

NATURISTS FOR A DAY

The northwestern United States and southwestern Canada boast an abundance of mountains. The Pacific coastal range extends almost continuously from the southernmost tip of California to the northernmost corner of British Columbia and around coastal Alaska. These mountains are part of the "Pacific Ring of Fire," a term which refers to the active geology that exists all the way around the Pacific Ocean, affecting every coast it touches.

The theory of plate tectonics suggests that the Pacific Ocean (or rather, the "plate" of earth's crust beneath it) floats about on top of the molten core of the earth and bumps up against continents. Where the ocean and the continents meet, the pressure between them forces molten lava to the surface of the earth. After thirty million years of bumping, exploding, and oozing, the hardened lava forms majestic, cone-shaped mountains, many of which still contain fire at their cores.

The volcanoes occasionally spew lava, rocks, gases, ash, and steam, and once in a great while, they blow their tops, as Mount St. Helens did in Washington State in 1980. More often, though, the heat that is generated by the earth's plates grinding into one another is released more slowly through cracks and fissures in the volcano. Underground reservoirs of water are heated, expand, and are forced to the surface, producing hot springs whose temperatures range anywhere from 90- to 160-degrees Fahrenheit.

These natural pools are loaded with dissolved minerals from the earth that long have been believed to carry healing powers. On the Olympic Peninsula, west of Port Angeles, lies the well-known Sol Duc Hot Springs Resort. Formerly the site of a military barracks, it now has about thirty small cabins and a bathhouse, where thousands visit every year to "take the waters." Three large public pools collect the sulfurous water that pours from the earth.

While public baths like Sol Duc are popular among tourists, locals in the know often prefer the more primitive hot springs hidden in the

mountains. Naturists—people who prefer to conduct their lives in the nude—gather at these hidden sites, guarding their exact locations and keeping the knowledge alive through word of mouth. Once you are privy to this network of information, you can enjoy these hot springs as the naturists do.

Developed resorts like Sol Duc require an entrance fee to enjoy the pools and other amenities, but they also require guests to wear swimming suits. Wherever a hot springs resort exists, though, you can be sure that there are many natural hot springs to be found in the same area. Such is the case with Olympic Hot Springs, a lesser-known, undeveloped pool in the mountains nearby. Like most of the natural springs, it is accessible only by hiking through the woods along a semi-secret trail at the end of a particular dirt road. Hot springs such as this one can be found by those who are looking for them, but rarely does one stumble upon them by accident. That makes these natural baths a hidden, but treasured, resource among those who want to enjoy them in relative privacy.

Renesmee had long expressed curiosity about nude human and vampire bodies, and since visiting hot springs is a Northwest tradition, we thought it was an obvious way to satisfy her curiosity and also enjoy ourselves. We would be a naturist family for a day and partake of one of the oldest traditions in the world—public bathing.

On a gray, fall afternoon when Renesmee was one human year old—she looked five or six—Bella and I took her to find the Olympic Hot Springs. We warned her in advance that others might be there and that they might not be wearing any clothing. We explained the etiquette of nude bathing, which is, essentially, to pretend that no one is naked. No staring, pointing, or commenting on another's body is allowed, though it is fine to look discretely. It is not polite to “show” someone's nude image to someone else. It is inappropriate to touch another's private areas and if somebody ever tries to do that, it is important to tell your Momma and Daddy right away. If she had any questions, she was to ask us privately.

With these rules in mind and with my bathing suit in tow—in case we did run into humans—the three of us began the two-mile hike to find the spring. We watched for others, but we neither heard nor saw anyone

else, and all we could smell as we proceeded was the pungent scent of sulfur. We were hoping to have the pool to ourselves because Bella's and my skin, even in heavy forest shade, was likely to stand out. More significant though, was the obvious anatomical difference between myself and a human male. Fortunately for us, when we reached the pool, it was deserted.

As we disrobed—Renesmee insisting that she needed no assistance from her mother—we hung our clothing on nails that had been pounded into a piece of lumber attached to a tree for that purpose. I held Bella's hand to steady her as she stepped into the pool (though she didn't need it) and I followed her in. I saw Renesmee's eyes grow large as she stared first at her mother's naked form and then at mine before we settled into the water. Her mother looked like the diagrams she had seen of nude women, but I didn't exactly match those of the nude men.

Where human men's penises hang flaccid most of the time, vampire penises never do. Ours do not grow and shrink like a human's, but remain rigid and upright against our bodies. We tend to be somewhat larger in that area than erect human men, and heavier, as well, given the solidity of our flesh. Perhaps those characteristics are meant as another kind of enticement to human prey. For the purposes of public bathing, though, it would be awkward. Should we encounter others, my continuous "erection" might be cause for alarm among humans, especially if they had children in tow.

