

Of summer and havens of bliss

By Paul McMullen

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One of the best ads in the recent World Cup (congratulations, Germany) was the one for Hyundai set in a crowded birthing unit in Europe. A nurse asks, "What was going on nine months ago?" The spot flashes back to frenzied soccer fans, and, well, you know the rest.

Which takes us to the propagation of the McMullen clan.

My sister, Sue, celebrates her birthday March 19.

I was born on a March 16.

For two seemingly intelligent people, it took us forever to realize that perhaps we were Father's Day babies, or, even more convenient for our very own creation myths, reunion babies.

That epiphany arrived one June afternoon on the beach at Ocean City, a few days after a McMullen Family Reunion. That annual gathering had shifted to the Eastern Shore in the late 1970s, after female relatives from Western Pennsylvania found the offerings at the resort a tad more appealing than Lonely Acres, the glorified camping their men had chosen as the ideal place to celebrate summer, freedom and family.



A testament to truth in advertising, Lonely Acres would have given Jean Shepherd great material.

If you don't know the late Shepherd's name, you know his work. He's the humorist behind "A Christmas Story," the 1983 instant classic with Ralphie and his Red Ryder BB Gun. Five years later, Shepherd gave us "Ollie Hopnoodle's Haven of Bliss," a similar shtick from his youth, this time inspired by a mythical summer destination in the Midwest.

Lonely Acres, in the bustling burg of East Carroll Township, Pa., made Shepherd's resort look like Disneyland. There was a swimming hole and a tiny dance hall and the occasional outhouse that reminded you of the modernity of the recently installed indoor plumbing in the cabins.

What it did have were trees and places to hide and play ball, and aunts and uncles and cousins and siblings by the station wagon load. It was a place where my father, his five brothers and my older cousins literally told war stories, of surviving World War II or Korea.

Into the 1960s, a week with my father's family at Lonely Acres was followed by an even longer drive to Boston, for a visit with my mother's. She needed that as much

as her kids needed another diversion. Their money was tight, but my parents made summer vacation a priority.

This was long before flat screens and game consoles and golf resorts and sports camps made entertainment a great American commodity - and helped create the paradox of the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave leaving vacation days on the table.

To quote from Forbes.com: "A study published in the Journal of Happiness Studies reveals that working more makes Americans happier than it does Europeans. The study's author, Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Dallas, says, 'Americans maximize their ... (happiness) by working, and Europeans maximize their (happiness) through leisure.' "

May you read this weeks from now, after vacation at the beach or the mountains - wherever you and yours find your haven of bliss.

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