

An Adventure Involving Several Crustaceans

By Camille Adkison

In a five-gallon bucket, crammed between interns in the back of a 1999 Ford Taurus, twenty-three juvenile crabs sloshed toward freedom. Danie held her hand over the lid. In the lab, the crabs had proved themselves to be masterful escape artists. Once she had returned from lunch to find one peering down at her from a shelf five feet above its tank. The lid could not protect her from the occasional splash of water that occurred whenever the car turned or accelerated, but it contained the crabs.

Two of the four summer research interns, Danie included, participated in the collection of the crabs. After completing data collection for her summer research project, the crabs were no longer necessary members of the lab. Danie was asked to dispose of the crabs; they could be either injected with lethal chemicals and disposed of as biowaste or returned to their habitat. She felt she owed them a debt after crab-knapping them and decided to enlist the other interns to assist her in her task. The crabs were considered invasive in some parts of New Jersey, so they could only be returned to Sandy Hook. Madeline, the lone vegan, had agreed to join the crab release effort as a matter of principle, but all four of them were excited for a beach trip.

The trip to the Jersey Shore was longer than expected. It was the Sun's first appearance in two long rainy weeks and every soul in the garden state wanted to soak it in oceanside.

"Good thing we're going to Sandy Hook. There's no way we'd find parking anywhere else anyway," said Garrett. Everyone promised to pay him back after he passed the park entrance fee through the window. "Anyone have a preference on which beach we should go to?"

"Probably one a bit farther in," said Madeline. "The ones next to the entrance are bound to be crowded and I doubt people will like us releasing a bunch of crabs right next to their toddlers."

They didn't glance at a map. They just kept driving until the number of people decreased to an acceptable level.

"Can we go to the next one? We're probably getting to the end of the road and I'm ready to get out of this car," said Mark.

Everyone agreed and Garrett pulled into the next lot. After a quick stretch they began the hike to the beach. Too far from the beach to hear or see the water, they followed signs pointing to the beach. By the time they reached the beach area they had all taken a turn carrying the crabs. Most of the water had escaped during the car ride. None of them were from New Jersey, but Garrett drove like he was.

They reached a rubber matt path that had been placed over the scorching sand to aide those with coolers and unprotected feet. In front of the path was a sign that read "Gunnison Beach" in large

white letters. It was the smaller sign that gave them pause. "Beyond this point you may encounter nude bathers."

"Probably just a couple ladies with their tops off," said Madeline. "That was pretty standard when I studied abroad. It's not a big deal."

"Yeah, no big deal," said Mark.

They followed the rubber path out onto the beach. The sand was so hot that any other path was impossible. Their progress was slowed by the family of four in front of them. The wheels on their cooler kept locking, but nobody protested. It gave them a chance to pass the bucket between them. If anything, it meant Gunnison couldn't be that bad. People brought their kids here.

The path ended a fair distance away from the sea of umbrellas that obscured the ocean view. One naked woman watched the flow of traffic from her beach tent.

Danie had trudged along that sweltering path for too long to turn back. "Eh, not that bad." She said.

"Glad we got it over with," said Garrett.

The interns marched on and encountered a particularly shocking volleyball game. Five men and one woman were engaged in an intense match. The only protective gear between the six of them was two pairs of sunglasses and four socks. Every part of them gyrated and flew freely as they jumped and lunged. *Surely that isn't safe*, thought Danie.

"If we can just get to the water it'll be fine," said Garrett. They were all desperate to cool off and surely no one swam around like that. What if you bumped into someone? It wouldn't be hygienic.

They passed group after group relaxing on beach chairs and towels. No one knew if it was years of unprotected sun exposure or their actual age, but the average nude bather appeared to be over the age of sixty-five. All shapes were celebrated, but the men outnumbered the women twenty to one. It was the clothed interns who were ogled. *Nobody warned ya, did they kids? Wouldn't mind if you joined.*

Mark broke through the sea of umbrellas first. He could see the New York skyline in the distance.

"Water look okay?" Danie asked as she walked to join him.

Danie saw his eyebrows raise over his sunglasses. "Hope nobody was planning on swimming," he answered. Where the water should have been was a fleshy conglomeration of grandpas and grandmas. She grabbed the bucket from Mark's hand and walked to the edge of the water.

"You deserved better," she said as she raised the bucket to dump the crabs out. She realized that releasing twenty-three juvenile crabs into a sea of nudists was not ideal, but no one wanted to haul them and their bucket back through the crowd, over the rubber path, and to another beach.



"Wait, Dan," said Madeline. "We have to get a photo for the lab page. We promised Dr. Grace we would."

"Is that even allowed?" asked Mark.

Danie lowered the bucket and peered over to the edge of the recreation area, "Take it over there with the skyline in the background."

Danie and Madeline held the crabs up with two forced smiles.

As soon as the picture was taken, Danie released the crabs. "Swim away, little ones. I'm sorry."

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"Thanks for the picture, girls," said Dr. Grace. "I'll have one of the grad students put it on the website this week. Did you guys have fun?"

"We released them on Gunnison," said Madeline.

Dr. Grace laughed, "You're not the only ones to make that mistake. I guess we should have warned you."

"Apparently it's the only one in New Jersey," said Danie.

"See any good volleyball?"