

Community Comment
July 31, 2015
Sam Pennisi

The joy of summer

I'm a California native from the Los Angeles area. My grandparents were from Sicily and my parents were born in the Midwest; Omaha Nebraska to be exact. My father worked at a factory that made airplanes for the war effort and that opportunity is what drew them to L.A. They did whatever it took to provide for my brother and I. We heard from my earliest memories that we would finish high school and go to college. It was not an option in my family. My Dad had a fourth grade education but he saw that more education meant more opportunities for a better life. Maybe because they were children of immigrants, an education did not just open doors for better jobs, it meant one could be a better citizen. Being an American and one who participates in our communities was important. When both of us graduated college, the pride they felt was obvious to us.

Because my parents struggled to provide for us, we learned the simple pleasures of life. Vacations, when we could afford one, was a trip to an inexpensive motel in the mountains above L.A. We would spend a long weekend and ride our bikes in the cool mountain air. Sometimes, we would find a place with a pool and could swim. We would spend all day in the water until our skin was all waterlogged. When Disneyland opened, I remember my dad saying that since we live in L.A., we should be able to go to this new park. They saved for about eight months so we could go the year it opened. We had a one day pass and had a blast. My typical Saturday was spent playing with two or three buddies. We would ride our bikes to the river bed and often were gone from morning until dinner. Things have changed.

Both my brother and I have had better lives than my parents in terms of financial security. He was a mechanical engineer and worked in the defense industry for his career. He did very well and worked hard at something he liked doing. I taught for twelve years and started our Bed and Breakfast. Teaching college didn't pay as well as being an engineer did, but I made more money my first year than my dad made in his last working year. We are not wealthy, but we have made good choices, saved and invested, and worked hard.

Since Sharon was raised on a farm in Michigan, and all her family is still there, it has been important to us to have our girls know their Aunts, Uncles, cousins and beyond. A choice we made was to own a small cottage in Michigan on a small lake, of which there are hundreds, and spend time there with extended family. If you asked our girls if this was money well spent, I think they would both say they love this opportunity to know the family and to spend some time in the summer in the upper Midwest. For the last few summers we have been taking our grandchildren.

We had them for ten days this last month. One is nearly 11, one is nearly 5, and one is just one. I watched them just play in the lake from morning to sunset. The ten year old can keep up with any of us in the kayaks or swimming; in that she beats us all. The one year old played on the beach and in the water under our watchfull eyes. The five year old discovered the simple pleasure of jumping off the end of the dock over and over again.

I discovered how successful, and lucky, I really am; thru the simple pleasures of summer.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.