



## *Lessons from a Sunny Beach*

If you've been following my theme of learning at all the last couple of months, you know I've been focusing on self-love. Like many, my level of self-love isn't always where it should be. In fact, I had a tremendous lack of it for most of my life...I was just always putting everyone and everything else first. Now I understand that I can only give my best to others when I am at my best and the very core of this is accepting and loving the beautifully unique person we are. It is so necessary to the world's survival that we all honor the simple fact that we are not exactly like someone else, because that would be entirely useless. The world needs EXACTLY what we have to offer, rough life experiences and flaws and all. It's absolutely our own, unique personalities and life experiences that make us perfectly qualified to do our specific missions in this life. How can we even think for a moment, that we are less than significant in this world?

So, following my heart's signals to take a little break from my all-to-common, busy routine, I set up an inexpensive simple vacation to 80-degree weather, finally taking that long-overdue bonding time I wanted with my only daughter. She works a lot of hours now, too, so it was wonderful to watch the stars align and shove us on to the airplane with just a couple weeks' planning. We both knew it was absolutely meant to be. In advanced, I envisioned the usual inspiration the beach, ocean, and warm sun was bound to throw at me, but even so, the relaxation and rejuvenation was over the top!

As I first stepped out onto the beach, I spotted a couple of white sea shells and was careful not to step on them, but as I got closer to the water, I realized they were everywhere! It was impossible to walk in or near the water without crushing them. I felt a little guilty at first, destroying such natural beauty, but as I looked around a little more, I was quickly reminded that the gorgeous, soft, white sand came from the very same type of shells I was destroying. Over time, the living creatures occupying the shells no longer needed them and they were now best utilized in another fashion. The glistening white sand was just as wondrous and necessary and amazing as the intricate shells.

The piles of shells lying around different places on the beach reminded me of people. Every morning after the tide washed out, there were colonies of the same type of shell in some areas—almost a hundred of them sometimes—but the very next day, they were usually gone. Sometimes another type of shell group or two would be close to the same place, seemingly because they were allowed to hang out with the main group. Or perhaps the other shells didn't even realize they were different at all. Perhaps they thought they were just like one of the other, more popular shells.

Sometimes the shells seemed to be mostly in perfect condition, but other times, they looked like they had come through a rough ride to the shore, where they ended up in a million pieces. Often, there would be remnants of crabs, sea weed, fish, or sea urchins intertwined. The first day we arrived, I noticed one of our neighbors had what I call angel's wings shells lying outside their door to dry, and I hoped I could find some myself during our stay. I watched for them on the beach for 3 days, but saw none. The next morning as I was taking a quiet, long walk during sunrise, I nearly stepped on some.

As I looked closer at the tiny shells, I found hundreds of them in a pile, in all sizes and colors. It was as if someone gauged my path and dumped them in a neat 2-foot by 2-foot circle that I couldn't miss. The tide had left them behind of course, as most of them were anchored in the sand somehow. As I looked closely and carefully started picking them up, one pair at a time, I discovered there was even more. Lodged in between them, here and there, were a few other very tiny and detailed shells, and as a bonus, some of those little white birds (doves?) that you find in the center of sand dollars! I couldn't believe they were all left behind a few feet on the shore, when the waves should have easily drawn them back in to the ocean!

What a treat! I've learned not to question the everyday miracles and to just enjoy them and to look up and say, "Thank You!" Even now as I'm writing this on the plane home, with my sand and shell treasures in tow, the sun is setting outside

the airplane window. The various shades of deep orange are absolutely breathtaking, reminding me that the gorgeous, peaceful sunrises and sunsets of the last few days, go home with me.

We were in Southern Florida, probably in the most friendly place I've ever been. Absolutely everyone you came across was helpful, happy, and relaxed. Everybody! This made it one of the most relaxing vacations I've ever taken in my life! Can you imagine this little corner of the world, with no visible stress, anywhere? I credited day after beautiful day of full sunshine and nearly 80-degree temps. It really was a mood-setter and begged everyone to be outside, where nature does its magic in filling us with positive energy. Everyone was plump-full!

Oh, but the last day there, we did stumble upon a "pessimist" as my daughter called it. In a group conversation on the trolley, one man piped up and said that while he was a permanent resident with a home only a block from the beach, he hadn't been to the beach in over a year. We all looked at him in bewilderment, hoping he was joking as we waited for justification for this insane behavior. He continued, "I wake up EVERY morning, just wishing the clouds and rain would come in! I'm so sick of sunny days...that's all we get here!" I was too dumbfounded to speak, but a couple others spoke up, saying they were really enjoying the weather, since they were visiting from the colder northern states with snow. "Oh, the snow is why I moved here. I couldn't stand it!" He said.

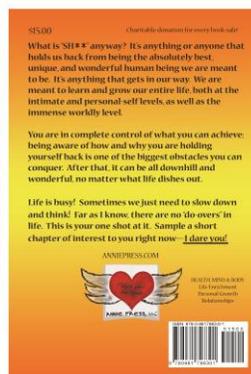
I don't think any of us understood him at all, and I had to write his comments off to him just not thinking at all about what he was saying, or moreso, what it was he really was not liking. He just didn't seem to know what he wanted; he just didn't know any better. We truly have to stop and think about what it is we want in our life, every day, or it becomes too easy to take things for granted, and to start complaining about the very things we really wanted in the first place! I want to hope there's just more to it with this guy, and I said a quick prayer that he can be happy and let himself think clearly about what he really wants in his life. It's a prayer we should send up for ourselves and others at least once a day. I thank God for the reminder and for the perfect vacation. Here's hoping you take a little Spring Break and STAY CLEAR! ~Mary Anne

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