*Dixie Randolph and the Secret of Seabury Beach*by MaryAnn Diorio

Book 1 in The Dixie Randolph Series of Middle-Grade Novels

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THE DIXIE RANDOLPH Series of Middle-Grade Fiction for Children

Book 1: DIXIE RANDOLPH AND THE SECRET OF SEABURY BEACH by MaryAnn Diorio

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*"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

~ Matthew 6: 15 KJV

*Dedicated to My Precious Granddaughter, Annamarie Joy*"Seek truth now, and it shall serve you well forever."~ MaryAnn Diorio
(aka *Nonna*)

**Dixie Randolph and the Secret of Seabury Beach**

**by MaryAnn Diorio**

*Chapter One*

Dixie Randolph stared out her tall, fifth-grade classroom window at the white cumulus clouds floating in the bright blue, June sky. Oh, how she wanted to fly up to one of them, settle into its soft fluffiness, and float away to Seabury Beach! Her heart soared at the thought of her favorite place in the whole wide world. The place where her family had vacationed every summer ever since they'd adopted her from an orphanage in Taiwan when she was five years old.

 That was seven years ago, and her younger sister Heather still wasn't happy about it. Eleven-year-old Heather, the only daughter in the family until Dixie arrived, never let Dixie forget that she'd stolen Heather's favored place.

 "Dixie, please pay attention!" Mrs. Halpin's firm voice drew Dixie back from her daydreams. Didn't Mrs. Halpin know how challenging it was for a twelve-year-old girl to pay attention when summer vacation beckoned her. Sitting in a classroom all day long was very different from roaming the sandy shores of Seabury Beach.

 Dixie took a deep breath and lassoed her straying thoughts. She glanced at the wall clock. In a few moments, the closing bell would ring, and she would be out of there like an arrow shot out of a bow.

 Today was Thursday, the last day of school. It was the day Dixie lived for throughout the long year of academic drudgery called school. A free spirit, she hated the confinement of a desk and a rigid schedule. Exploring the beautiful, little town of Seabury Beach, off the southern coast of Cape Cod, was more to her liking. Indeed, she'd already made it her goal to spend the entirety of her grownup life in that lovely, enchanting town. She would even build a little cottage there and live out her days watching the ebb and flow of the tide as dolphins leapt out of the waters in the distance, and whales made their delightful appearances. She would go barefoot most of the time and collect beautiful seashells along the beach to add to her shell collection.

 Dixie straightened in her seat, folded her hands on her desk, and did her best to focus on Mrs. Halpin. It was so hard concentrating on her teacher's circuitous explanation of long division followed by her year-end, farewell soliloquy. Mrs. Halpin was one of those long-winded people who took an hour to say what could be said in five minutes.

 After what seemed like an eternity, the dismissal bell finally rang. Dixie was the first to jump out of her seat. With a polite thank you and a quick see-you-in-September goodbye to Mrs. Halpin, Dixie slung her backpack onto her shoulders and shouted a yahoo as she flew out the front door of Richardson Elementary School, her two black braids bobbing at the back of her head.

 Free! Free at last!

 She headed toward the waiting school bus, eager to get home. Dad and Mom would be putting the last-minute touches on the packing so that they could leave for Seabury Beach before sunset.

 If, that is, her younger sister Heather didn't start complaining again about having to share a room at the cottage with Dixie. Heather had never taken well to Dixie's adoption.

 "Hey, Dixie! Wait for me!" Her best friend, Ruby Jo Justice, caught up with her. Dixie and Ruby Jo had been BFFs ever since Dixie's adoption. They did almost everything together. Their parents were close, too, and the two families even vacationed together at Seabury Beach every summer.

 Dixie smiled. "Race you to the school bus!"

 Ruby Jo laughed. "Deal!"

 Dixie ran with all her might, propelled more by her exuberance at being free than by her energy level after a long, tiring day at school. It was going to be a great summer, filled with fun and games.

 And who knew what else?

 She reached the door of the school bus just as old Mr. Dwight Castellini opened it. The children called him "Mr. Dwight." With his bushy white eyebrows, he looked like the Reverend James Perry in the novel *Rainbow Valley* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, the story Dixie's English teacher had read to the class that semester. Mr. Dwight was so old, he must have been a school bus driver ever since school buses were invented.

 When Dixie reached the school bus, she turned to Ruby Jo. "Beat you!"

 "You always do." Ruby Jo slowed down to catch her breath. "But one day, Dixie Randolph, I will beat you. Just wait and see."

