# Travel tradition still requires preparation

CELEBRATING FAMILY

LISA LUCKOW-HEALY

Last summer my husband and I meticulously planned a family getaway that broke with tradition.

We wanted to expand our children's horizons and go to three destinations in one week instead our usual one-week mainstay.

There was enough to do in each location without being too regimented. Two of our children were disheartened when we arrived at our third location – the one we usually spend the week at with two other families – because the others were involved in the resort's children's program and other activities our children also frequented.

This summer my husband and I will continue our annual jaunt to the Lake Michigan shoreline for our traditional getaway with two other families.

We set off knowing we will arrive at a place where we build lifelong memories and life moves at a much slower, more comfortable pace. It is familiar to all of us, yet we still prepare the same way each year to make the trip as smooth as possible.

It's important to plan ahead, especially when you are traveling with children. Here are some helpful hints to ease your family travels:

■ Involve your children in the planning process. Discuss the activities that will be available at your destination. Find out what interests your children. Jot down any items you will need to bring along for these activities, such as tennis racquets, water and beach toys, and bicycles and safety gear.

■ Discuss travel money for activities and souvenirs. Are there special items native to your destination your children will be interested in buying? If so, discuss how your children can earn the money to help pay for their travel shopping.

■ Have back-up activities in mind for the duration of your trip. Talk about what you can all do if the weather doesn't cooperate with your wish list of plans.

If you're not too sure, contact the chamber of commerce near your destination to ask for a schedule of local events and attractions. Request maps of outlying areas from your automobile club. This will help you determine how close other local towns are and what they have to offer.

■ Ask each child to pack a travel bag (or pack one for young children). Help make some suggestions as to what to pack so each pack isn't filled with a wealth of bedtime goodies and zero daytime entertainment. Include items such as travel games, a radio/tape player and headphones, a camera, small toys, drawing paper and colored pencils, and books.

■ Pack a travel snack bag. Remember that the children aren't the only ones who get hungry. Suggestions include bottled water and juice, snack mix, snack bars, fruit, crackers and homemade cookies.

■ Prepare a goodie bag of surprises for travel time. If you know there comes a point in your travel time when your children need a little boost, they will surely brighten up with a travel surprise.

Perhaps the surprise is a pack of their favorite chewing gum, a new deck of playing cards, or favorite new magazines or books. Music or books on tape also entertain the mind and provide a welcomed distraction.

■ Give everyone a departure assignment. Before you leave, go down your checklist and give everyone in your family a chance to double-check something in the house.

Check to make sure lights are off (or on a timer), appliances are turned off, the trash is taken out, the windows are closed where appropriate, the thermostat is turned down, toys and games are picked up and put away, dishes are cleaned and put away, and beds are made. It's always nice to return home to a clean house.

Use these suggestions to help in your family's vacation planning. There are numerous other ways to prepare for your trip. Perhaps the above suggestions will help solidify some of your existing strategies.

Don't worry if there's something you forgot to pack. Once you've left there isn't much you can do to change the outcome. Make do with what you have, or buy a replacement once you arrive at your destination, if necessary.

*To leave Lisa Luckow-Healy a message from a touch-tone phone about how you celebrate family, call (734) 953-2047; or e-mail suggestions for future family topics to LiHealy@mediaone.net.*

# Learn about reptiles before getting one as pet

ABOUT ANIMALS

DR. BRAD DAVIS

A few years ago, a teacher invited me to speak to her class of third graders about being a veterinarian.

I consider it an absolutely priceless experience, watching the kids listen intently and then hearing their questions. Of course, they were far more interested in the jar with the heart full of heartworm than they were in me, but you take whatever attention you can get.

Anyway, a few days later I received a lovely gift. Each child had written a report about my visit, and the teacher bound them up as a book for me, with art work by the students on the front and back covers. This remains one of my prized possessions.

The reports struck me because of the different styles, and the different facts. The number of dogs I own ranged from one to five. The time I went to school ranged from three to 12 years. And the spellings of my name showed me these youngsters would someday be Scrabble champions.

One of my quotes, however, appeared absolutely perfectly exact in every report: "Snakes give me the willies!"

I mean, honestly, how can they not? Forget any biblical or cultural bias, they ain't got no arms!!! Their tongues zip out of their mouths, and they crawl on their bellies in silence! Plus, just when you think they can't get creepier, they rub against a rock and shed their skin! (Uh oh – I'm getting the willies!)

## Snakes as pets

Some people don't agree with my (and every other sane person's) assessment of snakes. They don't find them creepy. They think having a pet that doesn't blink makes everything good.

One of these people is Mark Honas, reptile expert and radio host. Mark has had hundreds of these critters living in his house (yes, he has a house, ruining the image that every snake owner lives in his parents' basement), and finds them to be the best pets you can own.

He believes they're so cool it rubs off on their owner (the same thing every Miata dealer tries to convince every middle-aged man entering his showroom).

"An interest in exotic animals like reptiles (and snakes) usually leads to books and a great deal of reading about these critters, which leads to an interest in science," Honas said. "These kids will grow up to be scientists and cure cancer! See, snakes will cure cancer!"

Creepy scientists, that is.

Mostly I'm tensing snake owners. I don't personally like snakes, but they can be great pets, especially if you do things right and know all that owning a critter like this involves. This knowledge gained ahead of time helps keep children aware of what they need to do, and keeps parents from freaking out.

"If you want to own a reptile get a good book on the care and be sure you know what you're buying," Honas said. "An 18-inch baby albino Burmese python is cute now (yeah, right!) but in three years it will be over 15 feet long and close to 200 pounds. Learn before you buy.

"Go to the local reptile shop and ask a million questions. The more you know the better. Plus, most pet shop owners will love to pass on their experience. A good Web site for reptile information is www.kingsnake.com. They have everything reptile."

Herpers, people inclined toward reptilian pets, don't all agree on what pets to own. Some own the "hot," or venomous snakes. Most feel that owning a pet that could kill you might be a mistake.

Honas has three choices for starter snakes: a California King Snake, a corn snake, or a ball python, and recommends the purchase of captive bred snakes, as they will be the healthiest and the easiest to maintain. All three of these snakes can be expected to end up between 2 and 4 feet long.

Remember, you will need to figure in the costs of keeping the snake, as well as just buying it. Those with weak stomachs may not want a freezer full of dead mice to be used as snake chow.

Still, more and more people get into these pets all the time.

"The reptile segment of the pet industry is one the fastest growing," Honas said. "There are currently over 28 million reptile pets. So be warned there may be a herper in your neighborhood!"

So it's probable that of those kids I spoke to, a few of them have become herpers, keeping snakes or other reptilian creatures.

Oh well – can't save them all!

**Take Home Message:** Snakes may not be everybody's cup of tea, but anyone with an interest in them needs to do careful research before getting into the hobby.

I mean, what if you get the whole setup, and then you find out they give you the willies?

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