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The Picture

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The Picture || **J.H. COURTNEY**

The little girl and her brother sat on the rocks bordering Asilomar Beach, he with his hand tightly holding hers. She was three, he six. They were waiting for their picture to be taken. In front of them they could see and hear the ocean waves rolling up onto the beach. Seagulls were raising a raucous about something edible in the water and now and then one of them would skim over the surface and snatch up a small fish. A heavy mist was drifting in and the children could hear the foghorn at the nearby lighthouse.

Down on the beach, in front of the children, were their mother, father, and uncle. Their mother was spreading out a picnic lunch. The adults and the children were all warmly clothed. It seemed a strange day to be on the beach but it was the only day their uncle could visit. Uncle Charlie was an avid and skilled photographer and wanted to capture a good picture of his niece and nephew.

After several takes, Uncle Charlie seemed satisfied. He helped the children down from the high rocks and packed away his photographic equipment. The beach party ensued, with deviled egg sandwiches, a hot thermos of soup, milk for the children and sodas for the adults. To cap it off there was a birthday cake for the little girl. It was her third birthday.

After eating, the children played built castles in

the sand while the adults talked and caught up on family matters. Then they all walked up to the road, climbed into the old car, and drove back to their house on David Street in Pacific Grove. Uncle Charlie got into his own car and headed back to his home in the Central Valley of California.

It was 1942, World War II was in progress, and it was the heyday of the fishing industry in California. The children's father worked for the State of California inspecting the operations of fish canneries along what was to become known as "Cannery Row."

Time passed and one day Uncle Charlie came to visit the family again. He brought a framed picture of the children sitting on the rocks the year before. It was a black and white picture, large, and printed on expensive matte paper. It captured both the foggy atmosphere of the day and the innocence of the children's faces. It became a family treasure.

All of the family is gone now, except the little girl who has grown old and has arthritis. On this day she happens to be working with family photos and her hand pauses on the picture taken at Asilomar Beach back in 1942. She smiles, remembering, and touches the face of her brother. Then she sighs, places the photo aside for copying, and goes on with her work.