

DOWN HOME: OK, so the officer didn't laugh, too_72803

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Except for an encounter with one of Krotz Springs' finest, we had a perfect vacation.

Joanna, Lindsay, Molly and I spent a week at the beach, the favored summer retreat of our teenage girls. The other day, I tried to count; this was the ninth or 10th trip we've taken to the beach. I hope the girls remember these trips as fondly as I remember the vacations my family took when I was a kid.

MARV KNOX <i>Editor</i>

Back in the "old days," we lived in the Panhandle, where Daddy was a pastor. The beach seemed a million miles away, so we went camping in the mountains of New Mexico or Colorado. I still favor a mountain vacation—the sound of wind rushing through the pines; the pungent smell of the woods; the sting of icy water when you waded in the streams; the cold nights that induce great sleep.

Jo and I have taken Lindsay and Molly to the mountains a couple of times,

but the girls prefer a trip to the Gulf of Mexico. It's probably the terrific routine—sleep until you wake up; eat breakfast on the porch, listening to the waves; slather on sunscreen and mosey down to the beach; play in the water when you get hot and sit and read when you're not; jump in the pool to rinse off the sand and sweat; clean up; eat dinner; spend the evening walking on the beach or watching movies or just talking.

Even as a fan of mountain grandeur, I've got to admit a beach vacation is a wonderful retreat from the “real world.” I particularly like the sound of a peculiar form of silence—no telephone calls—and the most beautiful range of music—my wife's and daughters' laughter. We laugh quite a bit at our house, but the laughter of vacation has a free, easy sound that's tangibly different from home laughter.

Unfortunately, I became the object of some of that laughter about halfway home on the last day of vacation. You know, when you're heading home, you just want to get there.

That's not a good emotion in parts of rural Louisiana, where the speed limit on long stretches of Highway 190 has been reduced to 45 miles per hour, thanks to road construction that is not visible to the naked eye.

Well, I tried to be good, honest. But when we reached a seven-mile-long narrow viaduct over the swamp, I opened back up to the speed limit God intended, just a notch or two above 70. The viaduct went great. It has no shoulder, so the state troopers can't stake it out.

At the end of the swamp, a beautiful arching bridge spans the Atchafalaya River. At the bottom of the other side of that bridge sits a Krotz Springs, La., police officer, toting up city revenue.

“Sir, I clocked you going 73 in a 55-mile-per-hour zone,” he told me, writing my first speeding ticket in 30 years. At least Jo and the girls waited to laugh until he walked away.

Now, I'm \$90 poorer. But I still thank God for relaxing vacations and family laughter.

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