

Episode 6



The Sea

Hello, I'm Richard Winterbottom.

This is Rick's Bite-Sized English, Season Three, Episode Six.

Each week, I tell a short story and then pause to look closely at a word or phrase that's worth noticing and trying out for yourself.

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The old politician was a regular visitor to our house. He would stand swaying on his heels, hands behind his back, contemplating the sea as if it belonged to him. That's what the previous owners told us, anyway.

We don't think about him often now, his politics are distasteful, and in any case the view he admired disappeared years ago, swallowed by a block of flats.

But the sea is still there. It takes barely a minute to reach the public belvedere from where you can watch the fishing boats, the tugs pulling tankers into the estuary and the occasional cruise liner making its entrance. And no more

than five minutes to walk down the hill and feel the salt breeze on your cheeks.

I've lived far from the sea at different times of my life, sometimes for years, but without ever quite losing the sense that something was missing.

I was born within a few metres of the sea, although a very different sea from the one I live beside now, a dirtier, wilder, angrier sea. This makes me a 'sand grown'un', as they say in my hometown. As a child, the sea was simply part of our lives, always there, taken for granted, not questioned.



the sea at Blackpool, my home town

Now, near to my house there are sandy beaches, clean water rarely too cold for swimming, great waves for surfing, a marina for pleasure boats. I don't surf, or sail, and I only dip into the water on the hottest days of summer. My relationship with the sea is simple: I go near it, not in it. My

wife and I go for walks, and several times a week I run, either along the promenade near my house, or up and over the clifftops where the waves crash onto the rocks down below.

My wife also has a close relationship with the sea. She grew up in a fishing village, where the rhythm of daily life was set by the boats. Bells informed the day's likely lunch; one ring for hake, two for cod, three for mackerel. The sea governed everything, routine, livelihood, identity.

Some time ago I was talking to a friend when she suddenly asked, 'How old were you when you first saw the sea? I was astonished. It had never occurred to me that someone might remember the first time they saw the sea. I stared at her, unable to make sense of her question. First? What on earth did she mean by first? She too was flummoxed by my incomprehension.

She explained that she had grown up in a small town in the middle of Spain, far from the coast. In the 1960s, only the wealthy travelled on holiday, and families like hers would spend their summers at home or with nearby relatives. When she was twelve, her parents decided it was time for her and her sisters to visit the sea. She showed me a photo from the trip, a small pistachio-coloured motor car, the ubiquitous Seat 600, her parents in the front and the four children and the grandmother squeezed into the back. The luggage was tied somewhat precariously to the roof. Then the eight-hour journey to the water none of them had ever seen.



a Seat 600

She's no stranger to the sea now, but she has never forgotten that first sight of it.

The sea was there from the start for me, but I've seen how a sea view can vanish, and I've lived far from the sea for long enough to feel its absence. My friend's story reminded me not to take the sea for granted either. But for me the sea remains a constant, something I can always return to.

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In the story I say, "It had never occurred to me that someone might remember the first time they saw the sea."

'It had never occurred to me'. This is a useful expression, and one I think you will probably be familiar with. But do you use it?

We use 'it had never occurred to me' that... not to say that something was impossible, but that it simply hadn't entered our thinking at all. The idea wasn't there. It wasn't considered. It's useful when you are telling a story or an anecdote; something happens, or someone says something, and you realise there's a different way of seeing the world you hadn't accounted for. In the story, my friend's question about the sea opened up a reality I had never known existed.

Try to use this phrase when speaking about a new way of looking at the world, or when something unexpected makes you see things differently.

Please let me know how you will use this language.

It would be great too if you left a comment about the story or the language.

You can do this wherever you listen to the podcast.

I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks for listening.

This was episode six, the final episode in this season, but you can listen to all three seasons of the podcast on my website, Rick's Bite Sized English dot com. That's eighteen episodes in total.

And don't forget that each episode comes with the tape-script, a language worksheet where you can practise the language I focused on at the end of the episode and an

extension worksheet where you can look in more depth at some other language features.

To get the worksheets, all completely free, just sign up for my newsletter.

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