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My first glimpse of Florida was from the overheated backseat of a 1958 Dodge, a car with fins large enough to firmly secure its place in the automobile pecking order of the day. It was July, and I was with my family on the twenty-plus-hour trip from the dreariness of northern Ohio to the sun, sand, and surf of the South. I can still remember how exotic everything seemed when we crossed into Florida, despite the fact that I spent most of my time trying to coax a little fresh air from the hot wind blasting through the open windows. Little did I know then the large role that the Sunshine State would play in my life.

When I was a teenager, the state loomed large in my adolescent dreams of independence. Ft. Lauderdale was where you had to be during spring break (just ask Connie Francis), and Miami Beach was a magical place of pastel colors and elegant, towering seaside hotels to which the lapping ocean waves paid homage and where famous celebrities partied.

When I was raising a family, Disney World was required visiting. And when diving became my passion, it was Florida that often fed my appetite for blue, from the reefs of the Keys to the spellbinding underground springs carved out of the Karst Plains in the northern part of the state. As my interest in underwater and wildlife photography blossomed, Florida was where the wild things were, from the swamps of the Everglades to the bays of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

Nine years ago, I was introduced to the editor of a new Southwest Florida magazine and thus began writing occasional articles for *Times of the Islands*. Since then, the magazine has become a staple of the area, and I am proud to say that I am now department editor and

part of the *Times of the Islands* family.

For almost fifty years, Florida has been my playground, beckoning getaway spot, and source of outdoor wonder. But, despite my early intentions, it has never been my home.

Today my daughter and her family reside in Naples in an area that looks nothing like it did when I first saw it. And she is not alone. In the last few decades people have flocked to Florida, and overall the population looks much different from the cutoff-jeans-and-beer crowd of old.

This new, affluent bunch came in search of killer sunsets, blue water, and warm summer nights. And unlike those of us who were transitory, they stayed. This issue of *Times of the Islands* focuses on the most basic need of those putting down roots in Florida—habitat.

Living in paradise means having to contend with the weather. In this issue, you'll read how one couple learned a hard lesson about storm-proofing a home and how solar power is supplying some of today's residential energy needs. You'll even get a few tips on decking out your dock to better suit your Florida lifestyle. And before you invite friends over to socialize in the sunset, our articles on cuisine will ensure that you are better versed in what to serve, from tapas to truffles to authentic Bahamian breakfast fare.

So we invite you to enjoy this issue. It should make you feel glad that you decided to come to Southwest Florida...and stay.

Glenn

Glenn Ostle
Department editor
Times of the Islands