

Shore memories: Getting there part of the fun

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It may be cheaper by the dozen, but it's not easier.

My most vivid memories are not so much being at the Jersey Shore but preparing to go.

The logistics needed to take 16 children to the Shore for most parents, must be unfathomable. For me, the preparation and ride down were remarkable.

We knew it was time to pack when my older brothers were instructed to bring down from the attic the specially designed long white Quaker Storage boxes. Each child got one. The art of packing was not only deciding what clothes to bring of your own, but to take advantage of the mayhem and appropriate other siblings' clothes.

We didn't get to sleep the night before the trip because my older brothers warned, "If you kids do not have your clothes boxes outside your bedroom door when we pass by only once in the morning, then you will have to make due with one set of clothes." I lay awake in fear of oversleeping.

We went to the corner store early in the morning to buy provisions for the almost two-hour ride. Important sustenance included on can of soda wrapped in aluminum foil, Pixie Sticks, and s Sugar Daddy.

We looked forward to the arrival of our uncle Johnny, who rented a big truck for the event. He was one of few people who could make my mother nervous. He always teased her by saying he was on a tight schedule and needed to get on the road. You came of age when you got to ride in the cab with Uncle John. He use to tell the other kids that those riding in the truck would stop for ice cream. I learned on my first truck ride that was not so.

The kids who did not get to go in the truck vied for another vehicle. Not many wanted to ride with my father because he would listen to talk radio or spend an hour quizzing us. As a physician, professor of medicine, and director of medical

education at one of the city hospitals, he asked the kind of thought provoking questions that had no real answer or checked to see who was up on their Latin. The challenging discussions were stimulated by how he handled our off-the-wall answers. If you rode with Mother you had enough food to last cross country. This was comforting if you were, in fact, to be stranded in the Jersey Pine Barrens. (What does the Jersey Devil like to eat besides kids?) The down side was that Mom stopped for nothing or nobody. It was Seaside Park or bust.

There was one more car piloted by an edgy twenty-something sibling whose main goal was to beat the oldest sibling's record for making it to the Shore. While it was exciting in this car, you did fear for your life going around the circles. Ironically, this care was always the last one in town. Ostensibly they took a wrong turn or were low on gas, but the excuse was that this car stopped on the boardwalk first to scope out the hot new rides.

The neat thing about the first night sleeping at the Shore was that you were guaranteed a new roommate. Somehow my mother managed to coordinate new sleeping arrangements that made life more interesting. I remember going to sleep with sand in the bed, dampness in the air, and the sound of the waves hitting the surf.

Over the summers of adulthood I only had to move a family of four to the Shore. I probably should have paid more attention to my parents who mastered this trip. Another reason they were "The Greatest Generation."

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