

The school bell rang for the last time on Friday, not forever but for this school year. By now, many families have packed the car, locked the backdoor and headed off for a favorite place or parts unknown. The rest? Well, they realize they already live in a favorite place so they're relaxing at the town beach or climbing Mount Kearsarge.

My mother was one of the car packers. With Independence Day approaching, she loaded up the trunk, tossed us in the back with the dog and headed to Cape Cod. Now mind you, as families go, we weren't very good on long car trips. By long, I mean anything more than a half hour was a problem. When I was very little, our starting point was Connecticut and that trip took forever. I don't know why. It's not like we took side trips to see giant balls of twine or stopped for selfies with dinosaurs.

For some reason, my grandmother traveled with us. It's not terribly clear why. We were in Connecticut and my grandparents lived just outside of Boston. As best I can figure, Grandpa drove Nana down, spent the weekend and then went back to work. Nana stayed and hung out with us. I'm sure she applauded my sister's end of kindergarten extravaganza. She probably babysat while Mom ran last minute errands. However, I believe her key role was to provide moral support on the long drive to the Cape. I can't be absolutely certain about that; I was only two or three years old at the time.

Finally, the car was packed and a few toys were tossed in the backseat. Everyone made one last trip to the bathroom and we were off. Without air conditioning, we tootled along with the windows open wide. A paper doll or stuffed animal frequently caught the breeze and took flight. Tears and wails ensued but there was no turning back. The Connecticut Turnpike was littered with the flotsam and jetsam of countless children.

Except when it rained, then the windows were rolled up to all but an inch or two. It was miserably muggy. Instead of bereft over a lost toy, we were hot and fussy in the steamy car. Of course, the dog would fart not once but a few times because that's what dogs do. It was more than enough to make a little girl queasy.

That was just the beginning. It was before the age of enlightenment and Mom smoked cigarette after cigarette. I guess I can't blame her. Rain was pelting, the dog was smelly and my sister and I were whiny. Nana was not all that good at the moral support thing. (Don't get me wrong. I loved my grandmother dearly. However, she was not the first person you'd choose in an emergency. Nana was loving and lovely but ... resourceful, well, not so much.) Anyway, the cigarettes only made matters worse, sending me into full-blown carsick mode.

Eventually, a combination of cranky kids and hunger compelled Mom to think about stopping for lunch. Ben and Mildred's Chicken House, a beacon of cheer with greasy food and friendly waitresses was on the way. Alas, Mom could think about it but could not act. Ben and Mildred along with a dozen hot dog stands, burger joints and diners were looking for hungry travelers but not for us. Their culinary delights were all off limits to the Nyes. It seems that a small, curly-headed child had an uncanny habit of throwing up as soon as the family sat down.

Have a happy, healthy summer and bon appétit!



p.s. In case you are worried or wondering, while dogs still fart, Mom eventually quit smoking and, like most kids, the curly-headed child outgrew motion sickness.



Shrimp & Cucumber Bites

Just in time for summer, an easy but elegant hors d'oeuvre to pass at your next cookout. Enjoy!

Makes 40-50 bite sized hors d'oeuvres

Sun-dried Tomato Dip (recipe follows)
1 pound medium (40-50 pieces) shrimp
1-2 English cucumbers

Make the Sun-dried Tomato Dip.

Peel the cucumbers and cut them into about 1/4-inch thick rounds.

Dab a little Sun-dried Tomato Dip on each cucumber slice and top with a shrimp.

Arrange the Shrimp & Cucumber Bites on a platter and pass.

Sun-dried Tomato Dip

Makes about 1 cup

6-8 halves oil packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and chopped
2-3 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon or basil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
Pinch cayenne pepper
About 1/3 cup mayonnaise
About 1/3 cup sour cream
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Combine the sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, vinegar, herbs and cayenne in a small food processor and process until the tomatoes and garlic are chopped fine and well combined.

Add the mayonnaise and sour cream and process until smooth. Let the dip sit for 30 minutes or more to combine the flavors.

