

## **Kindred Spirit Mailbox: North Carolina Hidden Treasure**

You don't need a forever stamp. Your computer won't chime "You've Got Mail." In fact, people who send and retrieve letters from this spot must channel their inner postal worker and trudge through 1 ½ miles of wind, rain, snow (sometimes) and sand to reach the hidden mailbox behind the dunes on the beach at Bird Island. The Kindred Spirit Mailbox located in a bird sanctuary of North Carolina has become a meeting place for locals, friends, strangers, and families who live and visit Sunset Beach. The mailbox started as a simple idea over 30 years ago by a person of vision--literally!

*"... I walked the tide line of Bird Island. In the distance – right on the low tide line – I saw the silhouette of a rural mailbox. However, I never could reach it – for it was a mirage. The very next weekend, I "planted" the original Kindred Spirit mailbox"*

### **Preferring Anonymity**

Who was the original Kindred Spirit? It's unknown, sort of. Like many people who pen messages in the mailbox, they prefer anonymity.

You have to wonder if this person, who dug a deep hole in the sand to place that original post which has survived the test of time, realized how precious the art of letter writing would become? Did they imagine thousands of people walking for miles in order to connect with people they may never meet? Did they believe it would become a tradition and respite from the fast-paced, always-on, over-sharing world that exists just beyond the bridge you must cross to get from the mainland to the island?

### **Millions of Words**

For decades, visitors have written millions of words in notebooks left at the mailbox revealing pieces of their life. They have shared wishes and dreams, shed pain and addictions, bid final farewells. So many notebooks have been filled that a special collection is kept at the William Madison Randall Library at University of North Carolina Wilmington.

This tradition and the mailbox have endured the passage of time and the winds of hurricanes. The original mailbox was blown down in Hurricane Irene. The flag pole which stood for so long marking the spot for Kindred Spirit seekers now lies in the sand, blown over by the same hurricane. But a new mailbox has arrived, and with it the letters:

*"I'm so happy the mailbox has returned! We've been coming here for years, and I've missed you..."*

Every year, the weather passes through these barrier islands, sometimes taking down the mailbox with it. But, not for long. Almost instinctively, kindred spirits gather after each storm to find, fix, and care for the mailbox. Like the best parts of humanity the mailbox is “a thing that seems to take care of itself” ponders Frank Nesmith who is one of the people most credited with placing the original mailbox in the sand with his then girlfriend Claudia.

On the morning I made the journey, the day was sunny and crisp. A touch of Fall giving a gentle reminder that winter is just ahead, Thanksgiving just around the corner, and summer just another happy memory.

## **Open Hearts**

Reading the letters feels a little like snooping through an open diary. Every human emotion is found in those letters. The promise of anonymity leads the authors to open their hearts and souls with an outpouring of gratitude, loss, hope, pain, faith...and love.

*“...so grateful for my family and the beautiful journey we are on together...”*

At yet, snooping and sharing are encouraged. Two wooden benches have been erected in the sand where you can sit a spell, smell the salt air, watch the shrimp boats glide by, and hear the constant rhythm of waves crashing on the sand.

And then...open a notebook.

*“I love that your ashes are in the ocean. Every time the water laps up at my heels I feel as though you are giving me a hug...”*

Words pour from the pages relaying the stories of everyday people like you and me. Not the kind of stories shared on social media. Spending even a small amount of time reading through the letters can give you a different perspective of the world in which we live. A different view of humanity.

*“I hope I remember to savor this journey while searching for my destination..”*



Our world is fast-paced. We've come to expect things to happen in an instant. And for many things, that works perfectly. Email, text, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter...those fast-paced communication and sharing tools we are familiar with provide a lot of value.

And then there are the stories of our lives. Our personal growth, challenges, and self-discoveries. Our joys. And our sorrows. Our personal spiritual journey. These things are better left to a slower pace.

Delivered just in time, perhaps from a mailbox in the sand where kindred spirits meet.

*"...I'm leaving a shell. It is fragile and broken like we all are..."*

### **Getting To Kindred Spirit Mailbox**

You'll have to walk or ride along the beach for about 1.5 miles to get to Bird Island. Don't worry, it's an easy journey. Start at the public beach access located at West 40<sup>th</sup> Street on Sunset Beach, NC. As you look toward the ocean, you'll see the pier on your left, and the jetty on your right. Head

towards the jetty. The mailbox will be on the right, behind a sand dune, about 1/8 of a mile before you reach the jetty. There may or may not be a flag pole visible, depending upon if it is resurrected.

**For More:**

- Kindred Spirit mailbox, [Facebook page](#)
- Kindred Spirit mailbox, [Google Maps](#)
- Visit North Carolina, [www.visitnc.com/](http://www.visitnc.com/)
- See [here](#) for more on our site on the Carolinas.

*-All photos by Dawn Damico.*