

Thursday, August 24th, 2006
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

WHAT HAPPENED TO LONG VACATIONS?

Does anyone take serious vacations any more? In the “good old days,” schools did not start again until the Monday after Labor Day. The last two weeks in August used to be a popular time for families to get away to the beach for a final summer fling. But not anymore. The American family vacation seems to be dying.

In days of old, I always joined in on family excursions at summer’s end. And there was no electronic requiem involved. No cell phone rings, no BlackBerry buzzes, and no laptop beeps. It was Lake Michigan in my early years, Lake George, New York in my college days, and from my twenty’s on it was annual summer vacations in Gulf Shores, Alabama.

Back in the 60’s and 70s, there was no high rises on the Gulf Coast, no water parks, and a few local seafood restaurants. Just a lot of single story beach houses with long porches facing the Gulf. There was no local phone service back then, and you had to bring your own drinking water. We brought our own sheets and towels, because the well water was full of iron and made the wash stiff. No TV and no air conditioning.

And you know what? The whole family thoroughly enjoyed the two weeks we stayed. We talked to one another, went crabbing and fishing off the shoreline, read, took afternoon naps, and long evening walks looking for the new shells that washed up on the shore earlier that day. Maybe a trip into Pensacola once or twice for a movie. And when our two weeks was up, no one wanted to go home.

Expedia.com’s annual vacation survey found that only 14% of Americans go away for two weeks or more at one time. And now, schools begin in the middle of August. Middle of August? Why? Aren’t air conditioning bills for schools much higher then? So what happened to the June 1st-August 1st summer schedule? No more school days were added. Kids have to cut summer jobs at resort areas short. Why the change?

Now, if you can get away to the beach for a few days at all, you cram into one of the high rises that line the Gulf Coast beaches for miles at end. Since you stay in an air conditioned condo, your body adapts and it’s too hot to go out to the beach. The kids all head for the mall, or a game room. Dad, and mom if she works, check into the office several times a day, and carry their PEDs and cell phones wherever they go. Electronic devices and games surround the whole family.

Just getting away does not, in itself, guarantee relaxation. It takes several days just to unwind. And isn’t life too short not to appreciate every moment, and have the tune out time with special family and friends? Maybe this longer special time has passed a lot of folks by. But I hope for me it never does.

Did you read where Krispy Kreme is having major financial difficulties? A number of stores have gone under, and sales have dramatically fallen nationwide. Its future looks shaky at best. Maybe the concept was a victim of its own success. Stores proliferated overnight. The company just grew too fast, and carb-conscious customers backed away from the special taste of a wonderful doughnut.

I now I have been a special Krispy Kreme fan for years. Those hot, out of the oven different flavors that almost melt in your mouth. And let me tell you this. I know a lot about Krispy Kremes. Like the fact that

an anonymous New Orleans Frenchman sold his secret yeast-raised doughnut recipe to Ishmael Armstrong of Paducah, Kentucky, and the first Krispy Kreme retail store was opened in July of 1937 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

And the choices. There are so many to choose from. Of course original glazed, then chocolate iced, custard filled, raspberry filled, lemon filled, maple glazed, sugar coated, cinnamon bun, cinnamon twist, powdered blueberry, glazed cream filled, strawberry filled, cake, powdered cake glazed devil's food, glazed blueberry, glazed sour cream, glazed cruller, chocolate iced cake, and cinnamon apple filled. Have I worn you out? Don't tell me I don't know anything about Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

The real treat is to go to a Krispy Kreme shop that makes the doughnuts on site. I've been to one such shop, and it was a special treat. Gladys and I were on our way last year to the S.E.C. football championship in Atlanta to watch LSU beat Tennessee. We were on the I-459 bypass around Birmingham about midnight, and turned off Exit 13 at Hoover, Alabama to get gas and take a short break. There it was. The largest doughnut shop I had ever seen. We stayed for 45 minutes watching the doughnuts come out of the various ovens and down conveyor belts to the display racks. After eating a number of flavors, we took a dozen assorted with us, and I even bought a Krispy Kreme T-shirt.

Rick Bragg once wrote that trying to explain how good Krispy Kremes are to someone who has never had one is like telling a celibate priest about young love. He sure knew what he was talking about. But like the loss of summer vacations, the flow moves on. And I'm not sure it's for the better. I think I'll go for a box of Krispy Kremes this weekend. For old times sake.

**“I'd give all wealth that years have piled,
The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer-day. “**

Lewis Carroll

Peace and Justice.

Jim Brown

You can listen to Jim Brown all this week as host on WJBO radio, 1150 am in Baton Rouge, and on the web at www.wjbo.com, fro 9am until 11:00 am each weekday. Next week, catch Jim on 1380 am in Baton Rouge each morning, same time.

Jim Brown's weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim's Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus read his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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