



February 2019

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Ashley (2019) "Resting Easy," *SWOSU Sayre Student Anthology*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 6 , Article 41.
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/sayre_student_anthology/vol1/iss6/41

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Resting Easy

By Ashley Brown

None of us could have ever imagined that in the spring of 2015, we would be planning a trip to California to spread our sister's ashes. My family had taken many vacations before. It seemed so wrong to be taking one now for this reason. We all knew it needed to be done. Reluctantly, we chose a date. We made the plans to complete the task at hand. Looking back at this trip, I always feel a smile creep across my lips. While the reason for our latest family vacation was a tragic one, good friends and family helped me make the best of it.

Arriving back home in California gave everyone on the trip mixed emotions. I, myself, couldn't decide if I was glad to be back or heartbroken that I didn't have my sister there to enjoy it with me. To be honest, I think it was probably a little bit of both. The last time any of us had been in the state, we had all been together, my sister included. It was a hard realization. Despite the sadness in our hearts, we continued with our plan. We were all anxious to honor our friend, Danielle.

We headed north on US Highway 1, taking in the breathtaking views. Having been a resident of Oklahoma for the past 12 years, I had forgotten how humbling this sight is. I think we all drove in silence and awe until we reached our destination, a small private beach in Half Moon Bay. It was a beautiful and welcoming sight to our heavy hearts. This was our sister's favorite place to visit when we were young. And as the sun set on the first day of our California vacation, we knew we had chosen the perfect spot.

Waking up the next morning, I felt a great peace in my heart. I knew that Danielle would be pleased with our choice. As we readied our rented equipment at a local board shop, my brother leaned toward me and said, "She would love it." I knew then that he too felt the same peace in his heart

that I had. We walked as a family, down the shore to the spot we had chosen. Before entering the water we shared stories and memories about our beloved Danielle. We all agreed that we wished she could be there with us to watch the morning mist rise over the ocean.

One by one we entered the water. Laboriously paddling out to open water. As I struggled to meet my group, I remembered what my brother had said and used it to motivate me. She would love it here. She would love the salty air, the cool breeze in her hair, the sun shining down and the circle of friends and family waiting at the end of the long paddle out. Again I felt my heart fill with peace and love as I joined the people I love most in my life. We held each other's hands, floating in that water at Half Moon Bay, but feeling like we were on another world entirely. Time stood still as we bared our souls to each other, taking in the serenity of the waves, marveling of life's great mysteries, and sharing with each other our fondest memories with our sweet Danielle. We laughed, we cried, and it was in those moments that I realized, this trip that I had dreaded would become one of my most treasured memories.

On April 18th, 2015, my family, friends and I set out to California. Together we turned a difficult task into a beautiful memory. I'll never forget the wonder that we took in from atop the cliffs driving up Highway 1. I hold a special place in my heart for the people whose hands I held on what could have been one of the most difficult days of my life. I'll always long for that California air, the place where I made so many memories with my sister, before she passed. But I can find a little peace in knowing that she'll always be waiting for me there, in that secret spot, resting easy in the California sun.

