

## **Wherever I go, I'll always feel the sand between my toes...**

I grew up where the vast Atlantic meets the quiet Rhode Island shore. It is the place where the sand, no matter how hot or cold, always feels just right on my feet. It is the place where riding in waves and cartwheels down the hills just feels natural. It is the place where growing up watching fireworks over the ocean was a nightly activity and playing card games under an umbrella was a regular routine. I've always felt that this home of mine knew me better than anyone. It is, and always has been, one of the only things that have ever made sense to me. This beach represents everything that is important to me, everything I am, and everything I wish to become.

Part of growing up and becoming the person I want to be means appreciating where I come from and how it has made me who I am. My whole world is represented by my home—the place I will always love most in the world. I know now more than ever that home and the people that have most influenced me will always be a part of me.

My father reminds me of the dunes that signify the end of our sheltered beach club. The rocks are strong and sturdy—I'd climb on them as a child, just as I'd climb on my father's shoulders. They are protective, and even as the waves continue to crash fiercely upon them, they do not waver. Each rock is a little different from the next, and each shows my father's quiet and humble strength. Like my father, we cling to them, knowing we will be safe and supported upon them.

My mother is the precious sand dollar. While walking along the beach as a child, I'd find them and hold onto them tightly, and I often wondered how I was so lucky and blessed to have this elusive prize. The sand dollar shows beauty and grace—near perfection. It is gentle, and shows the earth's natural magnificence. Like my mother, it represents the silent beauty and magic in the world that seems exceedingly hard to find, and I will always treasure it.

My big sister Caitlyn is represented in the tides. Just as the tides never fail to come in and out each day, my "KK" never fails to be there whenever anyone needs her. Caitlyn's strength has always been seen through her friendship. Though the tides change daily, never coming in and out quite at the same time, they show the natural exquisiteness of the universe in its complexity but still constant reliability.

Audra, the baby sister who has become my best friend, is undoubtedly the waves that crash along the shore. The waves are unpredictable, always changing, and often are the cause of a great adventure. As I ride in the waves, I feel an incredible and indescribable rush. Each wave is unlike the last, and my fierce little sister is not afraid to be different and stand out. While the waves bring more adventure to my life than any other part of the beach, it is also through them that I learned how to turn something that seems terrifying into something beautiful. It is through Audra that I have seen immense strength to overcome the biggest waves that knock me down.

My grandmother, loving nicknamed "Gammy," taught me more than anyone I've ever met. For as long as I can remember, Gammy would remind me of the popular Footprints in the Sand poem, and I loved following the footprints I found and seeing where they led me. My grandmother taught me about faith. I never knew where the footprints would lead, but I followed them anyway. She taught me that I never walk alone on my journeys. Even now, years later, as I

take long walks on the beach, I think of my grandmother and have faith that she too walks with me through tough times.

My identity lies in the grains of sand that I will forever feel between my toes. I am made up of small pieces, all of which are touched by the sand dollar, protected by the rocks, constantly changed by the tides and the waves, and influenced by the footprints along the shore.

My father has taught me strength; my mother—grace and beauty. My sisters have taught me friendship, adventure, and endurance, and my grandmother taught me faith. These traits, just the like the five people who taught me them, will forever be a part of me.

Just a week before leaving for college to start my freshman year in 2010, my family enjoyed Chinese food for dinner. As we finished eating, we each opened a fortune cookie, and I read, “You cannot discover new oceans unless you are willing to lose sight of the shore.” Somehow the fortune seemed perfect for me, and it was exactly what I needed to remember as I embarked on my new college experience.

I thought, at the time, that leaving home was the biggest adventure I would ever have. In hindsight, it was a big step out of my comfort zone, but in order to achieve all that I want and become the person I long to be, I needed to go off and “discover new oceans.” And four years later, once again venturing into the unknown, I am determined to continue in the same spirit. I may lose sight of the shore at times, but I will always have the sand between my toes, and I’ll always be able to find my way back home.

Though I am made up of innumerable traits, all of which are a part of me, they are merely grains of sand that make up a whole me. I am not easily defined. A single grain of sand, after all, is nothing special. But when several different grains of sand are influenced by the beauty of the entire beach, together it creates something truly amazing.