

Opinion

Death-defying coasters and water slides

by Alicia Hartman
Co-editor

Well, Spring Break is only one day away. Actually, some people have already left. As everyone is packing for Florida (Disney World/Daytona), heading south to Alabama to meet country-folk, or flying west to challenge the slopes of Denver, unfortunately, I am doing nothing devastatingly exciting for Spring Break except working. Whoo-who. No, I can't even go home because I already live at home.

Since I am not doing anything thrilling, I'm going to reminisce about a typical annual summer vacation for me and my family.

My dad, mom, sister and I pack into the blue Oldsmobile. Andi (my sister) and I situate ourselves in the back seat along with our pillows, stuffed animals, food, deck of cards and pens and paper.

My Uncle Norm, Aunt Nancy and cousin Melissa also joined us on our expedition. Vacationing with my uncle, aunt and cousin is pretty fun, except for the fact that my uncle always follow us and he drives as slow as molasses.

My dad is the type of person who likes to get where he's going in the shortest time possible. Things are slow enough with my uncle behind us, but then my mom is totally illiterate when it comes to reading a map (But aren't most

women map illiterate?)

DAD: Which way now, Linda?

MOM: I don't know.

DAD: God ____ it Linda! Read the ____ map!

Dad's face is getting redder and redder.

MOM: You're driving!

DAD: Well I certainly can't drive and read the map at the same time can I?!

Dad is fuming by this time, shouting at the top of his lungs.

MOM: I think you just better stop somewhere and ask for directions!

We go through this conversation over and over and over and over.....

Andi and I are pretty prepared at vacation entertainment. Besides playing cards and hangman, we like to signal semi drivers to toot their horns, and we read other cars' license plates and make words or sentences out of them. (Bumper Stumpers on the USA channel.)

Driving in Canada is fun too where everything is in the metric system. We see a sign that says the speed limit is 100 km. "What's 100 km in miles, Dad?"

I love toll booths. I like reading all the weird-named cities on the ticket and how much they "cost."

Did you ever notice that the ride home takes half as much time as the ride there?

Eventually we get to the hotel/motel.

I always wondered what the

difference was between a hotel and a motel. A motel (MOTOR plus HOTEL) has rooms that open directly to the parking area. Rooms in a hotel are enclosed within a building. Hotels are usually bigger, nicer, more comfortable, and of course, more expensive.

Motels aren't bad, I just like the elevators in hotels and the fact that you can run up and down the halls, creating all kinds of commotion and wake everyone. I really hate motels that have two stories because you have to drag all your luggage that weighs 29 million pounds up a stairwell that isn't enclosed, and it's usually raining cats and dogs. (Or is that dogs and cats? Which is politically correct?)

My mom is so frantic in a hotel/motel. She has a fear of the floors and we always have to wear shoes whenever we walk around on the carpet because "you don't know what kinds of bugs have been crawling around." I usually take those thongs that FLIP-FLOP-FLIP-FLOP when you wear them.

I love all the "goodies" that hotels have: petite bottles of shampoo and conditioner, soapies, official hotel pens and paper. My sister and I always fight over the stationery.

Requesting extra towels is always fun. The maid brings you less than you began with, or she brings enough to dry an army.

My mother always forgets to

pack something too, underwear, toothpaste, etc. So we must adventure to the nearest K-Mart. All K-Marts have the same types of things, but there is nothing more thrilling than going to a K-Mart that's different from the one you usually shop at. You seem to find things that your K-Mart doesn't have.

Wherever we stay, whether it's a hotel or a motel, the place has to have a pool.

Every time I go on vacation with my family, we go to an amusement park. I like amusement parks, but I hate BIG rides. Yes, I'm a pansy.

I hate those death-defying roller coasters like the Viper at Darien Lake; the Magnum, Gemini, Corkscrew and Blue Streak at Cedar Point; or the KILLER COASTER, the BEAST at King's Island. King's Island (in Cincinnati, Ohio) has several wet-your-pants coasters. Besides the BEAST, there is a roller coaster that you stand-up on, and one that first goes forward then backward on the track.

Everyone attempts to drag me on to these coasters, but I get sick just looking at them. Ralphing and yacking aren't my favorite pastimes. Besides, someone has to hold the food, purses, stuffed animals and my dad's glasses, which flew off his face riding the BEAST, but he caught them just in time.

Sometimes I sit for 15 minutes, sometimes I sit for

two hours. I don't mind sitting and waiting. I'm a people observer/watcher/starer. I love those groups who walk around wearing the same colored T-shirts (probably so they don't lose each other), the leader waves the FLAG to gather the group together, and they all have the monster cameras from hell.

Then there are the heavy metalers decked out in their leather coats, leather pants and leather boots when it's hotter than holy famolees outside.

