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Topics: When My Life Got Better or Travel

## TRAVEL

“People do not die for us immediately, but remain bathed in a sort of aura of life which bears no relation to true immortality but through which they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were traveling abroad.” Marcel Proust

Although I have spent much of my life traveling to South Florida, it feels like a foreign country to me. The weather, the people, the lifestyle bear no relation to my real life. But that is where I'm going. As the plane banks to the left and descends through a bank of clouds I feel my heart sink. By the time we taxi to the gate I have tears in my eyes, and the runway is blurry. I have traveled to South Florida at least once a year, for much of my life, but this will be the last time. The humid air slaps me like a wet towel, and I wait for the shuttle to take me to the Tri-Rail and on to Boca Raton. I am here to pack up my mother's home and take her away from all that she knows. I am here to take her to Colorado, to an independent living facility a few blocks from my home. It has been 10 years since her husband died and now, at 87, it is no longer safe for her to live alone.

The clouds are backlit and glowing as the train heads north from Ft. Lauderdale. The first time I traveled to Florida I was 8 years old, and we stayed at the Fountainbleu; a famous hotel in Miami Beach. I remember eating baked apples for breakfast, and making elaborate sand castles with sea shell lined moats. My brother and I would run back and forth shouting, “save the castle,” as the ocean washed it away. The water sparkled as small waves crashed around my knees and I knew that if I swam straight ahead I would surely arrive in China.

During my college years my grandparents spent winters in an apartment in Bal Harbor, which is a spit of land between the ocean and the causeway north of Miami Beach. The ocean was right outside their balcony, and I slept with the windows open and the sound of the waves in my ears. Years later I would take my own children to visit their grandparents in nearby Palm Beach every winter, and delight in watching them hunt for shells; reliving my own childhood memories. We laughed when my 3 year old daughter, seeing the ocean for the first time said, "that's really too much water."

The train arrives in Boca Raton, and I get a taxi to my mother's home. When I press the buzzer I hear my mother's excited voice. She is always glad to see me. But the apartment is in disarray, with piles of unopened mail and clothes on every bed. My mother, who was so neat and orderly, is unable to control the growing chaos and it breaks my heart. She has dozens of rolls of paper towels and 8 electric coffee pots, as if each time she buys a new one she has already forgotten that there are several more in the cabinet. The closets are stuffed with clothes, many duplicates and some unworn. I take a stack of garbage bags and begin to sort things out. The movers will be here in a few days, and much of her furniture will be donated to a charity. So much waste; my eyes fill up again with both anger and frustration but I blink back the tears.

Five days later the movers have come and gone. The house is empty and I have cleaned the bathrooms and mopped the floors. I go for a run each day to clear my head and it is like running through a cloud. Nothing evaporates and I am drenched, even after having showered. Drops of water cling to me and I remain moist; even after I towel off. I'm very tired of Florida. On our last morning my mother looks confused, knowing and not knowing that she is returning to Colorado with me later in the day. Although this has been planned for a year, she sometimes acts as if she is just going for a visit. At the airport I buy her a magazine and a muffin. On the plane she happily watches the golf matches and I watch her. My husband picks us up at the airport, and she is here. But she is not, and never was, home.

My mother died in 2014, but I often still see her in that apartment in Florida. She is just out of my line of sight, waiting for my visit, present in my heart and at the center of my travels.

