

## The Five Meter Wall

Bill Menke, August 29, 2182

We are decommissioning the Five Meter Wall today.

“Decommissioning”, we say., and not “abandoning”, for we do not want to give the impression that anything is amiss or that today’s event was unplanned for. Still, today is a sad day for me, who grew up in Strip Five, the part of East Rockaway between Walls Five and Six. The apartments between Main Street and Atlantic Avenue were my haunt, and even though I now live and work in Malverne, which is mostly in Strip Seven, my daily routine often took me south, to Strip Five at the shore of the sea.

For the most part, the walls are not really “walls”, but rather earthen berms that run east-west across Long Island. Walls One through Three were built – and submerged below the sea - long before I was born. Strip Four was still inhabitable when I was a kid, though it was getting pretty soggy by the time my teenage years ended. Strip Five was the focus of my early life, though of course I would occasionally travel into the higher Strips. Only Walls Five, Six and Seven actually exist. The Feds will start to build the Eight Meter Wall sometime during the next decade.

The arithmetic of sea level rise is simple. The sea is rising 2.9 centimeters per year – and the UN says that they can probably hold it to that rate indefinitely. So, we decommission one strip every thirty-five years. Long Island is a pretty big place and its center is well above Strip Sixty-Two – which is the last strip we’ll need, for at that point all the glaciers on Earth will be gone. Of course, the Island will be ridiculously skinny then, but that time is a very long way off.

I’m not super sure how the system of Walls started, for it was way before my time and people now do not like to talk about the Oil Age, when folk polluted the atmosphere and got sea level rise started. I also don’t know why we measure the walls in meters, not yards, for we all still use the English system when we measure other things. Maybe the One Yard Wall just seemed awkward, or too reminiscent of football.

We’re not the only part of the country with Walls, of course. Jersey has them, and Florida and a lot of other parts of the East Coast, too. Florida decommissioned their Five Meter Wall last year. We were all sad to learn that Lake Okeechobee had become a bay. Florida does things differently than we do. Very few people live in their Strip Six. It has been converted into a nature preserve for the alligators.

I considered moving to Strip Six, but it was too expensive. I would have thought that nobody would want to live in a place that has only thirty-five years to go, but exactly the opposite is true. People love living near the sea! And because you can’t get insurance, nothing new gets built and rents are exorbitant. By the way, nothing prevents you from living in one of the decommissioned strips, at least if you owned land there originally. That was decided by the famous court case, Ramirez vs. the United States, back around the year 2075. But there are two catches: the government will charge you if you have to be evacuated in a storm; and the sewage system doesn’t work in a decommissioned strip (and you’re not allowed to dump your waste in the sea). So only a few really well-off people who can afford self-sufficient houses on stilts live there.

But here I am, today, standing in Main Street. It's low tide, so the street is completely dry. All of the wooden houses are gone. Actually, their owners made out pretty well, selling them to recyclers. Now that there's a global ban on tree harvests, old wood is really valuable. They say that this ban is only "temporary" and that cutting will resume after the world's forests have reached their peak growth, but I figure that's a long time off. In the next few years, the concrete buildings – like the one I grew up in – will be gone, too. They'll be stripped of anything recyclable and ground up into the gravel that will go into the Eight Meter Wall. You think that they'd just use the material in the Five Meter Wall, but it, like a sandbar, helps to reduce the force of the sea. Wall Five stays and the apartments go.

I think that I'll walk down to the end of Main Street and check out the new Mill River Floodgate & Pump Station. The old gate is too low and never worked right, anyway. I've heard that you can see swans there.

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*A fictional, but well-informed, account of the future, by Bill Menke, August 29, 2022.*