

A Note from Executive Director, Vicki Hickman

Roughing It At Norris Lake

My husband and I recently spent three days at Norris Lake with our daughter, son-in-law, and our two grandsons—Roman, who is two and a half, and Westin, who just turned one. My son-in-law's parents joined us as well, although they wisely brought their own RV. The rest of us rented a rustic cabin at Norris Dam State Park.

And when I say rustic, I mean rustic.

There was no internet, which meant no cable, no streaming, and very little television. Of course, with two small boys in the cabin, quiet moments were rare enough that it hardly mattered.

The cabin had queen-size beds, which technically provided enough room. However, my husband and I have not slept in anything smaller than a king-size bed in years. The queen-size bed placed me so close to his CPAP mask that each time it shifted, I found myself directly in the path of intermittent gale-force winds.

Our time inside the cabin was largely spent keeping Westin from climbing into the fireplace to eat the lava rocks. Apparently, he viewed it less as a safety hazard and more as a rock buffet.

Meanwhile, Roman took responsibility for repeatedly testing the carbon monoxide detector. I am happy to report that it passed every inspection.

Between the CPAP wind tunnel, fireplace patrol, and carbon monoxide alarm, the cabin offered all the peace and relaxation of a small emergency command center.

Fortunately, we spent most of our time on the lake. Rain had been predicted, but we managed to avoid most of it and enjoyed plenty of time on the boat.

Seeing the boys on the water warmed my heart.

Roman went tubing with his dad and, rather than being nervous, insisted they go faster. He jumped from the boat into the water with the confidence of someone who had been boating his entire life—adorable to watch, although slightly terrifying for his GaGa.

Westin floated around the lake in his tube, splashing everyone within reach and laughing at our reactions. At just one year old, he has already learned that splashing people is far more entertaining when they do not want to be splashed.

One of my favorite moments came while the boat was moving fast. Roman crawled into my lap, wrapped his arms around me, and held on tightly. For a few precious minutes, I simply held him close.

Those moments do not last forever.

Before long, Roman may decide he is too independent to sit on GaGa's lap, and Westin may no longer find endless splashing quite so hilarious. Even the lava rocks and carbon monoxide detectors will eventually lose their appeal—at least, I hope so.

We returned home tired, slightly sunburned, and probably in need of another vacation. But I am so glad we went.

I know how fortunate I am to have a front-row seat as my grandsons grow up—to witness their first adventures, hear their laughter, and experience the world again through their eyes. They may not remember every detail of this trip, but I will remember Roman holding tightly to me as the boat sped across the lake, and Westin splashing us as though he had invented the greatest game in the world.

Sometimes the best family trips are not the most comfortable or peaceful. They are the ones where everyone is together, the children are laughing, and GaGa is keeping one child out of the fireplace while the other conducts his twentieth safety inspection.

That is the kind of “roughing it” I will gladly do again.

-Vicki