

Come and Go

Even today I vividly remember running across the hot sand, the salty air stroking through my hair while my parents were struggling to set up a blanket and look after their two very energetic kids, aged five and six, at once. Together with my younger brother I basically grew up visiting the beaches of the Baltic Sea in the North of Germany every summer. The last opportunity I got to see the places that had basically witnessed me growing older had been before the lockdown - when breathing without fabric covering my face had yet to seem like a piece of freedom.

Back in June I turned eighteen and instead of going swimming I stayed home. The familiar feeling of sunscreen sticking to my skin faded, just like the sea itself is nowadays.

I started to wonder how many times I will be able to visit the shore, shushing away the seagulls which tried to attack the ice cream cone in my hand. Or complaining about the never-ending amount of sand we would drag home after every single trip. In our shoes, underneath the carpet, in some corner months later, we would always find more. Little six-year-old me was convinced that the beaches and the water wouldn't end anywhere.

But nothing lasts forever. A desert can run out of sand, an ocean can run out of water, a human can run out of days to live. Time changes everything and sometimes our existence is to blame.

It's us who leave broken bottles behind, who throw smoked cigarettes away. While the Baltic Sea witnessed me becoming an adult, I had to watch it turning into a trash dump for more and more people. My personal wonderland got dirtied, not only literally, but practically.

And whenever I found myself picking up the signs of mistreatment to reduce the danger of injuries, I wanted to clench my hands into fists despite them being filled with shattered glass. The sea might not feel the pain, I certainly do. The day I couldn't celebrate my birthday at this special place I realised that the virus threatens our existence, but rewards nature with a break that was long overdue.

Suddenly I found it much easier to stay put in my room because our unintelligent species is forced to stop from ruining our very own resources. The elements that keep us alive. You don't have to like swimming to understand that the water functions as a storage for carbon dioxide. Yet we don't seem to grasp its importance for our existence.

„Do you know what happens when you boil water for too long?“ My mom had once asked me this questions during a car ride that I had gotten bored on years ago. She told me I had nodded and had explained how the water would disappear. Right, it disappears. That is the easy way to describe the outcome of climate change, if *we* continue to walk in our tracks.

The virus is our opportunity - We need to seize it.

Once we have control over the pandemic with a vaccine, the horrors of lockdowns and self-isolation will vanish soon enough. At this very moment we are running out of time, not because our ecosystems are dying, but because we are.

On top of that, studies show that six out of ten kids can't properly swim in Germany since no one has taught them. Most of them have not seen a real ocean in their lives so far - Why do schools still have to teach elementary school students about the functions of an ecosystem, instead of actually visiting them? When I was their age I confidently let the waves rock my body while my parents, who had shown me how to use my limbs in order not to sink, were watching from nearby. Nothing has been able to compare to the sensation of floating on the soft surface like I was a weightless snowflake dancing through the air.

We are born with a limited, but unknown amount of days on our life account. In this way we reassemble the grains of sand at the coast, seemingly endless in number and ending somewhere nevertheless. There is no reason to miss out on opportunities.

Humans come and go, the Baltic Sea has remained ever since. Let's protect all these wonderful spots that should be surrounded by laughter, not pain or cruelty.

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