

Trip strengthens family ties



Erin Harrel
of Cape Coral is
the mother of
three children.

The end of summer has come, much to my dismay.

My husband, Greg, and I took the kids (Jude, 9, Riley, 8, and Maggie, 4) to the Outer Banks, N.C., through Savannah, Ga., and then to St. Augustine.

The kids enjoyed their cousins for a full week on the beaches of the Outer Banks — and I got to reconnect with my brothers and sister. It was absolutely delightful!

I have three siblings: My older brother, Brendan, and my younger sibs, Kevin and Casey. Each is married with one or two kids.

Spending a week with family can sometimes be difficult, but we found this trip fun and insightful.

The opportunity for all of our family to be together is rare. My mom and dad have always placed a huge emphasis on family, but with Casey and me living in Fort Myers, getting everyone together seems to be increasingly difficult. But the Outer Banks trip was a huge success.

We found a large house on the beach with five bedrooms, a pool, hot tub and plenty of beach toys. Giving everyone their own space made it very pleasant.

The kids frolicked on the beach. Jude and Riley rode the waves for hours on end. Maggie built sand castles with her cousins, all of whom are close to her age.

Casey and her husband took their boys crabbing and fishing. Brendan and his wife were content playing with the kids on the beach. Kevin



Photo special to Parent & Child

and Colleen enjoyed just hanging out with everyone.

After all the little ones were down for the night, my siblings, their spouses, our parents and Greg and I spent hours of very therapeutic laughter discussing the joys and woes of parenting.

It was wonderful to be able to bounce some of our concerns and excitement off those we trust and adore most. For example, this coming school year Maggie was to attend our favorite preschool, Bright Beginnings. However, a full-time employment position presented itself, and I readily accepted it. Hence, we were forced to find a full-time position for Maggie with her siblings. Greg and I lamented the decision. I even lost hours of much-needed sleep. I just wasn't sure she could handle a full day.

After sharing my concerns with my siblings, I was reassured we were making the right decision. Even my

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mother (whom I thought would be devastated) consoled us and reminded us that Maggie spent the majority of her day in the car, anyway. My sister reminded us that she would get a nap every day and our lives would be much easier having all three kids on one schedule.

The hours spent talking about this and so many other parenting dilemmas and joys were much less costly than the mental health therapy I thought I was going to need.

This summer began a life-long bond between the young cousins and strengthened the bond among my siblings. Following in the footsteps of my parents, we all discovered that family is by far the most important thing in life. **pc**