I have been to the ocean, the ocean, the ocean!
Judi Davis

I have always wondered just how dumb people think I am. The lead-in question is, “Hey Jude, what are you doing on . . .?” Just as though they thought I always carried a date book with me. “Why do you ask?” O.K. so I bit, I always did and still do. For instance, several years ago my friend Bill sold his home and was moving into a new-old one. He asked me one of those “what are you doing this weekend” questions. As a result, I went down for a weekend in early April to help him remove his things from storage and set up his new home. Somehow, it always seems that moving needs a woman to wash out and organize cupboards, wipe down shelves and windowsills, and clean the bathroom. I knew I would end up going home with whitish prune-like fingertips from being in soapy water too long and broken nails from wedging too many cleaning rags into too many too narrow spaces.

So, there I was in Elma, Washington, lingering over after breakfast coffee on a lazy Sunday morning. We had worked until well past midnight on both Friday and Saturday; we thought we deserved some lazy time on this work-your-butt-off weekend. As we sat sipping our coffee and engaging in the kind of comfortable conversation that friends do, Bill mentioned that he was going to go to the ocean in May. I made the casual comment that I had never been to the ocean.

“Never been to the ocean?”
“No. Well, I have to qualify that. I was taken to the ocean when I was a child, but I don’t remember what it was like, except that I once got sick after playing in the salty water. So, what I meant is that I, the adult, have never been to the ocean.”

“O.K. let’s go.”
“Huh?”
“Get your coat on. Let’s go to the ocean.”

Bill, along with about three quarters of the rest of the world, was much more spontaneous than I. With no apparent thought, he had decided that we were going to go to the ocean. His sense of fun and adventure were
contagious, and I could not see why we shouldn’t go. It was only about a forty-five mile drive from Elma and it would be a nice interlude. We could get back in time to put in another three or four hours of work on the house before I had to leave for home.

I said, “O.K., O.K., alright already, I’m getting my coat.” And in the back of my head I was thinking, Coat? What coat? I don’t wear coats.

Bill wasn’t through surprising me. After combing my hair, putting on lipstick, and making the big decision of what to wear for a non-existent coat from my limited working visit wardrobe, I found that Bill had hauled his older model Harley out of the garage. Wow! He couldn’t have pleased me more. I had given my motorcycle to my son about five years earlier and hadn’t been on a bike since.

The two sweatshirts that I had draped over my arm for the ocean went on early. I felt a bit like the Pillsbury Dough Boy in all those clothing layers. We put on our helmets, climbed on the bike, kicked up a small spurt of gravel, and were on the road. That ride was exhilarating. It felt so good to be on a bike again, the deep throated purring roar of the engine, the bite of wind on my face, and the road flashing by beneath our tires; it didn’t even matter that I was just the passenger.

The early spring day was perfect for our ride. The weak lemony sunshine was almost too bright for eyes used to winter’s gloom, but it was just warm enough to take the chill out of the air and waft the moist scent of sun warmed, newly tilled, rich dark earth to our nostrils. The sunlight enriched the green grass, seemed to add a shimmer to the pink and white blossoms of flowering trees, enhanced the limey green of still crumpled new leaves, and warmed my soul.

As we entered Westport, the sun began to hide behind black roiling clouds and it looked as though our lovely day was going to deteriorate into a day of storm. When we parked and climbed off the bike in front of a great huge pile of red rocks that blocked the sight of the ocean, I didn’t know what to expect, or whether to expect anything. I was whipped by the wind as I climbed up that mountain of moisture slick red rocks so that I could see the ocean on the other side. Our wonderful day was suddenly a grey day, and I was too busy concentrating on where to put my hands and slippery tennis-shoe-clad-feet to look at what was beyond the rocks. I think my first conscious
awareness was of a constant, surging, ancient, primal roar. That age old roar was power, pure, raw, and relentless. Then I lifted my head and I saw it: the ocean, the powerful, the mighty, the beautiful, the awesome Pacific Ocean.

Gray-blue white spumed waves were crashing midway up the rocks where I stood. The rocks trembled with the force of the impact. The spray mist reached up with careless fingers and beaded my eyelashes, hair, and clothing. Far off to my left was what Bill called the jetty; it was a long arm of massive rocks almost obscured by the vapor of the dancing spindrift and waves that were playing a rough and tumble game against them. I stood there and greedily absorbed the magnificent aura of the ocean. I merged with the ocean. My heart beat with every surge of wave. I was enthralled, engulfed with primitive feelings. When I came to myself again, I breathed, “Nothing can ever surpass the awesome grandeur and power of the ocean. I never imagined that the ocean was such a magnificent being.” And then through the roiling black clouds, the sun came out in two radiant slanting shafts to sparkle on the churning waves about a half-a-mile out to sea.

When I got home, I didn’t have whitish prune-like fingertips from being in soapy water too long or broken nails from wedging too many cleaning rags into too many too narrow spaces. There was a tiny round red rock in my pocket and an unforgettable memory locked in my heart.