 Dixie loved that she and Ruby Jo were BFFs. For every crazy idea Dixie came up with, Ruby Jo had a sane one. The two were inseparable, even to the point of doing their homework together nearly every night. Ruby Jo was the sister that Dixie had hoped to have in Heather but, sadly, did not.

 "After you." Dixie stepped back to let Ruby Jo enter the bus first. Then Dixie climbed the three steps into the old bus, walked down the aisle, and followed Ruby Jo into an empty seat in the middle on the right. Dixie threw her backpack on the seat across the aisle to save it for her two older brothers, Tom and Sammy, who would board at the high school stop. Unlike Heather, they'd welcomed her into the family and treated her as though she were their birth sister.

 The school bus hummed with the chatter of children, freshly dismissed from the last day of school. First-graders giggled while jostling for window seats. Middle-graders playfully wrestled each other's arms for the sheer joy of the incipient summer break. A few of the children laid tired heads on their backpacks and closed their eyes for a nap.

 Just then, Heather boarded the bus with one of her girlfriends. Her head held high, Heather walked right past Dixie and found a seat in the back.

 Dixie turned around. "So, would it kill you to say hello to your sister?"

 Heather stopped and gave Dixie a glare. "You're not my sister, and you never will be!" A hateful look crossed Heather's face. "I wish you'd go back to Taiwan where you came from!"

 Like an inflated balloon suddenly punctured, Dixie's heart collapsed into her chest. It was painful enough to hear Heather say those mean words to her at home, but to hear her say them in front of all the kids on the school bus was devastating. Dixie's face burned with shame.

 She faced forward again, her heart crying on the inside. She'd never be good enough to be Heather's sister. Never. Maybe it would have been better if she'd never been adopted. Just as Heather always said. Maybe it would have been better if the orphanage in Taiwan had kept her there after her birth parents died in that terrible earthquake.

 Ruby Jo nudged her arm. "Don't pay any attention to her, Dixie. She doesn't know what a great girl you are."

 But Ruby Jo's attempt to comfort Dixie didn't work. More than anything else in the world, Dixie wanted Heather to accept her as a real sister. A forever sister. But would that ever happen?

 Dixie hid the question deep in her heart and forced herself to smile. "I thought this day would never come."

 Ruby Jo grinned. "Me, neither. This has been the longest school year in history. I'm ready for vacation."

 "So am I." Forgetting Heather for a moment, Dixie closed her eyes and pictured her beloved Seabury Beach. The long stretch of sand that bordered the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Cape Cod rose before her mind's eyes, making her heart quicken. How she loved walking up and down that wide expanse, with Scout, her Golden Retriever, at her side, especially in the early hours of the morning when the sun was just coming up and the seagulls danced in exuberant praise to the God Who created them!

 The tiny town after which the beach was named lay on the lower part of Cape Cod, with the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Its small gray cottages, framed by white picket fences, created a safe and charming environment where families could relax and have fun. Dunes dotted the beach here and there, covered with tall, thin grasses and lots of multi-colored pebbles and seashells. Dixie had already collected dozens of them for her treasured collection. This summer she would collect even more.

 She smiled. No doubt about it. Seabury Beach was the best place in the whole world.

 But there was a dark side to Seabury Beach as well. Dixie had first learned of it the week before, when she'd overheard her dad and Ruby Jo's father talk about a longstanding feud between two prominent families of Seabury Beach: the Wards and the Sullivans. Seemed as though two centuries earlier, sailor Jeremiah Ward had traveled to a faraway land and had brought a treasure chest back home to Seabury Beach. But Henry Sullivan, a rowdy fellow with a mean temper, had falsely claimed that the Ward family owed the Sullivan family a huge sum of money and ought to hand over the treasure chest to pay it back.

 Henry Sullivan continued to press for the treasure chest, but Jeremiah Ward refused to budge. After a while, the two families came to blows, resulting in the death of Sailor Ward at the hands of Henry Sullivan and Henry's theft of the chest. Since then, the Wards and the Sullivans had not spoken to each other, and no one in Seabury Beach had ever discovered what had happened to the treasure chest. Talk was that someone in the Sullivan family had hidden it somewhere in the village of Seabury Beach. But no one knew for sure.

 Dixie shuddered. What if the treasure chest were still in Seabury Beach? What if the treasure were still inside the chest? What if the treasure were worth millions of dollars?

 What if? What if? What if?

