

Feeling a breeze moving through my wet hair, tangling it beyond repair. Eating salty chips and swimming in saltier water. Feeling the waves rocking me, growing stronger, swooping me off my feet, growing playful, propelling me across the beach at high tide and transforming me into a seal, into sea foam, into freedom and joy personified, into happiness.

My favorite days were ones spent at the beach with my family. Back then, I thought the only person who loved the ocean more than I did was my father. His life revolved around the oceans and rivers and each and every living thing within them. His ashes are drifting among the seafoam and currents now. It's a happy thought, really- the ocean was always where he belonged.

Occasionally, he would drive us all the way to this beach in Key West to collect hermit crabs for his clients' saltwater tanks. It was a little time-consuming, but the fun of it all more than made up for it. The Keys are filled with so much natural beauty, and so many good memories. It pains me immensely to see this gorgeous place I have known for nearly my entire life destroyed by hurricane Irma, and now terrorized by the red tide.

While the levels found in the Lower Keys have been low, future red tide events will only grow more hazardous. In several places, that has become a reality. Just north of the Keys, on Florida's southwestern coast, a severe algal bloom has left thousands of sea turtles, fish, manatees, crabs, eels, dolphins, and even a young whale shark washed up on the shore. This marine massacre is one that can and will happen again, and it will only grow stronger. A probable reason for this recent surge of red tide events is a combination of human-released nutrients and agricultural runoff. Floridian scientists are currently developing promising methods to help control the hazardous algal blooms. One of these methods consists of an ozone system

that has proven itself capable of wiping out the algae cells in a pool and clearing them of toxins in just one day. Still, this process cannot stop the red tide altogether. Fish will continue to die from it each year and red tide events will continue to happen all around the world.

Although there is a sour bleakness to this situation, we musn't give up hope. Countless problems have been conquered by scientists before, and we must have confidence that this will be no different. After all, if you don't have hope, you might as well have nothing. I've had my fair share of struggling with hope, of elaborate chains and colorless anchors trapping me at my lowest point. But the ocean has become so much more than water to me. It is my second home, and the home to countless other living things. Isn't that worth hoping for?