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Vacationing in Redneck Paradise:

Lakewood Camping Resort in South Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

"Yee-Haw"

When you think of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, I can probably read your mind and form a pretty good idea of your opinion. Yes, it is trashy, redneck, corny, overly commercialized, and basically considered the armpit of beach destinations. If you have ever been there, you know what I am talking about. It is not on most people's dream vacation list, that is for sure. Maybe in the past it was upper-scale tourism, but that is not in high supply anymore. Yet for some odd reason, my family and I adore the Dirty Myrtle with our whole hearts. So, what if I told you that I could not go a summer without visiting that golden gem of my childhood?

For some background information on my family: my father helps run a locally owned woman, and I business in Piney Flatts called Crowder RV Center. He has worked there for roughly 30 years, and for those 30 years him and my mother have gone camping multiple times a year, eventually bringing me and my brother along. Camping is just part of how we operate. While growing up, my father would borrow campers off of the lot and take my family anywhere we could go: Gatlinburg, Roan Mountain, Little Wilbur, and most importantly, Myrtle Beach. I know more about the RV business and the camping lifestyle than the average twenty-year-old

woman, and I am pretty thankful that my dad could teach me so much about something we both love.

Campgrounds feel like a home away from home to me, but there is one specific location that will always feel like my second home. It is called Lakewood Family Campground in South Myrtle Beach, also known as Surfside Beach in South Carolina. This place has barely changed over the course of my existence, and as a particularly sentimental person, I prefer it this way. What has changed is me. The vacation is always different in a place that will never change. The experiences have changed over the years and have come with different interests at different ages.

When I tell someone that I stay in a campground at the beach, I always get the look. The “holy shit you’re an actual hick” look. That is okay though, because they will never understand what that campground means to me, and it really is not that big of a deal.

Childhood Memories in Lakewood



Birds-eye view of part of Lakewood

The drive was always the worst part. Seven hours of driving from Elizabethton, Tennessee, down a straight South Carolinian road is not the most fun way to travel for young children. Eventually, it would prove to be worth it, though. The feeling of excitement as we drove up to the entrance was surreal. I remember my heart rate increasing, energy busting out

everywhere, and the feeling of pure adrenaline pumping through my tiny body because I knew that the upcoming week would be the best week of the year. As we pulled up to the check-in office, I would plan out the week in my head: putt-putt, giant meals, sand, ocean, golf cart rides, and the smell of the salty air filling my lungs every step of the way. This was my paradise no matter the opinion of any other entitled prick that tried to tell me otherwise. Too bad I did not have the vocabulary to tell whoever looked down on my vacations exactly what I thought of them at the time.

As soon as we would find our campsite, my dad would do what he could do perfectly in his sleep: back a camper into its exact spot. I have always been proud of my dad for being the handy man that he is. It always only took one try for my dad to do anything, especially back a camper trailer into a site.

Once we were unloaded and settled, vacation time started. It did not matter what time of the day it was; we all changed into swimsuits and took the golf cart to the beach as soon as possible. Grocery shopping could always come later. The beach was the main priority on our agenda. It is funny to think back at how I used to run into the water first without any care for where my chair was or trying to tan first. Life was so free and careless. My only intention at the beach when I was younger was to have as much fun as possible and spend as much time on the beach as my parents would allow.

The campground housed many different options for us to do things as a family. To understand these activities, you need to understand the magnitude of this property. It is about a square half-mile of oceanfront property with a small lake and a few large ponds scattered through it. If we did not want to be on the sand, we could go fishing in the lake. My dad and I used to do that often until I got older and started bringing friends with me. We would also take

advantage of the complimentary watersport rentals that came with our reservation. We could take paddleboats, kayaks, or canoes out onto the lake and have a blast. There was also a small waterpark right on the sand dunes on the beach where there were waterslides that led to a large pool area. This was a party-scene usually, with a DJ and food trucks at the pool. Even though we did eat out some and went shopping a few times throughout the week, I had everything that I needed in the campground.

Vacationing in Lakewood as a Young Adult

Boys, booze, and the beach. A vacation really is what you make of it. In a cute, familyfriendly campground, older kids will always find a way to get into trouble. Just because the grounds have guards and are secure from anyone who is not staying at one of the sites or houses, doesn't mean that we could not stir up some trouble from the inside. This got a lot easier when I started bringing friends with me that I could run off with in the middle of the night, or whenever we wanted. It also was easier when we started staying in a house instead of a camper. The campgrounds at the beach are not just for campers, they have entire little neighborhoods of little beach cottages, and my dad's boss eventually bought one for the employees to use. Campers shook every time we took a step, but a house doesn't make a peep when it is two o'clock in the morning and we are meeting up with some friends on the beach. These days, it is almost like we spend the whole week looking for ways to be mischievous, and that is half the fun.

Nowadays, when we pull up to the entrance of Lakewood, I have a relaxed feeling like I'm returning home from a stressful day. The first thing my vacation friend, Lauren, and I do is not run to the beach anymore, but we lather up with tanning oil, run down to the bar that never

IDs us, and lay out on the beach to get as dark as possible with a Miami Vice in each hand. (In case you were wondering, a Miami Vice is a cocktail composed of half Strawberry Daquiri and half Pina Colada.) We love our new routine. It serves our conceited urges to focus on our appearance with a tan and looking cool with drinks that are just as good without alcohol. The whole idea is silly, really, but we enjoy every minute. Worrying so much about appearance is stressful at times, though. Boys are everywhere, watching all the time like hyenas waiting for a chance to attack. It is truly ridiculous, but the chase is fun and flirty. Eventually we just learned to pretend that they aren't looking.

The shopping started appealing to me more as well. There are plenty of shopping for a couple of girls ready to burn some cash. Broadway at the Beach is a boardwalk type of layout with at least 40 shops and boutiques of all kinds. Ron Jon Surf Shop and Senior Frog's are their most popular places to be, but there are tons of smaller local stores.

Not only is Myrtle Beach a great place to spend every bit of vacation money we bring, but the restaurants are great too. We eat a lot, and we like it that way. Our favorite place this last trip, summer of 2019, was the Noizy Oyster. When I say that I could eat there every day for a year, I'm understating how great that place was. They have a full bar, raw oysters, peel and eat shrimp, crab legs, hush puppies, and every other bit of seafood that most people want when they go to they beach. