

COMMENTARY

I already miss the crazy days of summer

It's funny how beginnings can be endings, and the anticipation of both can be thrilling or grueling, depending on your perspective.

The beginning of June brings the end of the school year. For kids, this ranks right up there with birthday and Christmas.

Kids see summer as release from responsibility. It's three solid months without homework, tests or getting up early.

Parents, on the other

R.J. Foster

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R.J. Foster is a Darboy resident.

hand, can find themselves anticipating summer differently. It's 92 days in which the kids are without the regimented structure of getting up, getting ready and going

away — I mean, going to school, where their days are filled with structure, learning and positive interaction.

Turns out neither vision was quite right.

There's "summer school" — a great program with a slightly misleading title. There are classes held at schools, and it's in the summer. But it's not reading, 'riting or 'rithmetic. It's knitting, drama, art — fun stuff.

The down side is that it kills the not-getting-up-early plan. I giggled as I told my

daughters they would be getting up earlier for summer school than for regular school. It was Daughter No. 1 who smiled and said, "Oh yeah? Well, you have to get up and drive us. So there!" Sadly, she was right.

In the summer, there's no bus. I suspect the drivers are undergoing therapy that will help them regain the sanity lost to the children over the previous nine months. So when it's time to go, it's you behind the wheel.

Then there are summer

sports. When I was a kid, summer sports included baseball and splashing around in the city pool. Today, sports aren't limited by the seasons. Here's the secret. You want to play basketball in the summer? You find yourself a basketball "camp." You want to build snowmen? Find yourself a snowman "camp." Simple.

So for the first several weeks of summer, the kids are moving from class to class, camp to camp, just

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like during the school year. Except instead of moving all over the school building, they're moving all over the city. Great.

When classes and camps are done, there's relief for the parent-driver. And as sad as they are to see the classes end, the kids find comfort in one thought. Finally, they can sleep late and relax.

No commitments. No schedules to follow. No worries.

On the second day of post-summer-school-summer, it begins. "Daddy, we're bored. There's nuthin' to do!"

There were, however, lots of things going on. Daughter No. 1 got her first summer job — cleaning the neighbors' pool in exchange for a "family pass."

She enjoyed the responsibility. We all enjoyed the reward.

Mommy and I only felt a little bit guilty brokering our eldest child into servitude for a cool place to relax.

Daughter No. 2 was playing soccer on a team co-coached by her Daddy. We had an awesome time despite the painfully pink shirts we were assigned to wear. Pink Power!

We played softball and basketball and tennis, blew bubbles, rode bikes, drew with sidewalk chalk, cooked out over the fire pit. When boredom hit, we hit back!

There was a much-anticipated vacation to South Dakota. Mommy was excited to relive a childhood memory. The kids were excited to visit the Mall of America and then look at

some giant stone heads. And Daddy could already hear the voices from the back of the car: "How much longer?" "I have to pee." "She's touching me!"

Here's another secret. The most powerful spell of Harry Potter does not come from a wand, but from the 17-CDs narration of the book.

The "Dis-tractum Charm" creates no sparks or glowing animals. But it will keep two little girls and a grown woman's minds occupied enough to never ask "Are we there yet?"

We got back with about a week before school. It's too bad there was no magic spell to conjure up the backpacks from wherever they were dropped back in June.

I would also prefer a magical approach to school supplies shopping, rather than the traditional wrestling with other parents for the last 25-cent packages of crayons and glue-sticks and searching 13 large cartons for a red folder.

Today, school's in and summer's over. The girls are thrilled with their teachers and their classes. But Daddy's a little sad, missing the days of playing in the yard, driving across the country, even racing around town from one activity to the next.

Other parents tell me I should have my head examined. Maybe they're right.

At least now that school's back in session, I have time.

R.J. Foster: pletters@postcrescent.com