

Andrew Benson

Class

Sandpiper Supply Scholarship

1 March 2018

What Makes Savannah Home?

As simple as the word home is, it is often very difficult to define. Home is not just a location but a place that evokes strong emotions and impassions one's spirit. Home looks different to every person, but globally we all want to be able to have a place to call home. I was fortunate to be born and raised in Savannah, and in addition to geographical location, there are many reasons why Savannah is the perfect place to call home. When people think of Savannah, they automatically picture 22 perfectly laid out squares filled with architecture and old south charm of our historic city.

There is another side to Savannah that most tourists don't see or come from miles away to visit. If you take the time to wander off the beaten path, the beauty of nature alone makes you want to call this southern town home. Savannah's coastal charm is what makes it my true home. As a coastal town in the low country, Savannah is made up of numerous winding cuts, channels, marshes, and rivers. It is a labyrinth of pristine beauty just waiting to be discovered. This is the heart of Savannah for me and why I am proud to call it my home. As an avid boater, fisherman, and water sportsman, I prefer to spend my days on the rivers and beaches. Nothing says home to me more than the smell of dark, rich pluff mud and marsh grass in all shades of greens and yellows swaying in the breeze while hundreds of fiddler crabs scurry to find shelter from approaching waves. I grew up on the marsh and feel saltwater course through my veins. Some of my earliest memories are holding my mama's hand and picking up trash in the marsh behind our

home. I was taught to behold the beauty of God's creation and to leave it as pristine as possible. I suppose this is why I reacted to the two recent hurricanes that devastated so much of my home town by planning, organizing, and implementing two community wide river accessible beach cleanups to gather hundreds of pounds of trash that washed up on the shores of our coastal community. Having assisted Clean Coast of Savannah with many river accessible cleanups, I have seen first hand the amount of litter that lines the shores of Savannah. The trash problem was made so much worse from the hurricanes that literally took anything that wasn't tied down and even docks themselves into the rivers. What we can see lining the marshes and beaches is just the tip of the iceberg as to what lies below. I grew up fishing with my dad on the cuts and channels that run in all directions. I was barely walking when I first started going out in the boat. Having an expert fisherman for a father it was only natural that I grew up with the same love and passion for the sport. I could not bear to see my home littered with trash. It was a constant eyesore and a deterrent to tourism ,which is such a vital part of Savannah's economy. I decided to do what I could to return my home back to the beautiful coastal town it always was. Although we cleared pounds and pounds of trash, I realize the education and awareness my project created was the real impact. After spending a day picking up others' trash, it makes you think twice about single use packaging, recycling and proper disposal.

My actual home is filled with treasures found along the coast of Savannah. We have collections of driftwood, old glass bottles washed up on island shores, crab floats, and intricate conch shells placed lovingly around our home to remind us of the beauty of where we live. Giant megalodon shark teeth, some as big as your hand, that we discovered while walking beaches on the Savannah River now have a special display case in our home.

In addition to the serenity of the water surrounding Savannah, the beauty of nature is everywhere. The sight of deer roaming in my backyard and spying eagles, hawks, and osprey swooping out of the sky, talons ready to pick up unsuspecting prey make Savannah a candidate for an article in a nature magazine. You don't have to travel to Alaska, the Caribbean, or the Rockies to see the vast wildlife that call Savannah their home too. I learned to throw a cast net at age 6 and still marvel at the array of sea life that spill out each time. There are shrimp, baby flounder, and pinfish, to moon jellies, puffer fish, and crabs-a real seafood banquet that attracts the abundant game fish that also call Savannah home. The ebb and flow of our large 8 foot tides bring with it tailing redfish, trout, stingrays, sharks, and other sea creatures in every shape and size. I am in awe when a graceful pod of dolphins swim and leap right next to the boat-a spontaneous and priceless show. I know I am home when I smell freshly caught redfish or trout cooking on the grill for dinner or spending time with friends over a big meal of steamed blue crab caught that very day. In Savannah, home means having a tree fort build between palm trees and a zip line running between hundred year old oak trees. The flora can change from tropical to southern camellias, pines, and azaleas with just a few miles in between. This is what I love about my home-the variety. You can be in the middle of early 1900 history at one end and feel like you are on an island vacation at the other. Just as the saying goes - home is where your heart is, my heart is in the water and wildlife that just like me chose to make Savannah home.