Private Lives

by Diane Daniel
from the *St. Petersburg Times*

Life seems a little less [ ] *when you can depend on a special place to always be there for you.*

There is a tiny slice of the **Gulf of Mexico** that belongs to me. Looking across the water, or down the shoreline, I see the past 20 years play over and over,[2] like an old **Super 8 movie**.

I'm 16, writing poetry while sitting on a [ ] at sunset. I'm [ ] the salty sea on my yellow raft. I'm sitting at the water's edge, gathering a rainbow of shells. I'm in college, burgundy hair glistening.[3] I'm a working woman, thinking about my career, paying the bills. I'm heavy, I'm thin. My hair is long, short, long again. I'm happy, sad. Growing older, growing up.

My parents and I moved from **North Carolina** to St. Petersburg, **Florida**, when I was just about to start my senior year of high school. It was a difficult time to be [ ]; I had lived in North Carolina all my life. But I loved the water, so Florida seemed an okay place to live. I can't remember how I first chose my special beach at the end of Eighth Avenue. But once I chose my spot, I never switched beaches.

Almost daily, I swam and sunned there. I watched the sun set. I thought about life. On weekend nights in college, I hung out[4] at the beach with friends, playing music or just listening to the waves. My bedroom at my parents' house holds no memories for me. My memories of Florida are all a mile away, at Eighth Avenue beach.

I live in Boston now and visit my parents in Florida twice a year. Whenever I visit, I spend many hours at my beach, usually under a hot sun, but sometimes at night, when the sand is cool and the sea seems to offer answers it won't share during the day. I go to my beach not only to relax and think, but also to [ ] the sea.[5] The waves are [ ], the water [ ]. But more important to me is the sea's permanence and sheer force.[6] I want to be strong like that.

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