

## **The Perfect Vacation by Rick Reil**

As we enter yet another summer with hordes of families clogging our highways, airways, railways, national and state parks, and our numerous theme parks, as they head out for yet another vacation in the pursuit of happiness and togetherness, my thoughts ask why? After raising fifteen children I recall our few attempts at pulling off a vacation as accomplishing anything but family bliss. My sixth daughter, Bekie, once asked me why we didn't go on vacations like other families. After a few moments of thought the answer came to me and I answered her, I said, "because you're lucky!". Now my opinion might have been different if we'd been the perfect American family of a mom and dad and 2.3 children (I guess the .3 would be the family dog).

Now my children are all grown up and are enjoying the sweet joys of traveling with their children. Their facebook posts show happy faces and the fun of being with friends and family who live thousands of miles away. I'll take some credit for providing them this opportunity. If it weren't for me and my efforts to abide by the Lord's commandment to be fruitful and multiply these opportunities would not exist.

The vacations of my youth were most often spent traveling to St. Joseph, Missouri to visit my dad's parents. It took three days to get there from our home in Richland, Washington. If we drove it was in a large station wagon with no air-conditioning or we took the train. It was normally just my dad and me, my two sisters were quite a bit older than me and as teenagers didn't want to suffer the boredom of a long hot trip away from friends. My mother, for various reasons, among them the Midwest's summer heat and humidity, chose to stay home with my sisters.

I was normally excited to go visit my grandparents, I loved them dearly, especially my grandmother. However the excitement usually wore off about an hour out of town. My father's focus was to get there as quickly

and as cheaply as possible. If I had to pee there was always a pop bottle conveniently under the seat and once filled my dad would pour it out the window doing 70 mph. We most always stayed with friends or relatives, most of whom were aged (in my mind that was anyone over 40) and none of whom had children my age.

My grandparents lived in a very small house of no more than 500 square feet. It had one bedroom, no air-conditioning and a small black and white TV that only got one station, and that was only after dark. My Dad, an only child, normally left me in their care while he went to visit his old friends and do whatever else he did while away, which was most of the time. My grandparents didn't own a car so we relied on walking or the kindness of relatives to take us places. My grandfather would be considered an invalid today. He had a disease that caused his legs to be covered in weeping ulcers. This left him unable to walk more than a short distance and then only with the help of two canes. My grandmother did her best to keep me entertained and busy. I helped feed her chickens, and worked in her garden. I picked cherries and she baked pies. But the best thing was sitting at the kitchen table with her and my grandfather while they shared stories of their youth and our family.

We usually stayed about a week. My fleeting bits of entertainment were few and normally of short duration. Needless to say the trip home was a journey of anxious excitement to return to my own bed, family and friends.

Now that I am nearing retirement age people often ask if I plan on traveling. The answer is no, with a few exceptions. I enjoy traveling to see my children who live out of town. I would also like to visit the Black Hills of South Dakota where my mother was raised. I also have a great desire to see Duluth, Minnesota, but that is a story I will tell another day. But I do dream of a vacation, a perfect vacation that I will never be able to take except in my memories and my imagination. It is a vacation I have taken often but until now have shared with few. It is a journey to the past.

Where is the place? It is very near but also very distant. It is only a few miles from where I sit as I write this, but it is over fifty-two years ago. In my dreams I would travel back to the summer of 1963 for a week. I would put my 63 year old brain in my 11 year old body and walk up the sidewalk and into my boyhood house. There I would find my mom in her kitchen fixing dinner. She would be making meatloaf, mashed potatoes, corn and salad. We would be having apple pie for desert. The corn and salad fixings would have been grown in our garden, the apples on our tree.

Why 1963 when I was 11? Well, if you think about it what better time was there in America? Our country was doing great! We were mostly at peace, no active hostilities, Vietnam was a few years away. The Cuban missile crisis was over, John F. Kennedy was President and the space race was on. The economy was strong. General Motors had just introduced the Corvette Stingray. Most everything was made in America. Do Wop and folk music were the rage. Most people went to church, and at least in our town, life was safe and good.

And why is the age of 11 important? Well if you think about it 11 is one of the best years of your life. I was going into the sixth grade, the last year of elementary school, this meant I would be one of the top dogs. I had a paper route and made about a dollar a day. I also mowed lawns and did other odd jobs so I always had some money in my pocket. You could buy a hamburger, fries and a Coke for about thirty-five cents, the same price to see a movie. I had a nice bike I paid for myself. My friends and I had the run of the town. We went fishing, swimming, horseback riding, hiking, built forts, go-carts, and played endless games of softball at the nearby school. We did not know how deprived we were at not having video games, video movies, cell phones or mom-chauffeurs.

We were baby boomers and there were lots of us! Almost every house in the neighborhood had kids. Most of the moms stayed home and we knew all our neighbors. If you did something you shouldn't have it normally got

to your house before you did. If you needed money you earned it. If you wanted to go somewhere you walked or rode your bike.

At 11 you're big enough to do many things but not so big that you're having teenage hormonal overload. You haven't experienced the drama of Junior High. You're too young for zits and girl friends and or boy friends, at least on a serious level and best of all you still like your parents and they like you! You have no bills, your parents take care of most everything. You can run and jump and climb trees and even easily bend over and tie your shoes! How much better can it get?

My dream vacation is spending time with my parents and siblings, of whom all but a sister have past. It would be petting and loving my dog. It would be popping popcorn and drinking Coke out of an aluminum glass while laying on the rug in front of our old black and white TV watching the Andy Griffith Show. It would be a warm summer night playing Hide and Seek with the neighbor kids. It would be going to church on Sunday and hearing Father Sweeney telling us to keep the Sabbath holy and to wash our cars on Saturday. It would be taking the clothes off the clothesline and helping my mom make the beds. It would be helping in our garden and selling the extra produce to the neighbors.

It would be the best vacation ever, knowing now, 52 years later how much I was blessed to be born when I was, where I was and most of all to whom I was.

*This Story is Dedicated to my good friend:*

*Geroge Dana*