid my approach – their faces turning more horrified with each step I took – some moving out of the way.

Turns out the warm seawater had activated all the teabags in my pocket. A thick, sewer brown syrup had oozed slowly out of my shorts and down my wet legs leaving a snail trail of horror in its wake. I busted out laughing but no one joined in my mirth, they were all still making way for me like Moses parting the sea. I caught up to that elderly couple to explain, but they physically avoided me by hiding in the lobby behind plants.

In due course I found a showerhead and hosed down, cleaning off while dozens of judgmental day-trippers thought the absolute worst of me. I imagine to the public it looked like I didn't want to lose my kite to the point I'd sh*t myself without a care – regardless of the truth. I was strangely shamed even without the sin, so I made haste to the car to escape. Just then a voice called out and a man approached me – I was frozen in embarrassment.

“Hey mister, you forgot your kite!”