

# Shellboy's VERY SANDY BURROW LESSON



Outer Banks, North Carolina

## Forward

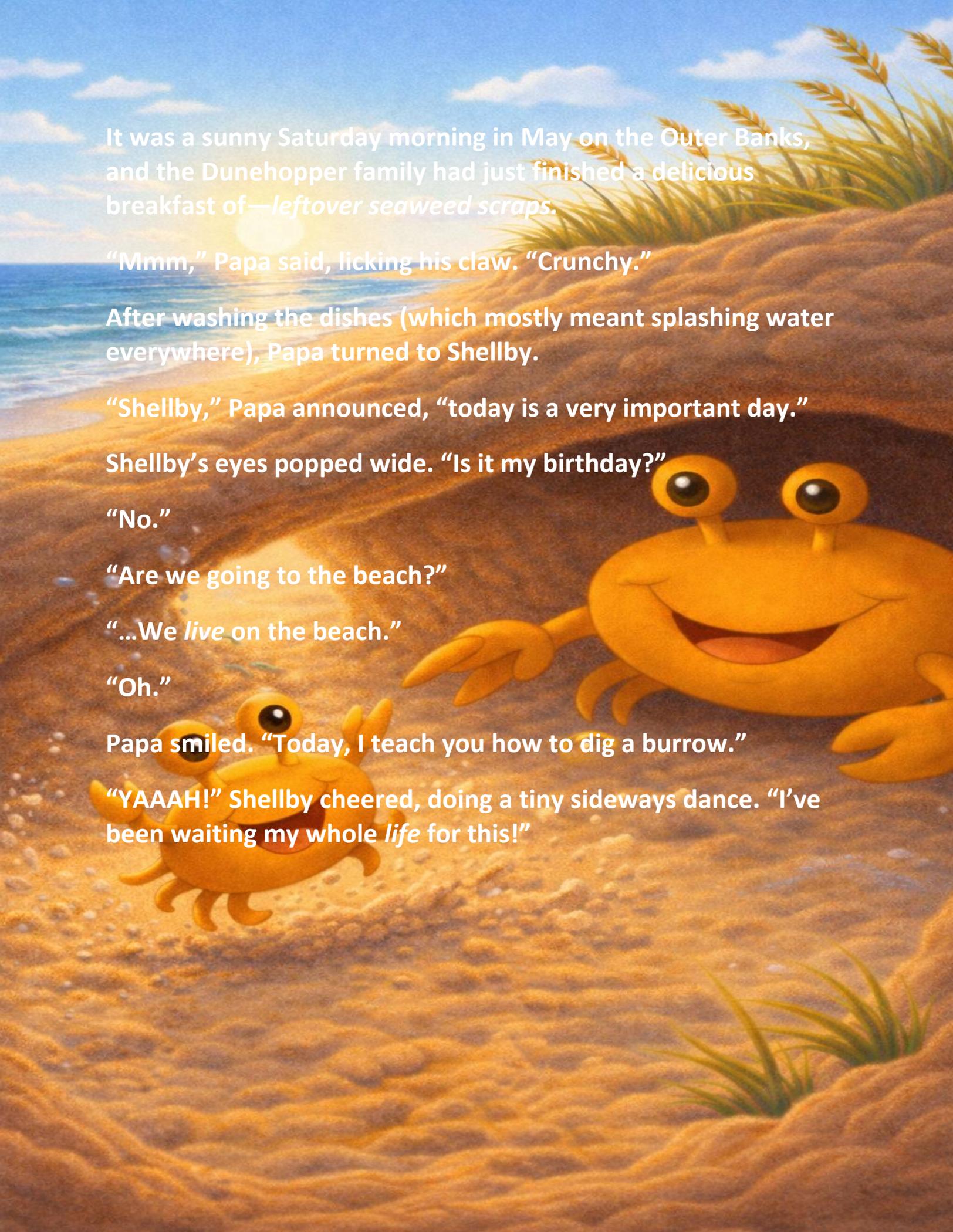
This storybook was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

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It was a sunny Saturday morning in May on the Outer Banks, and the Dunehopper family had just finished a delicious breakfast of—*leftover seaweed scraps*.

