

July 2016

‘Beach boys’ keep things hopping during family vacation

By Sherri Gardner Howell

Our annual trip to Holden Beach, N.C., is in the history books once again, and I am already missing the view from the porch of our rental house.

Each summer as the car approaches the crest of the “new” bridge – which is now 30 years old – and the view of the surf comes to life, I wonder if this will be the year that it doesn’t affect me beyond being a nice week-long vacation.

Somehow I expect it to one day just be ordinary, to just be a week that would be the same anywhere we gathered with family and friends.

It hasn’t happened. I am always caught in the magic of Holden Beach, in the history I have here. Roots buried deep in sand, it turns out, can be very strong. I have looked at this first view through the eyes of a child, when the children’s prayers as we crossed the “old” bridge were for the drawbridge to be up as the adults, already fanning themselves with the car windows down and air conditioner off “to save gas,” prayed it would be down.



I have seen this view through the eyes of a teenager, hoping to meet a handsome boy who would be more drawn to my long dark hair and brown eyes than to my cousin’s blonde-blue combination. I have seen it through the eyes of a wife, an aunt, a mother at every stage of my children’s lives.

Now I look through the eyes of a grandmother, and the anticipation of a week with my two grandsons fills me with excitement and gratitude.

Our beach week, spent for the last 19 years with the Melendy family, always develops some kind of theme. Last year was “shark week,” because reports of shark attacks kept everyone out of the ocean. We have had a “Cranium” week, a “Breezy” week, a “Amy wasn’t here” week,” a “first time with a baby” week and a “they cheated at hearts” week.

This year was the year of “the boys.” All the Melendy and Howell grandchildren were present at the beach this year, and it was a sight to behold. Ages 10 years to 17 months, the four boys were enough excitement and cuteness to keep us laughing and scurrying through the whole seven days. I was so busy that I took very few pictures, but there was a photo-op every three minutes.

From Bennett declaring his love for “the durils (girls)” to Cohen’s and Julian’s bonding through Sharks and Minnows and video games to King’s jabbering as he collected things that he wanted to throw away in the trash can (and a couple of things that didn’t need throwing away), the grandsons filled the week with all things unexpected.

They built forts, played in the surf, sand and pool and passed out from exhaustion in our arms. They watched out for each other and blended their daily lives seamlessly into each other’s routine. It was a joy to just sit back and watch them work it all out.

Mid-week, when time came to reserve the house for the same week next year, we put our deposit down without question. We did the math and figured the ages and stages our grandsons will be in 2017 and smiled. We will need the rented crib again, because there will be one more to enjoy – a boy, of course.