

Michael Gates

VOWA/Dominion 2013-2014 Honorable Mention

Some Beach

The alarm clock next to my bed broke the peaceful silence of the early morning with a shrill beeping that begged for me to stop it. Without opening my eyes I felt around blindly on the nightstand for the off button to make the noise stop, and the air went silent when my hand finally found it. A deep breath and a sigh of relief escaped my body. I finally opened my eyes and looked around, not that it did any good at five in the morning when the sun had not even considered brightening the sky yet. My eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness and moments later I was able to see around the room. My bathing suit hung over the bottom edge of my bed and my shirt from the previous day still sat on the floor in a wrinkled mess where I had left it. I closed my eyes and rubbed them with my palm as I let out a deep “I’m up way too early” type of yawn. Kicking off the sheets, I sat up in bed and swung my legs over the side. The cold morning air stung for a brief moment as my body adjusted to being outside the comfort zone of my sheets.

I slipped on my bathing suit and grabbed a new shirt out of my drawer, putting it on as I walked into the kitchen. I threw together a quick PBJ and scarfed it down, then made another one and put it in a plastic bag and dropped it in the cooler. In the corner my fishing rods anxiously awaited the upcoming day. I packed a few more snacks into the cooler and walked out onto the screened in porch. The refreshing smell of beach air rushed through me and the peaceful sound of waves crashing echoed down the beach.

This wasn't the white sand of Panama City or the waves you can surf; this was my own little stretch of paradise. The Florida panhandle, also known as Florida's forgotten coast, is my family's retreat from the world. The locals call it the Redneck Riviera because it isn't what you think of when you think of a beach. The majority of the people down there have had family live there for generations and generations. My family's beach house was built in 1928 on St. Teresa beach in Panacea, Florida, about an hour south of Tallahassee. My great granddad bought the house in 1933 and it's been my family's piece of heaven ever since. There aren't big waves in front of our beach house because it's in a cove that allows mostly protected waters, better for fly fishing or hooking up a small boat and taking my younger cousins out to catch shiners.

I thought about these memories as I loaded my fishing gear into my dad's brand new 22 foot all-purpose boat. He had done exactly what I was doing every summer of his life and now it's my turn to make my own legacy down here. I had already been out on this boat a few times but had never taken it out on my own, until today. My 18th birthday was less than 2 weeks ago and my dad was already treating me as though I were an adult. I liked it. I loaded everything up in the boat and secured it, double checking everything to ensure I had what I needed for the day. I finished getting the boat prepped for the long day ahead of me, making sure that I had food, water, life jackets and all my fishing tackle. The boat was ready and so was I, so I hooked the boat to the SUV's trailer hitch and started over to the boat ramp.

There's not much in the world that's better than cruising in your car with the windows down and country music pounding out of the speakers. I was the only car on the road, singing with the radio and on my way to a relaxing day on the water to catch some dinner, I'm not sure how life could be better. I got to the boat ramp right as the stars in the sky were vanishing and the blackness of the horizon was turning to blue. I got the boat ready to launch and the only guys

around were a few of the ‘good ole boys’ of Panacea doing the same thing that I was doing. Launching the boat by myself was not an easy task, but my dad had worked with me on it to make sure I could do it on my own before he would hand over the keys.

Once I launched the boat and had tied it to the dock I drove the car up and parked it next to all the other old SUV’s. I put my sunglasses on and covered my red hair with my camo Ford hat, then went through one final mental checklist like I have done a thousand times before. I knew I had everything I needed. It was getting brighter, and the sky was turning bluer by the minute but the sun had yet to peek over the water’s edge where the sky meets the sea.

I got in the boat and drove off, leaving all worries of my life on that dock. The Gulf of Mexico water was glass calm and the air revived my sense of living. I smiled out of the corner of my mouth, taking everything in as I pushed the throttle to the maximum. I took another deep breath as the wind rushed around me, and I swear that in that moment, time stopped. The sun cracked into view as colors of red, blue, and orange danced above the water, and I drove toward them at full speed and into one of the best days of my life.