“Mmm,” Papa said, licking his claw. “Crunchy.”

After washing the dishes (which mostly meant splashing water everywhere), Papa turned to Shellby.

“Shellby,” Papa announced, “today is a very important day.”

Shellby’s eyes popped wide. “Is it my birthday?”

“No.”

“Are we going to the beach?”

“...We *live* on the beach.”

“Oh.”

Papa smiled. “Today, I teach you how to dig a burrow.”

“YAAAH!” Shellby cheered, doing a tiny sideways dance. “I’ve been waiting my whole *life* for this!”

Papa nodded seriously. "Digging a burrow is one of the most important survival skills a ghost crab can learn. Burrows give us shelter, safety, and a cool place to nap during the hot sun."

Shellby gasped. "A nap cave?!"

"Exactly," Papa said.



Later that afternoon, Papa and Shellby scurried down to the shore.

“Step one,” Papa said, pointing with his claw. “We must choose the *perfect* spot. The sand should be firm but diggable, above the high-tide line, near dunes or plants, safe from waves—but close enough to food.”

Shellby squinted at the sand. “This sand looks... suspicious.”

Papa laughed. “You’ll learn.”



“Step two,” Papa continued, “we scoop with our strong front claws—like tiny shovels. Scoop, lift, and toss the sand out of the hole.”

Shellby warmed up her claw, grabbed a scoop of sand, and—  
**FLICK!**

Sand flew straight into Papa’s face.



Papa blinked. Once. Twice.

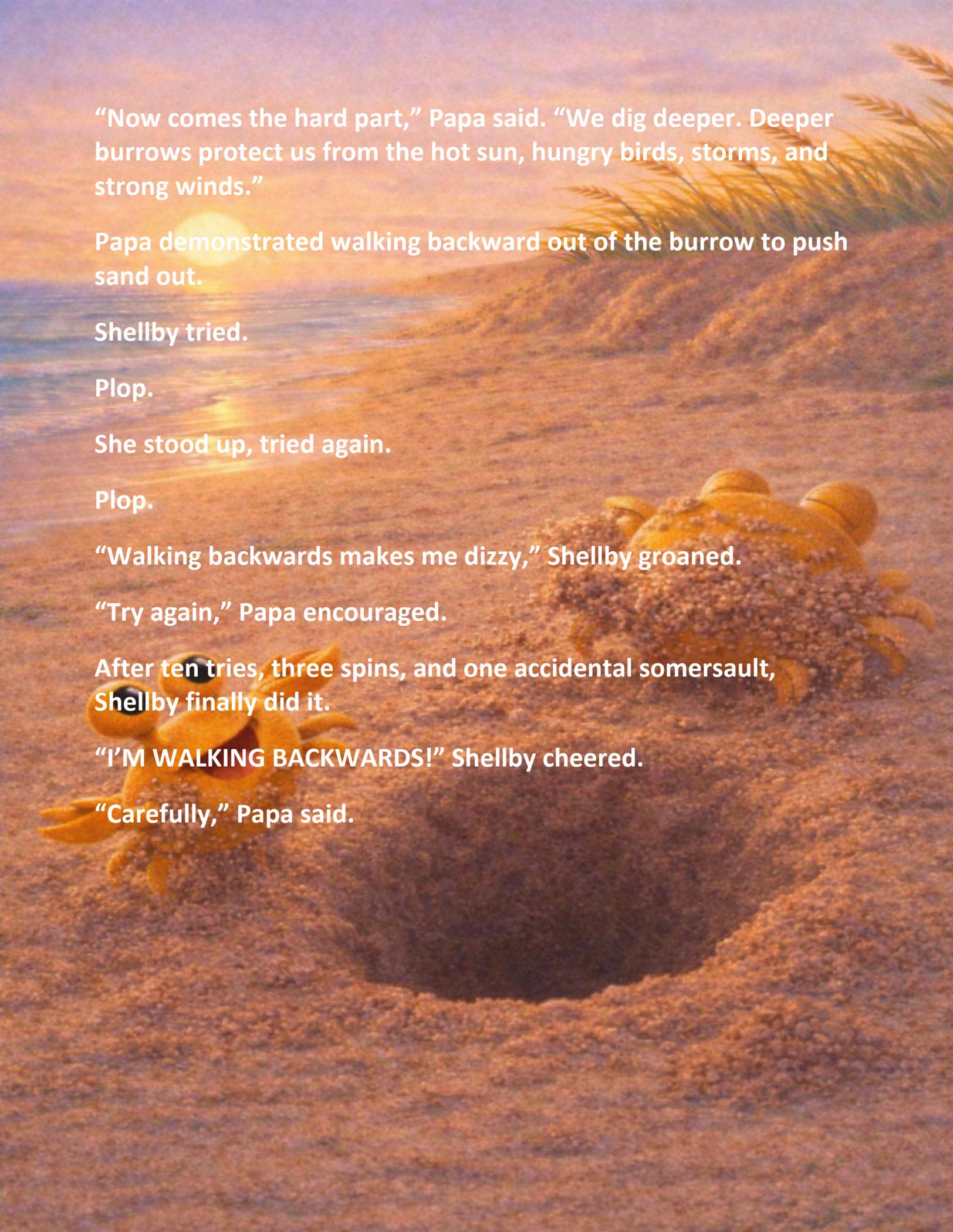
“Well,” Papa chuckled, wiping his eyes, “that was... *enthusiastic* digging.”

