

Our Oceans, Our Plastic

Poetry Submission

In My Room I Can See the Sea

Jasmine Brite

In my room I can see the sea.
Just how I thought it should be,
The way that my grandmother described it to me,
The way that her grandmother saw it.

I painted my walls just like she said.

My ceiling was light blue,
As light as the sky,
But no clouds of course because that would be silly.
But I did draw the fish,
Or what I thought they should look like.
I made them flashy and bright.
Im not sure if that's what they were,
But I hoped maybe they might.
Grandma said they were the birds of the sea,
So I drew them with wings.
But she also said they had gills,
Gills, what a funny sounding word!
She said they are what fish used to breath,
Slits on the side of their head that filtered salt water.
So I drew slits on the side of the fish's head,

I don't know if I drew it right.
But I tried to imagine,
The creature that I never saw.
I wanted to draw dolphins and whales,
But Grandma said that only a dolphin would fit,
Because a whale was too big.
How big could it be?
She said it was bigger than an elephant,
Which didn't make sense,
Because elephants are the biggest creatures in the world.
So I just drew a dolphin.
A long tube shaped animal,
With a snout like a dog,
And wings to swim with,
And a triangle on its back,
With a hole on top of its head,
Just like grandma described it.

The walls of my room were a darker blue on the top,
The color of a male peacock's feathers.
There I drew creatures called sharks and turtles,
Sharks looked like dolphins,
I just had to take away the hole and add more teeth,
Because Grandma said they were supposed to be scary.
Turtles supposedly had shells,
With their head and flippers sticking out.
So I drew the only shell I knew,
the symbol of the oil company,

Grandma couldn't remember her grandma's description of flippers,
So I sort of drew arms and legs and a bald head coming out of the shell.

The bottom half of the walls,
I painted the deep blue color of the midnight sky.
Coming out of the floor I painted seaweed.
Apparently people used to eat it,
Grandma said they were green plants,
So I drew grass in the water.
I drew crabs too.
They had an exoskeleton, like the bugs,
I see in the ground and the trees.
So I drew a bug but I added claws,
And eyes that stuck out,
So my crab would fit grandma's description.

In my room I can see the sea
How Grandma's Grandma saw the sea,
As it used to be.

Grandma's Grandma loved the sea.
She told Grandma not to let the beauty of the sea die,
To let it live in the legends.
She recounted her memories of the sea to grandma.
The fantastical creatures:
The thousands of species of fish
The dolphins
The whales

The sharks

The shrimp

The crabs

The seaweed

The coral

The sea slugs

The anemones

The sting rays

The seahorse

The jellyfish

The octopus

The deep sea monsters.

The thousands more

That grandma can't remember.

Grandma's Grandma told her of

The shades of blue and the shallow and deep depths of the sea,

The beauty of the sunlight reflecting off the water,

The constant motion of the waves and life within,

The rocking of the ship,

When sailing on a boat with her father.

The taste of accidentally swallowed salt water,

The sand between her toes,

The crash of the waves on the shore,

The clarity of the water,

On a trip to the beach.

Grandma told me the stories

That her Grandma told her.

They made me hope and dream.
I wanted to swim like a dolphin,
Feel fish brush against my legs,
Feel the waves lapping against my leg,
Feel the sand between my toes.

When I asked to go to the beach,
To see the sea and the marine life,
My parents said no.
I was angry and cried.
I wanted to see it.
The beautiful picture in my mind,
The brightness of life within the water,
That can't possibly be mirrored by what I've seen on land.
What I didn't realize was that I couldn't see it,
Not because my parents wouldn't take me there,
But because it didn't exist.
I didn't believe when they told me.
My parents were lying.
They couldn't be right.
They told me that the ocean was made of plastic.
They took me to my room,
The place where I could see the sea,
Moved me to the window,
And pointed to the mound of plastic that I could see in the distance.
The ocean of plastic.
It hadn't connected
I didn't see

The ocean of plastic
Had once been the sea.

Grandma said that her grandma was a conservationist.

She knew what would happen she did,

How the ocean would die.

She tried to stop it, she did.

She worked to spread the news.

She tried to tell the world.

How plastic was hurting the ocean.

Plastic was used in so many ways:

Bottles, bags, containers.

Used and wasted daily.

Did they not realize their 'disposable lifestyle'?

Not all the plastic made it to landfills and even a smaller percentage were reused,

The plastic made it to the oceans.

It floated about and got concentrated in the oceanic gyres,

Spreading garbage in oceans on a global scale.

Entangling animals, stunting their growth,

Being eaten by animals,

Releasing chemicals and toxins and taking up space in their intestines,

Eventually leaving them dead.

Did no one care?

If the polar bear lived or died,

If all the fish sank to the bottom of the ocean,

If the plastic waste allowed invasive species

To move about and wipe endemic species out.

Did they not find it alarming,

When the North Pacific Gyre was renamed
The Great Pacific Garbage Patch?
Or when the stomach of a dead albatross
Was found full of plastic?
Or when the 'confetti like plastic'
Floated on the surface of the gorgeous blue water?

She told them how they could help:
To use reusable bags,
To use reusable bottles,
To follow RRR: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle,
To make sure that they didn't leave their plastic trash lying around.
She told them that if they worked together,
They could save the ocean,
If each person made their little contribution.
But very few listened.
Very few cared.
So the ocean became one of plastic.
As grandma's grandma said it would.

Now no one can remember how it used to be.
I tried to see the ocean,
I did.
But life in the ocean cannot be replaced.
Nor can it be paralleled by anything on land.
I tried to use my room to see the sea,
To see the birds of the sea
And the bugs of the ocean.

But no matter how I tried,
Now all I see is the ocean of plastic.

So my room is the sea,
Based off what my grandma's fading memory of a description.
An explanation of life in the sea
Created using images of the only life I'd ever seen:
Life on land.

It makes me mad and it makes me sad
That there is someone responsible for this ocean of plastic.
The people of the past,
The ones who didn't care,
The ones who didn't try,
The ones who took away my chance to see the sea.
All I want to know is why?
Why didn't they try when they knew?
When Grandma's grandma told them what would happen?
If they had tried,
Maybe I could have seen the sea from my room.
By looking out the window.

Bibliography

Carr, Vanessa. "An Ocean of Plastic." *PBS*. PBS, 09 Aug. 2010. Web. 31 May 2015.

"Environmental Impact." – *Plastic Oceans*. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 May 2015

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Reflection

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Poem: In My Room I Can See the Sea

When I learned about the Ocean Awareness Contest, I found it intriguing that there were students that were able to put their passion about the ocean into art, whether it be through words or images. When I initially started writing my poem, I was going to do it in the form of a teacher warning her students about the future. Then I thought that it would be more potent if I were to write from the point of view of a child who lives in a world without the beauty of the ocean. I was born and raised in NYC and my family also travels a lot. As a result, I have been able to visit many beaches and I love to learn about marine wildlife at aquariums. It really struck me when I realized that if humans were not careful with plastic consumption and waste, we might lose it all. Of course it would have an immeasurable harmful impact on the environment if we lost the ocean and its inhabitants, but to me it struck closer to home that there could be children of the future who didn't get what I got; That were not able to splash around at the beach and catch all the fish. I hope that my poem is able to create a similar emotional response in others that can call people to help save the ocean, just in case they can't see the danger foretold by all the facts. If hard evidence doesn't persuade them, then just maybe my poem can.