

"My Island Home"
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"Don't follow too closely!" my dad ordered Aunt Shelly. On our trip out to Oklahoma, we had ridden with her and had quickly picked up on her habit of tailgating. She laughed now, dismissing her little brother's command as foolishness.

Aunt Shelly, Mom, Nana (my paternal grandmother), my little brother Bryson, and I were heading to St. Simon's Island off the coast of Georgia. I had never been there before, and the prospect of seeing a new environment thrilled me. Unfortunately, my excitement only served to lengthen the journey down there—at least in my mind. Hours and minutes dragged on, and the miles stretched into eternity. But finally, palm trees replaced pines, and the coastline appeared. We had arrived!

Our endurance had certainly paid off. The island was magnificent. Large oaks draped with Spanish moss lined the streets, providing adequate shade for bikers and runners. Palm trees surrounded the quaint, Spanish-styled houses, and a perfectly manicured lawn stretched across the length of the island. Hot, humid air embraced the secluded paradise.

Tying in nicely with the island on which it stood, our condo was small, but comfortable. Bryson and I claimed the room containing two twin beds and a T.V. Never before had I seen such variety in a house. Our bedroom, like all the other rooms, was furnished with crisp white wicker. But our walls were a deep shade of lavender, contrasting beautifully with the light green and yellow of the wallpaper border. White shutters framed our small window, adding to the

room's charm. Color schemes of the entire home ranged from the palest pink to the richest blue. Boasting an atmosphere of cheerfulness, the condo complimented its paradisiacal abode.

"Hey, Ammie, did you see the swimming pool?" Bryson asked me as I unpacked my suitcase. "I can't wait to go there. In fact, I think I'll go there now."

"Hold on one minute, Buddy," I replied. "We have some things to do first. After we're finished, we can go."

During the course of that afternoon, we became acquainted with our condo, the tennis courts, and the swimming pool. The following morning we were up with the sun, ready to explore the rest of the island. I was so glad we'd brought our bikes. Along the sun-dappled sidewalk, we rode for a couple of hours. To be perfectly honest, I was glad we stopped when we did. The sun's rays were intensifying, turning my arms to a dark shade of pink.

"Well, I suppose it is too hot to be doing outdoor activities," Mom said. "What should we do now?"

"We could go see the village," I suggested.

My suggestion proved to be a good one. After a ten minute drive through the eastern side of St. Simon's, quaint shops and restaurants appeared. In addition to the shops and eateries that framed the streets, a playground stood in the middle of the square, and a beautiful lighthouse rose above the sapphire sky. The pier, protruding from the island, was embraced by the vast Atlantic. At first glance I knew the village would be my favorite feature of the island.

Throughout the afternoon we shopped, ate at the local restaurants, and played miniature golf. As evening approached, a gentle breeze set in, cooling the air. The oaks and palms danced in rhythm to the ocean wind. Feeling a sudden burst of energy, I ran to the pier, where fishermen had cast their lines into the water. Resting my hands on the rail, I savored the taste of the salty

air. Never before had I felt so happy and content. The island, separate and distant from the rest of the world, was the perfect haven for me. I had no problems or worries. I was completely free, much like the wind which swept over the sea.

My feelings of freedom and security continued during the week. We swam, played tennis, ate at the island's diners, and toured the lighthouse. In addition to enjoying St. Simon's Island, we also had the opportunity to visit Jekel Island's historical homes, including those that had been owned by the Rockefeller and Vanderbilt households. After exploring its history, we went to the water theme park-a highlight for Bryson. As he and I approached one slide, I said; "We could go down backwards."

Bryson paused and creased his eyebrow, as he always does when faced with a decision. "I don't think so," he responded.

However, as we prepared to get into the two-seater float, he exclaimed; "I changed my mind. Let's go backwards!"

I think he made a wise decision. While plunging downward, I laughed so hard I thought I'd drown, and Bryson screamed; "Yeah, Baby!"

After our first backwards drop, Bryson, his countenance beaming with enthusiasm, urged; "Let's do that again!"

That was one of the best days of our trip. I felt so unattached, like a bird soaring beyond the skyline, looking intently towards the horizon.

Unlike the day at Jekel Island, the day before we were due to go home was quite sobering. Mom and I took a trolley tour of the entire island of St. Simon's. The trolley was stationed in the middle of the village, next to the playground. Though it was only mid-morning, the sun's heat was intense, causing my hair to be plastered to my forehead. However, despite the hot

conditions, our ride was both informative and enjoyable. We visited many ~~different~~ historical sites, but the one which impressed me most was the land on which the Battle of Bloody Marsh was fought. Dubbed the Battle of Bloody Marsh due to the massive Spanish bloodshed, it was amazing to think that James Oglethorpe and his troops had fought on the same island where we now stood. The secluded field was so tranquil and inviting. The only sound to be detected was the rustling of leaves. Yet, over two hundred years ago, the sound of muskets and war drums reigned. The marsh ran red with Spanish blood, and the smell of death dominated the air. Today the island was a paradise, but centuries ago it was not.

Fortunately, the evening was more uplifting. After a nice dinner and competitive game of miniature golf, we took our final walk on the pier. The week had passed far too quickly for me. I gazed at the majestic ocean, the crying gulls, and the lighthouse whose beam illuminated a stretch of water. High tide was coming, and the restless waves crashed against the rocks. This is where my freedom is, I thought. It will be waiting for me when I return. Breathing in the salt air I had come to cherish, I silently said goodbye to the island. Walking from the pier, a gust of wind enveloped me. It was entreating me to look back once more. But I knew I didn't need to. I had found my home, and my home was where my heart would remain.

"I'll come back to you," I promised the island. "And when I do, I know you'll be waiting for me."