 A shiver ran down her spine. What if she would be the one to find it?

\* \* \* \*

 The grinding sound of the school bus pulling away from the curb dragged Dixie's wandering thoughts back to the present. One more stop at the high school to pick up the last load of students, including her older brothers, and then they'd head home.

 Dixie turned to Ruby Jo. "Mama had me pack last night so we could leave as soon as I get home."

 "I wish we were leaving today, too, but my dad has to work late tonight. He said we could get on the road first thing in the morning."

 "Good. I'll save you a spot at the clubhouse lunch table." Dixie and Ruby Jo spent hours at the clubhouse at Seabury Beach, especially on rainy days when they couldn't go exploring. The clubhouse was filled with lots of fun activities for both kids and grown-ups. There was a ping-pong table, a basketball court, an indoor swimming pool, a bowling alley, and a roller-skating rink. There was also a large kitchen staffed with year-round residents who prepared the meals, and a huge dining room where families could eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

 "Thanks. Be sure to get our special table near the corner window overlooking the ocean."

 "Will do." Dixie sighed.

 Ruby Jo nudged Dixie's arm. "Hey, Dixie. What should we explore this summer?"

 "I really want to explore the north and south ends of Seabury Beach. We've never been to either one before." Should she tell Ruby Jo now about overhearing their fathers' conversation or save it for later when they were alone?

 She decided to save it for later, when no one else was around. She couldn't risk anyone's finding out that she and Ruby Jo would be looking for a hidden treasure while at Seabury Beach. It could put them in danger.

 The old school bus bumped along the country road toward Richardson High School where Dixie's older brothers, Tom and Sammy, would board for the rest of the trip home. Mr. Dwight steered the big bus into the high school parking lot, turned off the ignition, and waited for his remaining passengers to be dismissed from school. Meanwhile, he whittled away at a small wooden dog he was carving. Mr. Dwight was a farmer and a wood artist. In the mornings and afternoons, he drove the school bus in Dixie's little hometown of Richardson, and during the day he farmed. In his spare time, he whittled wood into toy animals for the children who rode his bus. The kids loved him for it.

 Tom and Sammy finally climbed into the bus. "Hey!" they shouted in unison when they saw Dixie and Ruby Jo. Then they waved at their sister Heather in the back of the bus.

 "Hey, yourselves!" Dixie responded.

 Tom gave her a fist bump. "Are you ready to leave for Seabury Beach?"

 "Boy, am I ready!" Dixie retrieved her backpack from the seat she'd saved across the aisle for her brothers.

 They plopped down onto the seat. Tom, the elder of the two brothers at fifteen, wagged an index finger at Dixie. "I hope you're all packed."

 She glared at him. "I hope *you* are. Last year you made us wait a whole hour for you to finish packing."

 Tom laughed, his freckled nose crinkling above his broad grin. "Yeah. I forgot to put my wet clothes in the dryer."

 "Well, we lost a whole hour off of vacation because of you." Dixie furrowed her eyebrows. "Mom should have made you pack wet clothes. You owe me." Feigning anger, Dixie crossed her arms across her chest and stifled a giggle. Truth be told, she adored her older brothers, even though they loved to tease her.

 Fourteen-year-old Sammy jumped in. He was the taller of the two boys, and the one who teased Dixie the most. "So, what are you and Ruby Jo going to do at Seabury Beach this summer?"

 Dixie smiled and glanced at Ruby Jo. "Explore."

 Ruby Jo nodded emphatically. "Yes. Lots of exploring."

 "What's there to explore?" Sammy asked. "You've been to Seabury Beach every summer for six years now. You've already explored everything in the whole are. What's left to explore?"

 "The whole beach, silly. Seabury Beach is two and a half square miles in size, with lots of dunes and secret coves. We haven't explored all of them yet. I hear there's even a small cave at the north end. Who knows what we'll find?"

 Sammy grunted. "You'll probably find a bunch of dead crabs and broken seashells, all tangled up in smelly seaweed."

 Dixie stuck her tongue out at him. "Or we could find something else."

 Sammy chuckled and elbowed Tom. "Tom, tell these stupid--I mean, imaginative--girls that there's nothing on Seabury Beach but sand and seaweed and dead crabs."

 Dixie stomped her foot on the school bus floor. "Girls are not stupid! You're the one who's stupid for saying that."

 Tom jumped in. "Both of you, stop calling each other 'stupid'! You know Mom's rule about that."

 Dixie turned to Sammy. "I'm sorry I called you stupid, Sammy."

