

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION {1988}

By J B Leftwich

Nestled in the hills of south central Kentucky and surrounded by oak, pine, sweet gum, sugar maples, beeches, is Lake Cumberland State Park, one of the most beautiful parks within a three-hour drive of Lebanon.

It was here that our clan, 17.6 of us with one absent, gathered last week for our annual family vacation. Only Missy, eldest of the third generation, who is working in a resort in Estes Park, Col., was absent. This upped 17-year-old Peri to senior of this generation.

The park motel, Lure Lodge, overlooks through a band of trees Lake Cumberland, which is formed from water of the Cumberland River backed 101 miles by Wolf Creek Dam. Each room has a balcony that is excellent for sitting and talking, or sitting and reading on rainy mornings. One of the facilities of the park is a restaurant which features a buffet and a breakfast bar ideal for satisfying appetites of hungry teen-agers but too cool for guests who did not bring long-sleeve garments.

Late in the afternoon and on into the evening, the raccoons gather beneath the balconies and around the pavilion. One son-in-law counted 31 of them one night. Park personnel said as many as 60 have been seen at one time. Sometimes, a few groundhogs join the party. It's a little sad seeing these animals of the night, once so elusive that only the best coon-hounds could detect them, now fat and sleek and begging for food. Signs warn guests not to hand-feed the animals. Many paid no attention.

Jack took the two small children, Leigh and Jim, and 13-year-old Anna fishing. Leigh was fascinated with the crickets, used as bait, and prevailed upon her parents to allow her to keep them in their room. The adults awakened to a serenade, so Jack sat the crickets on the balcony. One raccoon appreciated having crickets added to his menu. He simply climbed the down spout to reach the second floor.

Andy, Jason and Matt, all teenagers, and their grandfather dedicated much of their time to the nine-hole par-3 golf course. Left-handed Jason had no iron below a seven so we allowed him to lay out of a sand trap. He rewarded us by chipping. As we returned from one round, we met a beautiful teen-age blonde walking with her parents toward the lodge. The boys seemingly paid little attention to her.

"Let me tell you something," I told my grandsons. "At your age, I certainly would not have just walked by that girl."

"Oh, we made eye contact," Matt said. I wondered if we boys had "eye contact" with girls 50 years ago.

My wife, who despises grackles and starlings, but loves most other birds had a field day observing birds she rarely sees at home. Among them were tufted titmice, nuthatches, yellow shafted flickers, and one pileated woodpecker, the old fashion kind that I knew as a boy but did not know then he was "pileated."

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According to a park brochure, Lake Cumberland is one of the largest man-made lakes in the world. Wolf Creek Dam, 240 feet high, backs water up the river to cover 63,000 acres to form 1,255 miles of shoreline. The average depth is 90 feet.

The lake's blue-green waters attract house-boaters, skiers, scuba divers and campers. Fishing is a star attraction. There are plenty of commercial boat docks where houseboats, pontoon boats and fishing boats can be rented. Two docks are in view of the park's central facilities.

The nearest town to Lake Cumberland Park is Jamestown, Ky., Russell County seat and a city of 2,500 population. To use a well-worn word, Jamestown is "quaint" with its courthouse and city hall on the square along with commercial buildings. Much of the architecture is Nineteenth Century but modernization has crept in. For example, the upholstery shop, which should be Joe's Upholstery, is called The Recovery Room.

Some of us ate lunch at Mallie's On the Square Restaurant Tuesday, and more of us were there for lunch Wednesday. The building once housed a hardware store -- its high ceilings are tin -- run by the family of Mallie Miller. Betty Meadows Colvin, Mallie's granddaughter and one of four persons who own the business now, operates the restaurant, but maintains her home in Louisville.

One of the things that made Lake Cumberland State Park enjoyable was the courtesy of staff personnel. Many staffers in public positions have no sense of humor. These did. I had a running dialogue with the cashier of the restaurant, bargaining for a senior citizen discount.

"Kentucky gives senior discounts on rooms, not on food," she said.

Asked how to make out the check for the motel rooms, the clerk replied: "Oh, just make it out to me."

Now nursery rhymes are going mod. This from seven-year-old Jim:

"Squiggly Dee came out of the sea.
He ate everybody, but he didn't eat me.
Stupid old Squiggly Dee. He ate everybody but he didn't . . ."

What ever happened to Mother Goose?

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