

Once More Unto the Beach

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I've got beach on the brain.

I usually do this time of year, but after *The Winter that Almost Sent Us Over the Edge* and *The Spring That Almost Gave Us Hypothermia*, I'm more feverish than ever to collect on the golden season.

What's more, our weekly blizzards provided ample time for reflections of the stuck-at-home variety. Mine were escapist, and I thought a lot about family trips to the beach.

But as I remembered that old beach magic, a feeling of dread circled toward me like a gull locked in on unguarded crackers.

Going to the beach was hard. We really weren't that good at it.

This was a problem well worth solving, especially *this* year, and solve it I did.

My mistake has been going to the beach with the intentions of a minimalist but within the reality of being a creature-comfort-loving husband of a not-entirely-happy-to-be-at-the-beach wife and the father of two we-love-the-beach-but-we-want-what-we-want-when-we-want-it children.

In *theory*, going to the beach with the attitude that less (stuff) is more (the essence of the experience) appeals to me.

Oh, to feel secure with one bag. To be sated with only a blanket, a book, a bottle of sun block, and a towel. To measure myself by what I can leave behind as I strike off across the sandy plains. To travel lightly, to live simply so that others might simply live, to be the change I seek in the world.

Nonsense. For us anyway.

We need stuff, and we need lots of it.

We need things to eat and things to drink. We need things for lying down, sitting, and floating. We need things to save our skin. There are things to keep cold, and people to keep warm and dry. We need shade where there is none. We must fly things, throw and catch things, and build elaborate things that will soon disappear. We'll take pictures of things, talk into things, and, God willing, some of us will read and write things.

So, at the back of the Subaru wagon last summer, we loaded ourselves like Nepalese porters, two of us, the 5 and 8 year olds, unreliable ne'er-do-wells who abandoned the better part of their loads within twenty yards but remained adamant that nothing be

left behind.

My wife and I claimed our spot on the beach with aching arms.

But the heaviest thing I carried was an unwillingness to discard my vision of Zen-like simplicity so I could embrace moving our earthly possessions across the sands.

Well, I'm on board now and raring to go.

What helped me get to this state of readiness?

I've thought a lot about some of the beachgoers I saw last summer. I've asked myself what accounted for their placid demeanors as they transported as much as or more than we were. Why did they look happier, better adjusted, at peace with their world? And why were they almost always passing us?

And now I see it. They had what we did not: wheels.

Wheels were turning everywhere, and I had never noticed. Everyone was on a roll but us. Coolers on wheels. Beach chairs and beach bags on wheels. Red wagons. Carts with impossibly large loads gliding right along. Some were called Wonder Wheelers, and what a wonder they were.

Indeed, wheels solve just about everything. As long as you know you need them.

I plan to spend the rest of June putting my new vision to the test. What better time to practice? No crowds, easy parking, and few witnesses when we make rookie mistakes or if I'm reduced to using a wheelbarrow until I can afford a real beach cart.

There's no time to waste. Before we know it, August will be shuttered up, schools will once again issue invitations that can't be refused, and the sun will draw away like a skittish horse we wish would stay at the fence rail.

And I won't forget that the first day of summer, June 21<sup>st</sup>, was also its longest. In terms of precious daylight hours, it's all downhill from there. Not in the least depressing--and downright fun--if you're on wheels.