

With the hot days of summer dragging us down, a friend and I decided we needed some rest and relaxation. As we reminisced about the summers of our youth, the idea formed to escape to a water park a couple of hours away. However, now that we are older, fun isn't as easy as it once was.

After deciding to go, we had to arrange vacation time, which is always dependent on the goodwill of others willing to fill in for a day or two. By the time we had come up with a couple of days at the same time, they unfortunately did not coincide with payday. But with freedom singing in our hearts, we did not let the lack of money hold us back.

She harangued her fourteen year old son (he was going to have fun whether he wanted to or not) and I "invited" my husband and eleven month old grandson. I had asked my daughter, but with all the savvy of a former teen-ager who had gone on road trips with her mother, she did not pause for breath as she answered with an emphatic "NO"!

For days after the decision to go was made, I drooled over the literature we had pulled off the internet. Six different slides, a lazy river where you float on inner tubes and a wave pool, it all sounded like heaven. Add in the fact that we would get to eat out, spend the night in a motel and go shopping (we are women, even without money we go shopping); life could not get better than this.

The day before we left, reality reared its ugly head. I tried on my trusty black, hide-all-the-cellulite one piece swimsuit; it clung in all the wrong places and sagged in the rest. It was official; my old faithful swimsuit had finally given up the ghost. I would have to buy a new one.

Refusing to let swimsuit shopping suck the fun from my road trip, I headed out to Wal-Mart. Sunday at Wal-Mart is not the ideal clothes shopping time, but sometime you have to do what you have to do. As small children whined and harried mothers threatened naps, I took a deep breath, and entered the swimsuit aisle. Confronted by acres of bikinis, I felt my first quiver of trepidation. Somewhere among all the barely there tops, and oversized grandma suits, surely there was a simple black one piece I could toss in the cart without trying on, and head off to freedom.

After hours of searching, I finally had to settle on a two-piece suit that covered everything a one piece would, but with a plunging neckline that threatened to show my collarbone. Feeling positively scandalous, I worried I would embarrass the grandkid with this much flesh showing or lose the bottoms in the lazy river. However, since I refused to enter the dressing rooms with circus mirrors one more time, I tossed it in the cart and made my escape.

The next day, as all our neighbors drove off to work; my husband and I loaded the car. New beach towels, bags of snacks and the baby sunscreen were stowed in the trunk while toys, diapers and the all important "blankie" filled up the backseat. I had forgotten how much stuff a toddler needed for a day of rest and relaxation. Waving good-bye to my smirking daughter, we headed out to meet my friend and her son.

Since my husband and grandson would be coming back that day, we took two cars. I was unaware that my husband did not understand that when you road trip with someone in two different cars, you should stay together. He caught up with Darla, and kept on going. Soon she disappeared from sight. Reasoning that she knew the way and we would meet when we got there, I settled back to listen to music.

Five miles outside of Grand Island, the grandkid woke up. Calling Darla, I told her we were making a pit stop. She assured me that they would meet us at the truck stop. After wrestling with a diaper change and chowing down on fish crackers, Darla was still MIA. Wondering how fast my husband had truly been going to be so far ahead, I called her again.

I knew it was not a good sign when her son answered laughing. Apparently Darla had daydreamed her way past the turn-off and had gone on to the next exit. As her son tortured her about her bad navigational skills, we loaded up the wee one and got back on the interstate to meet them in the Wal-Mart parking lot.

Teasing her only a little because half the fun of a road trip is to end up somewhere unexpected, we decided to find someplace for lunch. We pulled into the first pizza buffet we could find. Squeezing in among the masses, we grabbed the last clean table in the joint.

On one side of us was the family who took auto racing personally. They argued and dissected each of the drivers as if they were personal friends. At one point, I thought one couple was going to come to blows, or divorce court as they voiced very diverse opinions of one of the drivers, in very colorful creative language.

On the other side was the extended family that had just come from a family member's funeral. Dressed in black, eyes red, tones subdued, they looked as unhappy and out of place as one can only imagine.

Quickly eating our lunch to escape our uncomfortable surroundings, we headed out. After consulting our trusty map, we discovered that Darla's accidental side trip actually put us about six blocks from our destination.

Pulling into the parking lot, I was so excited I could hardly stand it. We could hear the squeals of the children as the wave pool splashed over them and the screams of laughter as they plunged down the slides. Ahead lay the grand adventure of enjoying the simple pleasure of a summer afternoon in the water.

We put on our suits and eagerly joined the masses. My earlier swimsuit apprehension melted away as I got a look at the other women there. Apparently, instead of getting bigger swimsuits, the women just tattooed anything that sagged or grew. Feeling horribly under-tattooed, Darla and I threw ourselves into enjoying the afternoon.

We soon discovered that we are inner tube challenged. Her son and my husband, holding our grandchild, each plopped down on their inner tubes with nary a splash of water. However, as Darla and I tried to sit gracefully on our tubes, the slippery things slid out behind us, leaving us sitting in the river, splashing like beached whales. Laughing with embarrassment, we tried again, only to have the same thing happen. Taking pity on us, the teeny bopper lifeguard, with a profound look of patience, held our inner tubes so we could get on. Once on, we were expert river floaters. We floated down the rapids, bumped into everyone and got stuck in one of the bends. After going around three times, and still not managing to maneuver ourselves to the exit point, we were forced to fall off our tube and wade up the ramp, as gracefully as possible.

Next we joined her son on the slides. I had forgotten the thrill of plunging down a tube that was totally dark; to pop out into the blinding sun as you came to a screeching halt in a spray of water. I could have spent all day just playing on the slides, but eventually I had to turn back into a grandma, and help my husband with the grandkid.

My husband and I played in the wave pool with the wee one, who loved the bigger waves, wading in and out as he giggled and stuck his face in the water. He loved to sit in the shallows, watching all the big kids, yelling at them when the fancy took him.

Mindful of the sun, we took sunscreen breaks with stringent regularity. Slathering him up to make sure his tender skin did not burn and supplying him with a continual flow of fluid so he did not dehydrate, we re-acquainted ourselves with parenting skills that had grown rusty over time.

Hours later, we trudged back to the cars, relaxed and tired from a stolen day of fun.