“Oops,” Shellby said. “Too much scoop?”

“A little too much scoop,” Papa laughed.

“Scoop and toss is the trick,” Papa explained. “And we leave the sand in little piles near the hole.”



A beach scene at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the sand. In the foreground, a large crab is partially buried in a hole it has dug in the sand. The crab's head and front legs are visible, and it appears to be looking towards the viewer. The background shows the ocean and some beach grasses.

“Now comes the hard part,” Papa said. “We dig deeper. Deeper burrows protect us from the hot sun, hungry birds, storms, and strong winds.”

Papa demonstrated walking backward out of the burrow to push sand out.

Shellby tried.

Plop.

She stood up, tried again.

Plop.

“Walking backwards makes me dizzy,” Shellby groaned.

“Try again,” Papa encouraged.

After ten tries, three spins, and one accidental somersault, Shellby finally did it.

“I’M WALKING BACKWARDS!” Shellby cheered.

“Carefully,” Papa said.

“Now we shape the tunnel,” Papa explained. “Burrows are slanted or spiral-shaped, about one to three feet deep—sometimes deeper—and wide enough to turn around inside.”

Shellby asked, “Why spiral?”

Papa smiled. “Because spirals keep the burrow from collapsing, help it stay cool and moist, and make it harder for predators to reach us.”

Shellby nodded. “Also... spirals are cool.”

“That too,” Papa said.



Papa added, “And remember—ghost crabs are neat diggers. We check and fix our burrows every day, especially after storms.”

Shellby yawned. “Digging is *hard* work.”

After four hours of scooping, tossing, slipping, spinning, and digging, Shellby finally flopped onto the sand.

“I’m tired,” Shellby said. “And thirsty. And sandy in places I didn’t know I had.”

Papa smiled proudly. “I’m very proud of you, Shellby. You’re going to be a *superb burrow-digging crab*.”

Shellby grinned. “Best nap cave ever.”



As the sun dipped low over the Outer Banks, Papa and Shellby scurried home together—leaving behind one very impressive burrow... and one very sandy Papa.



# Did You Know? Ghost Crab Burrow Facts

Did you know...

- Ghost crabs dig burrows to survive! Their burrows protect them from hot sun, strong winds, storms, and hungry predators.
- Burrows stay cooler and wetter than the surface sand, helping ghost crabs avoid drying out during the day.
- Many ghost crab burrows are slanted or spiral-shaped, which helps prevent collapse and makes it harder for predators to reach them.
- A ghost crab may spend hours digging and fixing its burrow, especially after storms or high tides.
- The small piles of sand near a hole are clues that a ghost crab lives there—each pile shows where sand was pushed out while digging.

Next time you walk on the beach, watch your step near small holes and sand piles—you might be walking past a ghost crab's cozy *nap cave*!