

## Kensley: Tech-free vacation to New Hampshire refreshes family

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The final week of our summer vacation was spent on a tiny landmass 8 miles off the New Hampshire coast.

The Star Island conference center is a rough hybrid between a family summer camp and the Catskills resort featured in the movie "Dirty Dancing." The accommodations are far from luxurious, and as such, the island has intentionally remained an escape from many modern technological conveniences such as TV or computers.

On our first full day, Tanya caught up with an old friend. "I don't think the kids miss their screen time," she said.

Ella, my fifth-grader, interrupted her own conversation with a brand-new friend and offered enthusiastically, "Definitely! This is way more fun!"

Apparently, it took only one day to ease Ella away from the addictive comforts of technology. Nevertheless, as we took our seats on the flight home a week later, a few short hours removed from our peaceful haven, the kids begged to watch TV. We acquiesced, and they sat rapt and silent for most of the flight. I wondered if one week away from the trappings of modern society would affect my kids' cravings for technology over the long haul. Could a short vacation from technology really make that much of a difference in a child's growth?

I talk a good game, but let's be clear: I understand why technology is needed, that it helps my life immensely, and that our dependence on it is only going to expand going forward. Still, I firmly believe that children learn life's most valuable skills from actual human interaction and pursuits that don't involve screens. Which is why I tend to jump at any opportunity to achieve this.

Our time away consisted of a whirlwind of interpersonal communication, and was spent in large part savoring the smells, sounds and sights of our maritime milieu. We forged deep connections with many old and new friends, as well as with each other. We read, sang, danced and watched sunsets. I stretched on the grass while music wafted from the long hotel porch. Ella played guitar and sang in the island talent show, with Sophia on backup vocals. Tanya and I laughed our way through the basics of improvisational theater. We didn't check email or make a single phone call.

And Ella and Sophia begged to return next year.

Motherboard mastery cannot help us capture the indescribable sensations of love or spiritual fulfillment. Time spent in front of man-made devices will never improve our self-esteem, and it won't make us more empathetic. It certainly won't help us learn the values of respect and charity. But a week in a one-star hotel, eating in a communal dining room, surrounded by screaming gulls and bathed in sunshine reflected off the Atlantic did all of those things.

By the end of the week, we were equal parts exhausted and nourished, and recharged for the

coming year. I'll never know for sure whether this particular vacation made a permanent difference in our children's lives.

But of this I am certain: Ella and Sophia have yet to plead for an entire week of video games.

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