

Save the turtles

Dahlia Herman

PROSE, 1ST PLACE (Grades 7-9)

I ran across the decorated cobblestone beneath my feet and onto the soft tan-colored sand. I dug my feet into the tiny rocks and walked to the water gliding back and forth from me, as the waves crashed smoothly upon the wet sand. I carved a heart, but the sea pulled it back. My younger brother Finn came running over to me and splashed me with the salty liquid. I splashed him back, and we both fell into the dark blue water laughing.

My family and I live in Alaska, but for winter break we decided to travel to Mexico for some warm weather. I pulled my brother out of the water, and we walked back to our room where my mom and dad were fussing over the twins, trying to pull over their dinner clothes.

“Zawa,” my little sister cooed, ducking away from exhausted mother for the fourth time since we entered the room. My mom handed me her dress, and I slipped it over her tiny body as she tried to crawl her way out of it. The twins Fern and Theo had only just turned two but made as much ruckus as they could find.

A few hours later we had finished dinner and climbed into bed when my mom said, “I planned a special surprise for us tomorrow.”

“What is it, what is it?” yelled Finn, bouncing up and down on his bed.

“Shhh, you wake the twins,” my mom answered in a whisper. “But I arranged for all of us to go on a hike in the jungle,” she replied. I smiled as my head fell upon my fluffy pillow.

“Night,” I whispered into the endless darkness.

“Goodnight Zara,” my mom answered softly.

I awoke to the sunlight peeking in through the glass windows and the waves in the distance crashing against the sand. My mom was already up packing whatnots such as snacks and water in her big black backpack. Finn was reading quietly in his big white bed. He was always an early riser. I walked down the little ladder separating the loft from the main floor. My mother smiled and nodded my way. I walked outside and felt the warm breeze I barely felt in Alaska. I sat down as the twins woke up and started crying. My mom dressed them in a swim suit and we were off.

At breakfast a tour guide came to greet us and told us about what we were going to expect. We all hopped into this tan-colored jeep, and he drove us for a little bit through the bright lush green trees. There were parrots and birds calling and singing to each other, making a beautiful lullaby.

He stopped his tan truck and we jumped out. The soil was fresh and paved a path through the green trees and vines that took over. You could see a sliver of the bright blue sky. The sunlight was peeking through the different colored leaves, and you could see monkeys and birds swinging from tree to tree, trying to see who the new visitor was.

“All right,” said our tour guide. “If you’re all ready, let’s hit the road.”

“Where is the bathroom?” I asked and got that sickening feeling that there wasn’t one here. The tour guide laughed and pointed to a batch of trees. I made a face and he answered, “It’s nature’s bathroom. But look out for the bullet ants, their bites are venomous.” He faded off with the last word, I knew he meant it as a joke but it didn’t feel like one after I separated from the group.

I crunched along slowly, trying not to get too far away from my family. I went to the bathroom and was ready to walk back when I saw it, right in front of me on the brightest green leaf, the biggest ant I had ever seen. It looked at me, and I screamed, running for my life. I ran and ran and ran, my voice still echoing off the leafy trees. My breath was heaving, and I had to stop. I looked behind me and it was gone. The ant, I couldn’t describe it, it was almost bigger than my finger.

But I had another problem--my family. I had run for my life but also away from my family, a long way from my family. I screamed for them. All I heard was my own voice echoing back.

Something moved under my feet. I jumped away and watched as a baby sea turtle crawled its way out of the white sand. I looked in front of me, and that was it for my breath. I gasped. It was the most beautiful hidden beach in the world, white sand and turquoise water, but that was not it. There were sea turtles, tons of baby sea turtles, hatching from here and there and everywhere. I picked one up and it wiggled in my grasp. I set it in the ocean and laughed, as it swam away.

I sat down trying to breathe and watch the turtles swimming over the waves. One came up to me and bumped into me. I lifted it up and placed it in the water. I pulled my socks off and dipped my toes in the warm, salty water. When I heard rustling, I got ready to run, assuming it was the giant scary monster ant, but no, it was my cute tiny brother Theo calling my name, “Zawa, Zawa.”

“Theo,” I said and scooped him up in arms. Fern, Finn, my parents and the tour guide came out of the trees. My mom ran over to me and hugged me with all her might.

“Oh Zara, I

” she trailed off and hugged me again.

“How did you find me?” I asked.

“We followed your footprints, and they led right here,” my father said.

“The soil is so soft that the prints stay for a long time, so we found you here,” the tour guide added. That’s when everyone seemed to realize their surroundings.

“Tutawl,” Fern screamed running towards the secret beach.

“Turtles?” my mom said, sounding confused.

“There are very few places in the world where baby turtles can hatch now without getting eaten or hurt. In most places the lights from the hotels and towns drive them the wrong way, or the crabs and seagulls eat them, so the babies and moms are very lucky to find such a magical place like this,” the tour guide said, scooping up one and placing it in the water.

“Careful,” my dad said, trying to stop the twins from going crazy.

“We need to help them,” me and my mom said together.

“So that is the story about how our family, the Meadowbrooks, started a program for turtles here in Alaska,” I told my class. They applauded and I sat down at my desk with a huge smile plastered on my face, trying to remember that interesting trip we took.

Dahlia Herman is in 7th grade at Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School. She plays ukelele and violin, loves playing with animals and going on bike rides, and running with her family.