Nestled among the rolling waves and towering trees of Maine, lies a tiny island called North Haven. It is there that my family on my fathers' side has come from for over two hundred years, and a place that has greatly influenced me.

Driving through scenic Thomaston and Rockland Maine, one might get the feeling that they were in a timewarp; the speed limit throughout both towns is 25 mph, old barber shops and mom and pop stores line Main Street, and a dark, foreboding prison lies in the middle of town, reminiscent of old stories of my grandfather's, where people you knew went in, but never came out.

At the end of Maine Street though, is the ferry terminal. It is here that the tourists come, along with the Islanders who'd spent the day on the mainland shopping, or visiting relatives, to catch the North Haven Ferry. The parking lot at the terminal is always jammed with the cars of people, desperate to get their vehicle onto the ferry before spaces run out. The honking horns, and intermittent swears of angry drivers are omnipresent. Once all of the cars are situated, the wide assortment of people walk on. It is said that you can tell the summer people by the shine on their L.L. Bean shoes, and most of the islanders do very little to hide their resentment of the people who are in one sense their enemies, but in another, their saviors. Although it is very difficult to live with the summer people, the islanders must rely on them for their livelihood, since all of the jobs on the island are geared towards the satisfaction of the tourists. The fishermen and lobstermen catch fish and do their lobstering for the summer people. The carpenters and painters fix up the summer peoples' homes. The only store on the island, Watermen's, (where you can find just about anything imaginable) provides the summer people, along with the islanders with their only source of food. Without the summer people, the island would die.

Downtown North Haven consists of the ferry parking lot, which is situated on a wide open wharf, a gift shop that is run by my grandmother, Watermen's, and the Wall. The Wall of course is where the island boys like to sit, drink beer, and scope out the beautiful summer girls who seem to have a passion for romancing the ruff, tough island boys. Every summer, two or three guys get lucky and find themselves with a rich blonde, who subsequently dumps the poor guy in late August. Curiously, this doesn't seem to put a damper on their desires for a summer beauty.

The real beauty of the Island though, lies in its vast woods and idyllic waterfronts. My family's property is on Southern Harbor, where the water reaches up to the steps of "the shack", and is surrounded by forest. I can remember many a day where I would go into the woods with my father, while he'd clear out an area for his future dreamhouse. I'd sit far enough away so as to avoid the falling trees, but near enough to my father so I could talk to him as I read my book. I was around 9 at this time, and it was here that I learned about nature, and how it was important for humans to respect nature. For example, every day my father would talk to the trees before he'd cut them down, and explain to me that it was not an exclusively human trait to feel. He explained to me what the basic laws of nature were, and described for me in detail what it was like to grow up on an island where rats and loud race cars were replaced with deer and old red Chevy pick up trucks.

The most magical time of all for me was when I saw my first deer. I had walked into the forest a little, conveniently forgetting my father's admonishments about going into the forest alone, and I remember gazing upwards in amazement at the towering trees that almost seemed like a race of ancient guardians, put there to protect me and all the animals in the forest from harm.
I walked along quietly, caught up in my fantasies about being an Indian hunter of whom my father said could walk through the woods without making my noise. Suddenly, standing not 20 yards away from me was a deer! I'd never seen one before up close like this, and fancied myself to be the first to ever witness this beautiful creature in the wild. I tried my hardest not to make any noise, but sure enough, the first leaf I stepped on made the sound of a thousand stampeding dinosaurs, and the graceful animal bounded away into the shadows. When I returned to my father and told him what had happened, he proceeded to tell me that I had just seen one of the most beautiful things I'd ever see in my entire life, and that I should never forget it for as long as I live. He said that in fact when he was a boy, he too had seen a deer, and told his daddy about it. He also said that this was why he brought me to North Haven every once and a while, so that I wouldn't lose touch with the world around me.

Another time I remember was when I was sitting in my grandfather's house near the ferry dock, when a little kid I didn't know ran up and breathlessly told Grandpa Boat, (the name I had given my Grandfather when I was 3) that someone's boat had overturned, and that they needed help quickly. My Grandfather grabbed me and ran down to his boat, which he called the Junibelle, after my Grandmother, and gunned the engine. We raced out into the thoroughfare, where all the boats come into before they dock, and sure enough, there was a small overturned motorboat. It was a summer person's boat, no doubt the result of some reckless kid out racing with his friends, but there was no one around. My Grandfather cut the engine as we pulled up next to the motorboat, and dove into the cold, blue water. A full minute or two later, he emerged with a limp, lifeless body in his hands. He lay the boy down on the boat, and proceeded to give him mouth to mouth resuscitation. I didn't know what was going on, but soon after, the boy started coughing up all of the water, and a look of relief washed over my grandfather's face. When we got the boy back to the dock, there were tons of people waiting there, applauding my grandfather. I was so proud. My Grandfather seemed to ignore them though, and as he carried the boy up the walkway to the landing, I heard him mumbling to himself about "these goddamn summer kids who don't know how to put a fucking life preserver on".

I'm lucky, having grown up in the city to have experienced the serenity and simple beauty of being in a small community, near the ocean and the woods. Without a place like that to go, I think humanity could forget what its roots were, and devolve into a race of smog breathing animals, who have never seen a deer, or have never smelled the strong salty air of the ocean.

It is a special feeling to be connected to nature, and although I only get that feeling on the rare occasions that I visit North Haven, I think that it will always be a part of me. North Haven has taught me a lot, and has made me grow up in ways that I never would have if I had only lived in the city. It has indeed been a great influence on me, and will remain so throughout the rest of my life.
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