I am told that seeing an erect penis for the first time can be quite a surprise for a female and our daughter was no exception. We had explained to Renesmee that human and vampire men are different, but until she learned otherwise, most likely I would be what she thought of as normal. It hadn't occurred to me that her vampire father might be setting her up for disappointment later in her life. Once I considered it, though, I realized that her sharp eyes had probably already caught glimpses of the wolves in the nude when they phased. We had briefly considered inviting Jacob to come with us, and though that wouldn't seem inappropriate to true naturists, we felt a little uneasy about it, given that Jacob and Renesmee might become betrothed one day. There are no rules when your

child is one of a kind, so as in this case, we find ourselves making them up as we go along.

There is something wonderfully freeing about being outside in the nude. It's hard to explain, but I could see how nudity might become addictive. Communing with nature is especially enjoyable if you are sitting in a warm-to-hot pool with the peaceful, green forest all around. Though as vampires, we function the same regardless of our body temperature, the heated water did lend a feeling of muscle relaxation. Possibly, it was just an illusion.

The temperature of hot springs varies depending on how much rain has fallen recently and due to the fluctuations of the steam beneath the earth's surface. I would have put the pool's temperature on this day at about one hundred two degrees. It began to cool down slightly when a light drizzle set in.

The underground spring beneath us flowed vigorously, causing our soaking pool to continuously overflow and refresh itself with heated water. Over the years, enterprising individuals had dug an actual pool, which would hold eight or ten people in comfort. They also lined the bottom of the pool with flat stones that provided a firm floor and also prevented it from becoming muddy. A shallow trench encircled the deeper hole and the flat shelf thus created, as well as the sides, were set with flat stones to create an underwater bench. One got into the pool by stepping on the bench and then sitting, letting your feet dangle into the deeper water below. The central part of the pool was five feet deep and the bench lay a foot under water.

We thought we might visit hot springs regularly if we enjoyed it and so far, it appeared that Renesmee really enjoyed it. I've heard that it is common for human children, even infants, to get very excited when their clothing is removed. Carlisle says babies in hospital nurseries will kick their legs and gurgle while their diapers are being changed and their bottoms are bare. Esme says it's true for toddlers too, that often they love nothing more than to peel off their clothes and run around naked.

Renesmee reacted that way to being naked outside. She didn't join us in the pool at first, turning instead into a virtual pogo stick, springing ten

feet into the air over and over. She laughed and giggled and lay down on the ground and kicked her bare legs in the air. Her mother and I were highly amused.

Eventually, she got curious about the bubbling pool and decided she wanted to check it out, or perhaps she simply got chilled. Because the rocks were slippery, Bella stood on the bench and took Renesmee's hand in spite of Nessie's insistence that she could get into the pool by herself. We had a nice long soak in the incessant drizzle with Renesmee getting in and out of the pool as she warmed up and cooled off.

While Nessie was in the pool, Bella taught her how to roll onto her back and float. Bella held her hands beneath Nessie's back, demonstrating the arch she needed to make. Then gradually, Bella removed her hands, surprising Nessie when she discovered she was floating all by herself. Renesmee was amazed at how easy it was. We didn't tell her that her chubby bottom probably had something to do with it, a body's fat content being highly useful in backfloating. Bella told me that saying such a thing to a girl is tantamount to child abuse. Likely our beautiful daughter would be scarred for the rest of her life, believing she had a "fat butt." Little girls were supposed to have chubby bottoms, weren't they? Shows you what I know about it.

After Nessie learned to backfloat, I taught her the next essential skill—the dog paddle. I held my palm beneath her tummy and she naturally moved her hands in the correct way, having seen the wolves swim across the river. I showed her how to cup her hands to create more resistance and then Bella got her to kick her legs. It wasn't long before Renesmee could pull herself around the pool in a rudimentary dog paddle. Floating and paddling are two critical skills for surviving in deep water, so we were very proud of Renesmee's accomplishments. She was a natural.

Like any five-year-old, Renesmee got a huge kick out of pretending that the bubbles in the pool were coming from between her legs. When she ate human food, her body functioned the same as a human's, so she had previously discovered the intrinsic (and infinite) humor of intestinal gas.

We had had to teach Nessie that it was impolite to fart as loudly as possible and then to laugh like she had told a hilarious joke. She later discovered how funny it was when she “blew bubbles” in the bathtub. Carlisle says that this fascination is also common for children of a certain age (and some men at any age), so we were relatively indulgent, assuming it would pass (ha ha). I remembered the first time Nessie passed gas while eating her dinner. She jumped from her chair and whipped around to see what had “tickled” her, startled confusion written on her face.

“Your butt got you, didn’t it?” Emmett asked her with his eyes very wide, resisting a smile. Renesmee looked at him and nodded her head gravely. The joke only worked a couple of times before she realized that Emmett was teasing her. So now whenever she farts, she immediately starts laughing like a hyena.

After a couple of hours, Renesmee started showing signs of fatigue, so we reluctantly left the warm waters of the mineral pool, dried off with towels, and pulled on our clothes. There was something about this naturist thing, feeling free and at one with God’s creation. Maybe we could talk Alice and Jasper into coming with us next time.

Postscript: The first thing Renesmee did when she got home was find Aunt Rose and tell her how she was getting some red “pubic hairs” like Momma when she got big. Nice.

Edward

