

## We Can't Help It If We're from Florida: New Stories from a Sinking Peninsula

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*Stories intertwine to eloquently convey the weirdness of the sunshine state.*

What makes a story inherently Floridian? A stray alligator strutting down the sidewalk? A conference in which scientists discuss the best way to clean up oil spills in the Gulf? Or is it “the faintest sense that time is infinite. ... You can go your own pace, and there will most definitely be a tomorrow, and clearly a day after that”? The writers featured in *We Can't Help It If We're from Florida* may not have the answer to this question, but each of their stories and essays creates an unforgettable atmosphere apt for the state.

Even those who have not visited Florida will feel the climate of it, right from the start: “On hot days the air still smells like salt water,” Shane Hinton writes. Vivid scenes in each piece provide both nostalgic and newly discovered images of Florida’s landscape and culture.

There are those who love the state, and there are those who hate it; both are given equal weight and validity as they detail their experiences near sinkholes, on the baseball field, and through never-ending high-school years. Author Lidia Yuknavitch vows never to return to the state in which she grew up—too many painful memories. Racquel Henry cannot escape it: “Those old memories rose like ghosts, kept calling her, stretching out for her to come home.”

Both fiction pieces and nonfiction ones explore the diverse lifestyles of those who live in Florida. In Laura van den

Berg's "Kiwano," "We got pedicures and sunburns. We ate shrimp cocktails in bed, swaddled in plush bathrobes." Jason Ockert's story "Every Heavy Thing" invents a lizard who falls from the sky onto a sunbathing man reminiscing about the moments in his life that made him who he is.

The group of writers whose stories intertwine in *We Can't Help It If We're from Florida* all eloquently convey the weirdness of the sunshine state without attempting to explain it. It's inexplicable, like the sense of home these characters feel thinking about Florida, even when they have moved several hundred miles away.

AIMEE JODOIN (November/December 2017)

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