 Sammy lowered his eyes. "I'm sorry I called you stupid, Dixie."

 Tom attempted to ease the tension. "You know, Sammy, we may be surprised at what Dixie and Ruby Jo discover. They're pretty smart girls."

 Sammy raised an eyebrow. "Adventurous, maybe. But smart? I wouldn't call someone smart who searched for dead crabs."

 Tom gave Sammy a warning look. A don't-go-there-again look.

 Dixie scrunched her face. "We're not going to search for dead crabs, Sammy. We just may find them by accident along the way. We're going to search for --"

 Sammy interrupted her. "For what? Hidden treasure?"

 Sammy's words stopped Dixie short. Her breath caught. "Maybe." She again remembered the conversation she'd overheard between her dad and Mr. Justice. "Besides, Ruby Jo and I are a lot smarter than you. We do something useful with our time at Seabury Beach. All you do is go fishing and take naps."

 Sammy lifted his chin and spoke in a British accent, something he did when he was feeling challenged. "I consider those activities very smart things to do while one is on vacation."

 At the sound of Sammy's British accent, Dixie burst out laughing. Sammy was one of those people with whom it was impossible to stay angry for long. His charming ways could melt the hardest heart.

 Just then, the school bus stopped in front of Dixie's house. Her heart soared as she looked out the window. The family van was nearly packed and waiting for her and her siblings to add their suitcases.

 Dixie grabbed her backpack. "Bye, Ruby Jo. See you tomorrow. Come over as soon as you get to Seabury."

 Ruby Jo nodded. "Will do."

 Dixie exited the school bus, followed by Tom and Sammy and, lastly, Heather, who gave Dixie a condescending look. As the bus pulled away, Dixie waved to Ruby Jo. "See you tomorrow!"

 Ruby Jo waved back through the open window and shouted. "Can't wait!"

\* \* \* \*

 After Dixie got off the school bus, she found her father loading the luggage into the back of the family van.

 "Hi, Dixie!" He stopped and gave his daughter a hug. "Are you all set?"

 "Yes. All my stuff is packed and in my bedroom."

 He smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulder. "Then let's go get it."

 Dixie's mother was in the kitchen, packing some snacks for the two-hour road trip. "Hi, Dixie! Don't forget to pack your toothbrush."

 "Hi, Mom! Already did."

 While Dixie grabbed her diary from her bedside table, along with the Nancy Drew mystery she was reading, her father picked up her suitcase to carry it to the van. Dixie followed close behind and stopped in the kitchen. "Mom, I'm ready to go. Do you need help with anything?"

 "No, Sweetie. I have everything under control." Mom wiped a hand across her brow and sighed. "Well, on second thought, maybe I could use some help. Would you grab Scout's bowl and his bag of dogfood?" Scout was the family's Golden Retriever. He loved Seabury Beach as much as Dixie did. Ever since the family had welcomed him as a newborn puppy, Scout had been at Dixie's side. If there were such a thing as a CFF--Canine Friend Forever--Scout was it.

 "Sure, Mom." Putting her diary and her Nancy Drew novel on the kitchen table, Dixie went into the mud room at the back of the house and retrieved Scout's bowl and his dog food. She then carried them out to the car and handed the bowl and bag of dog food to Dad. Afterward, she went back to the kitchen to get her diary and book from the kitchen table.

 But just as she was about to retrieve them, Sammy grabbed her diary. "Ah! A diary! Just what I always wanted."

 "Give me my diary, Sammy!" Dixie reached for her diary, but Sammy pulled his arm back and laughed.

 Dixie shouted. "Mom, Sammy took my diary!"

 Mom turned to Sammy. "Samuel Randolph! You're fourteen years old. Don't you have more sense than to take your sister's diary? Now give it back to her, or else you can spend summer vacation in your room." Mom gave him a warning look.

 Sammy hesitated, but just for a moment. He thrust his arm toward Dixie. "Here's your stupid diary."

 Mom put her hands on her hips. "Samuel Randolph, I told you not to use that word in this house!"

 Just then, Dad walked in. "What's going on here? I can hear the shouting from outside."

 Dixie frowned. "Sammy took my diary and wouldn't give it back to me."

 Dad turned toward Sammy. "For that little trick, Sammy, you will spend the first day at Seabury Beach in your room and the next three days cleaning up the yard."

 "But, Dad!"

 "But, Dad, nothing!" Mr. Randolph raised his voice a decibel. "Now, go get your bags so we can get this show on the road."