People are so interesting.

Besides being terrified of roller coasters, I am also scared of water slides. I was riding a single tube one time and the tube turned around so that I was going down the slide backwards! My life passed before me - it wasn't a pleasant experience.

I've also ridden down this water ride that had a VERY steep and VERY high incline. I sat on this hard, plastic slab, raced down the incline at a speed of over 29 hundred miles per hour, hit bottom, and then jumped the water five or six times. I thought I was going to die.

Well, hopefully my Spring Break won't be too bad. Enjoy yourself on those death-defying, killer roller coasters and water slides. I'll be sure to enjoy my serenity. Send me a postcard.

Alicia Hartman is a second semester communication major.

Making a new house a home

by Dave Barry
Syndicated Columnist

Recently I stood in the kitchen of our new home, amid hundreds of cardboard boxes, all helpfully labeled "BETH", and watched my wife, Beth, open a box. She cut through several layers of tape, opened the box flaps and pulled out an object that had been laboriously wadded up inside roughly 2,000 square feet of white paper. She unwrapped it, layer by layer, until finally she got to the object that had been so carefully protected: a coffee mug.

With coffee still in it.

If you're wondering why we packed a mug with coffee in it, the answer is, we are not that stupid. We are MUCH stupider than that. What we did was PAY SOMEBODY to do this.

I am of course referring to moving professionals. They're all trained at a special school. Here's a sample question from the final exam:

You are packing up a customer's possessions, and you find a human body with multiple stab wounds. You should:

a. Call an ambulance.

b. Notify the police.

c. Wad it up in white paper and stuff it in a box.

The correct answer is "c". Professional movers wad EVERYTHING in white paper. If, in 1990, George Bush had sent in professional movers to resolve the Kuwait problem, today the entire Iraqi military force, tanks and all, would be individually wadded up inside several million cardboard boxes strewn all over the desert, each box labeled with only the word "IRAQ". (Or possibly "BETH".) It would take Saddam Hussein DECADES to unpack his army. ("Let's see what's in this box ... more corporals! Where the HECK did they put the enlisted men?")

That's pretty much our situation. We're in a new, extremely box-intensive house. We moved because our old house got whopped by Hurricane Andrew. We thought about fixing it up, but then we got some estimates from contractors:

CONTRACTOR: OK, you see this?

US: What?

CONTRACTOR: Where the tree landed on this truss.

US: Houses have TRUSSES?

CONTRACTOR: (to his assistant): Go back to the truck and fetch me some more zeros for this estimate.

It turned out that our old house needed major work. To get it back to its original condition, we would have had to go through a three-step process:

STEP ONE: We move out.

STEP TWO: We move into temporary lodgings.

STEP THREE: We die there of old age.

The reason for Step Three, of course, is that major home renovations -- ask anybody who has been through them -- are never completed within your personal lifetime. Major renovations are something you do for posterity.

CLERGYMAN: And so today we pay our last respects to a person who had a dream -- the dream that someday, somehow, her house would once again have working bathrooms.

(Roars of laughter from the audience, especially the plumbing contractor.)

So we decided to sell our house in what is legally known as "whopped condition." The buyer, who is named Frank, was

not troubled by this at all. Frank is a positive, optimistic individual, by which I mean he is clinically insane, although of course I would never say this in print because he bought our house. Frank is totally unafraid of major home renovations. He strides confidently around and says things like, "I'm gonna move the kitchen HERE, put another bathroom HERE, put an escalator THERE; then I'm gonna move the entire house NEXT DOOR for a few days while I dig a new basement, and then I'm gonna..."

We admire Frank's zeal, and we plan to say so at his funeral. Meanwhile, we're adapting to our new house. We've never had a brand-new house before, where everything works and the walls and floors are spotless and there is no lingering odor coming from behind the cabinets where apparently a mouse has died. (Don't worry, Frank! After a while you get used to it!) And so when we entered our new house for the first time as the owners, we felt a sense of euphoria that lasted for a full 10 seconds, which is how long it took for our small auxiliary backup dog, Zippy, to

locate a white carpet and poop on it. I am not making this up. I believe the sound of the door closing was still echoing through the empty house when Zippy let loose. I don't hold this against him. Inside his brain, which is made of the same material as his toenails, he believed he was doing the right thing, according to the laws of Dog Logic, as follows:

1. It is bad to poop inside our house.
2. This is not our house.
3. Therefore, this is a good place to poop.

Of course we plan to do much more with our new home. We're going to put gouges in the floors, and we plan to do a LOT with hand smudges. But we like to think that, in terms of our basic decor theme, Zippy set the tone. We can't wait to get started, and we're looking forward to many happy years here, during which we hope to eventually locate the box containing our son.

Dave Barry is a syndicated columnist from the Miami Herald