

## **Our Beloved Sea**

*By Osha Rose*

I am someone who tends to focus on talking about what's going right in the world, so it was unusual that I found myself attending a Cape Ann Climate Coalition roundtable to discuss the climate crisis on Cape Ann this spring.

I was moved by a story someone shared about our mussel beds deteriorating and the ripple effect this can have on our ocean's ecosystem. The beaches are a huge part of how I live my days and what I love most about being here on Cape Ann.

I was reminded of the importance of educating myself on what can be done to help protect and preserve our waters. There is so much more that I can do, and at that roundtable, I listened to how others were acting in support of preserving what we love about this island.

Since that meeting, I have researched and learned about what has been done, and what we can still do to help restore mussel beds in a natural way. But I have also become aware of how our actions affect the greater whole globally. For example, how many of us realize that the pollution we are putting in the streets—with our cars, our trash, and whatever we're using to fertilize our lawns—will end up in the ocean?

I have a small child and recently noticed a sign at a local beach reminding kids not to play where the water runs off from the street into the ocean. *What are these pollutants that can be harmful for my child that are flowing out to be dispersed into the ocean?* I wondered.

It's a reminder of the damage we do if we only think about ourselves, and brings me back to a moment I recall from my teens. I was in the backseat of my friend's car as I watched her clean out the Dunkin' Donuts iced coffee cups and bagel wrappers by throwing them out the window as we drove down the boulevard in Gloucester. Even back then something about that didn't feel right to me. I remember thinking, *where will that trash end up?*

Growing up with a scuba diving father who would help fishermen clean the barnacles off the bottom of their boats, I could see that my dad was a lover of the ocean and of nature itself. When you care about our waters it becomes apparent that the ocean is at the mercy of how we choose to live here on land.

What *does* it mean to value and appreciate nature? Does it mean we simply groom and prune our gardens to enjoy the bit of nature in our backyards? Or is the appreciation fully expressed when we notice trash on the street, pick it up, and put it somewhere to be processed?

This thought came to me while reading a sign at a playground with my daughter. We were near the ocean and on the sign was images of plastic bottles and small sea creatures to illustrate how pollution affects the ecosystem of the ocean. I learned how waste like plastic breaks down to tiny particles that look like edible plankton to the creatures in the sea.

At that roundtable, a light was sparked in me. Since then I have learned that climate shifts cause the warming of ocean waters, which causes ocean acidification. This means a reduction of carbonate in the water and carbonate is what strengthens the protective shells of the mussels.

It makes me think of the calcium we require to strengthen our human bones and what happens to our teeth in our bodies as pregnant women. A growing baby zaps all our calcium to grow their own bones and internal systems. Sea creatures do not get the extra nutrients and multivitamins we mothers take to balance out that deficiency.

What *can* we do to help bring balance back to our ocean waters?

What would it take for you to be motivated to make a shift in the amount of plastic that you use? Or the way that you care for your lawn and gardens?

Will your motivation come the day you see a teenager throw her coffee cups and empty bags out the window while you drive down the boulevard?

If we only think about the small box of space around us, inside of our cars and within the perimeter of our yards, we miss an opportunity to have a positive effect on everyone and everything around us.

Discovering what lights us up and then sharing about our unique pocket of passion, we can all make an impact in our own small way. There is potential for each piece written here to connect our community with words, and one day to even help heal the harm to our beloved sea.