 Dixie held her diary close to her heart while she picked up her Nancy Drew novel from the kitchen table. As she left the kitchen, she overheard Heather grumbling about her to their brother Tom in the hallway.

 Dixie's muscles tightened. She flinched at yet another verbal jab by Heather. They had become the norm in the Randolph household lately. Dixie hoped they wouldn't be the norm while they were on summer vacation, too.

 Within the hour, Dixie and her family were on their way to Seabury Beach, with Scout lying at her feet in the back seat. Butterflies danced in Dixie's stomach, doing flipflops at the prospect of another adventure-filled summer. She pulled out her diary, removed the little daisy-covered ballpoint pen attached to it, and wrote:

*Thursday, June 23rd*

 *Dear Diary,*

 *We are finally on our way to Seabury Beach. I thought this day would never come. I am so excited about spending another summer in my favorite place in the whole, wide world. Who knows what Ruby Jo and I will discover this summer? Maybe we'll see dolphins near the shore. Maybe we'll go whale-watching.* She stopped and chewed on the end of her pen. Then she resumed her writing:

*Maybe we'll even discover the hidden treasure that Sailor Ward brought home from his trip across the seas.*

 *Love,

Dixie*

 Dixie replaced the pen on its hook on the back cover of her diary and closed the little daisy-covered book. She leaned her head against the back of the seat, closed her eyes, and smiled. She wouldn't tell anyone except Ruby Jo about the hidden treasure. It would be their secret. The secret of Seabury Beach.

 The thought of discovering the hidden treasure sent a chill down her spine. She couldn't wait to share her idea with Ruby Jo the next day.

 Scout stirred at Dixie's feet. She leaned over and whispered in his ear. "Hey, Scout. How would you like to go hunting for treasure on Seabury Beach?"

 Scout barked.

 Dixie laughed. "I knew you would."

 Sammy tugged on Dixie's ponytail. "What was that all about?"

 "What?" Dixie hedged.

 "Whatever it was you said to Scout that made him bark."

 "That's our secret." Dixie gave Sammy a mischievous smile.

 "Aw, come on, Dixie. Can't you even tell your own brother?" Sammy poked her in the ribs.

 "Stop it, Sammy!"

 He feigned innocence. "Stop what?"

 "You know exactly what I mean."

 Dad's voice came from the driver's seat. "What's going on back there? You know the rules about no fighting in the car."

 Sammy was the first to speak. "We're not fighting."

 Dixie glared at her brother.

 "Well, it sounded a little too loud to me," Dad said. "What's going on?"

 "Sammy poked me in the ribs," Dixie said.

 "Sammy, aren't you a bit too old to be annoying your little sister?"

 Sammy grinned at Dixie. "She likes it."

 "I do not!" Dixie glared at Sammy. Sometimes Sammy could be impossible.

 Dad lifted his voice. "Sammy, would you like me to add garbage detail to your yard detail for the entire summer?"

 Dixie clasped her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. If there were anything Sammy hated, it was garbage duty. It meant he'd have to clear all the dinner plates after every meal, dump the garbage into the trash, and carry the trash to the curb each week for pickup. "Serves you right," she whispered to him under her breath.

 "You won't get away with this, little sister." The grin on Sammy's face belied his words.

 Dixie knew her brother well enough to know that he would never follow through with his threat. As Mom always said, "Sammy is all bark and no bite."

 Which reminded Dixie of Scout. He was still lying at her feet, snuggled on top of her flipflops. She wanted to stretch her legs but the weight of Scout's body prevented her from doing so.

 She tried gently to nudge him because her foot had fallen asleep. "Scout?" She spoke the words softly. "Scout? Can you move over a little? My foot's asleep."

 The Golden Retriever raised his head and gave her a questioning look.

 Dixie tried to pull her foot out from under him. After a few attempts, she finally disengaged her foot and stretched it out on top of his back. "Ah! That's better. I can feel the blood flowing back already."

 She bent over and patted Scout on the head. "We're going to have so much fun at Seabury Beach this summer."

 He yelped, stood up, and nuzzled his nose onto Dixie's lap.

 Dixie petted his long, golden coat. Already her mind raced with the many adventures she and Ruby Jo would go on with Scout at their side. If the hidden treasure were any indication, this would prove to be the most exciting summer of all.

*DIXIE RANDOLPH AND THE SECRET OF SEABURY BEACH*[Learn more here.](https://www.maryanndiorio.com/)