

Sean McNeely
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Travel Writing

1995: Caribbean Sea (Galveston)

I have now pretended that the seemingly infinite Gulf is a very bright blue instead of the ruddy brown that it always turns out to be. I have fished with hacked squid from piers jutting twenty-five feet from the top of the ocean, next to veterans who have promised me that “this” was the life. I have felt very strongly that *if this was* the life then at least the ocean would be a more inviting color. I have stood next to those same vets and pulled a baby hammerhead shark from the waters on a day when no one was catching anything. I have felt very strongly that maybe they were talking about the sunset, not the water, when they spoke to me with longing in their eyes and distance in their hearts.

I have warily waded into those same seaweed laden waters that once prompted astonishment and marveled at their unparalleled ability to make body parts disappear. I have run back to shore splashing and tripping on the surf after feeling the invisible body parts of creatures that do not need to see through the silty brown waters. I have pondered (on more than one occasion) why they decided to name our town Jamaica Beach, when in reality it doesn’t look like any picture of Jamaica or its beaches that I have ever seen before. I have dreamt (on more than one occasion) that our Jamaica Beach looked a little bit, just a little bit, more like the scenes I saw in the pictures.

I have played more games of seaside putt-putt than almost any PGA tour golfer, and I have even hit the ball up the narrow ramp, across the five feet of empty space, and into the golf ball-sized hole between the dragon’s teeth—setting off a raucous explosion of sights and sounds which promised me a free nine holes. I have lost more balls into the artificially blue water at Magic Carpet Putt-Putt than players on the 17th tee at the TPC at Sawgrass. I have dreamt of futures with white sand and clear water, and woken up to the stench of rotting seaweed riding on an early morning breeze.

I now have a better understanding for the rationale behind building houses on stilts. I have also developed a greater appreciation for the forces of nature that produced them. I have been fishing an hour and caught many fish. I have been fishing a whole day and caught nothing but an appetite. I have stared out to sea and wondered why anyone would want to build a town here. But most importantly, I have gazed afar and seen life’s inherent contradictions, bobbing a bright red and white against the ruddy brown seas.

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