



Artists in Residence in Everglades EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

Heather Dewar

I am a native Miamian who learned to read the skies over Biscayne Bay before I learned to read the written word. When I was three years old my parents bought a 20-foot sailboat with a canvas cabin, named it Rocinante, and outfitted it with a folding stove, an ice chest and a bucket for a toilet. Rocinante drew only 18 inches of water; there were very few places we couldn't go in South Florida's salty shallows.

As a child I learned to spot an approaching thunderstorm and gauge when it would hit us; swim with my sneakers on, for protection from sea urchins; name the creatures that lived in a floating clump of sargassum weed; and trim the sails just so to bring Rocinante within yards of the rookery at The Cowpens, gliding by so slowly and quietly that the white ibis and roseate spoonbills roosting there paid us no mind. I was an only child, so my main companions (other than my parents) on those trips were flying fish and ospreys, sawfish and sea turtles, manatees and bottle-nosed dolphins - and once, a hammerhead shark nearly as long as Rocinante that ghosted alongside the boat for the longest ten minutes of our lives.

It never occurred to me that my upbringing and memories were unusual until a winter day in 1990, when I found myself in an open skiff on Florida Bay with a group of environmental lawyers, most of them from New York. "Wow! Look at all the birds!" one of the New Yorkers exclaimed. I wondered, "Where are all the birds?"

I have been writing about the environment, and especially about bays, swamps, sloughs, marshes, tree islands, keys and reefs, since that day. For more than 20 years I covered the environment beat for newspapers, including The Miami Herald and The Baltimore Sun. Today I'm a freelance writer whose work appears in magazines, and a part-time writer-editor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I live in Baltimore, where I'm working on my first book, a history of South Florida's wild places and the people who have inhabited them. Its working title is "Home Waters."

I am especially interested in writing about human beings as creatures embedded in the natural world. I want to understand how we form our relationship with nature, for many of us the most lasting relationship of our lives; how we decide which landscapes are worth cherishing and which are not; and how we write humankind into, or out of, the stories we tell about the land (and water).

I have a bachelor's degree in English literature from Harvard College, a master's degree in science writing from Johns Hopkins University, a lifelong love for watery places, and a deep respect for the scientists and explorers who know these places much better than I ever will. My manuscript-in-progress is mostly their story. I am grateful to AIRIE for the opportunity to immerse myself in the Everglades landscape after too long away, and hope the experience will make "Home Waters" a deeper and truer book.