

Editor's note: The following article was written as an assignment in a class taught by Bryan Oesterreich at Beaufort County Community College.

## **My Outer Banks Fourth of July**

By GLORIA PHELPS

Spending the fourth of July on the Outer Banks of North Carolina is the ultimate way to celebrate our independence holiday.

My day started early, around 6 a.m., sitting on the cool sand with my toes digging down below the surface, into that area where the sand is still moist, watching a yellow halo appear above the water. As the ocean waves gently crashed against the shore and broke the silence of the morning, I continued to watch the halo until it became a big yellow beach ball suspended high above, casting a glow on the water below.

Feeling inspired by the beauty of the morning, I decided to take a one-mile walk down to the old fishing pier to see if anyone was fishing. The sand was soft and each step left an imprint until the gently lapping waves washed over them. Fiddler crabs, sensing my presence, rapidly crawled into their holes just inside the opening, poking their heads out just enough to see if I presented danger to them or if it was safe to resume their sand crawling.

The fishing pier was bustling with activity below with early morning surfers looking for some tall curling waves to ride. You could hear the slap of their surfboards as they hit the water and jumped atop them to paddle out beyond the breakers, their animated voices carrying to shore.

On the pier there were only five weathered fishermen, using a variety of bait ranging from cut bait, shrimp, squid and blood worms. One of them looked especially haggard in his frayed blue jean shorts and red plaid shirt with the sleeves cut off. He had been fishing all night and inspection of his blue forty-eight quart cooler with fish innards stuck to the top, revealed that his vigilance had paid off in the form of flounder, spot, croaker, sea mullet and blue fish. He proudly smiled when he revealed his bounty and offered to share his catch with me.

When I declined and thanked him, he gave me another grin revealing his caffeine stained teeth. He bid me a good day and I headed back down the beach.

As I opened the screen door of our 27-foot recreational vehicle, the robust scent of freshly brewed coffee rushed outside and blended with the salty ocean air. My husband, Michael, greeted me at the door with a good morning kiss and some coffee in my favorite blue and purple hand thrown pottery mug.

Breakfast consisted of fried eggs, crisp honey cured bacon, lightly browned hash browns smothered in pepper, and cheddar cheese toast.

After breakfast, Michael and I drove south and launched our two red and blue Wilderness Systems Pungo 120 kayaks into the sound at the Canadian hole, just north of Buxton. The water was warm, clear and calm to the point of being slick. I saw a shell moving along the bottom of the soft sandy bottom and picked it up to find a crab living inside. Sensing its fear, I gently returned it to the water.

All of a sudden, a huge brown pelican dive bombs into the water in front of me, startling me. He came up holding a fish, tail wiggling, in his beak and swallowed it whole. His pouch engorges and I could see him swallow and then the pouch narrows back down to normal size.

Paddling further down the shoreline we saw two black Labradors blissfully playing and jumping in the water. One spotted a white heron and commenced to chase it. The heron, fishing in the shallow water close to the shore, ignored the dog until it got about 12 feet from it, then it leisurely lifted its graceful body and flew away about 20 feet and fished some more.

Further along our journey, an undernourished gray raccoon came out to the water, inspected us and upon realizing we could mean danger scurried into the tall green underbrush.

On the way back to shore we noticed a lone windsurfer, obviously a beginner, trying to uphaul the colorful blue, red and yellow sail connected to his Bic longboard. Being windsurfers, but never making it past the novice level, we took a few minutes to offer some advice on proper foot and hand placement. Later when we returned to shore, we paddled by him and saw his tall sail catch a light southwest wind and gracefully glide across the water.

In the afternoon we visited the historic town of Manteo. We parked on one of the oleander lined narrow side streets and walked to OB nuts where we purchased some freshly roasted peanuts in the shell. My favorite thing to do is sit on a wooden bench on the quaint waterfront eating my warm salted peanuts as I watch the activities of the busy boat dock as I take in the smells from the local grills.

From our location we have a perfect view of the Elizabeth II, a replica of a 16th-century sailing vessel that is docked at Roanoke Island Festival Park. Feeling re-energized from our peanuts, we decided to take a leisurely walk through the beautiful Elizabethan Gardens. Being an avid gardener, I love wandering through this 10-acre unique American pleasure garden. The Queen's Rose Garden featured many varieties and colors of climbing and sweet scented tea roses, including the dark yellow Queen Elizabeth rose, bright pink

Virginia Dare rose, pristine white The Lost Colony rose and deep velvety red Sir Walter Raleigh rose. Lace cap and oak leaf hydrangeas ranged in size, shape and color from white, dusty pink to deep purple. Magnolias, hibiscus, bedding plants and herbs were admixed along pine straw lined paths, accented by aged cement garden statuary. No visit is complete without stopping at the octagon shaped, thatched roof gazebo overlooking the sound. Upon exiting, I purchased a red star hibiscus plant, ablaze with blooms to add to my own meager perennial garden.

For dinner we drove to our daughter and son-in-law's cottage at Buxton where we were met with lots of slobbery (put deliciously sweet) kisses from our 2-year-old grandson and hugs from our 4- and 12-year-old granddaughters. We dined on charcoal grilled plump juicy hot dogs, potato chips and baked beans seasoned with brown sugar and bacon. For dessert we went to Uncle Eddy's Frozen Custard, where we found a variety of homemade scooped creamy ice cream. We chose sugar cones and waffle cones of flavors such as Butterfinger blast, rum raisin, mocha coffee bean, fresh blueberry, Hawaiian sunrise, decadent chocolate and the all-time favorite, vanilla.

After our creamy treat, we drove to the ferry dock at Hatteras to view the fireworks display scheduled for dusk. Soon after parking and unfolding our canvas chairs, the much-anticipated display began with a thump, thump, and then the night sky became a canvas of ever-changing light displays. Colors of red, blue, white and purple burst into the darkness and became spiraling fingers of lights beckoning downward, much like an ornamental fountain. The grand finale consisted of multiple explosions of fireworks that danced and swirled through the black night heralding the independence of this great nation.

What a most exciting way to end a glorious day!