Hannah Cumming NBCA Scholarship Essay

In all 19 years of my life, it's been an anchor. The memories of Northville Beach are timeless. With a sharp right turn, the car coasts onto Sound Shore Road. I count the rollercoaster-like hills before we go bumping gently down the grassy driveway and slow to a stop. At five, or twelve, or eighteen, it feels like the same mix of excitement and hope.

With each step downhill, the sound of lapping waves is a little closer, and the smell of the Sound a little stronger. The screen door creaks, and we're finally at the Cottage. It's such a fondly simple name for a place with countless memories.

We visit only a few weeks each year, but Northville Beach is like home for my family. Over the years, tides have shifted the beach and times have changed. However, this place's essence stays true through its natural beauty and the people there. Up and down the driveway, each cottage is filled with familiar faces. My three siblings and I grew up calling everyone on the beach "aunt" and "uncle" before we could even keep track of how we were related, if at all. Every year, long after the sun sinks into the water, our parents, grandparents, and second cousins sit around the dinner table, sketching out family trees and sifting through old photos.

Under the careful watch of these adults, it was in Northville that I learned to look closely and tread carefully in nature. Shells cut our feet and unseen rocks sat below the surface. Years ago, when the Sound was still dotted with jellyfish, all the children on the beach gathered to bury washed-up ones, and someone always stood by the water, ready to shout, "Look out!" On days when the Sound was too rough, we spent hours sifting through the shoreline instead of swimming. Buckets of sparkling jingle shells and sea glass piled up on the deck. My dad caught minnows for us to hold before sending them safely back into the water. Now, though we no longer worry about jellies and our feet have long since been callused from the rocks, the magical rituals of the beach remain. I still spend whole days basking in the sun, scouring the ground for skipping stones, and floating lazily over calm water. It's a healing routine that will never get old.

This year, I look forward to one more idyllic weekend at the beach before the Cottage is shuttered against the winter. So much will have changed when we return. I'll have finished my first year of college. Though the sand may be different and the plants overgrown, we will always feel the same childlike wonder when we return. Northville Beach will always be a rock in my life as I take on whatever comes next.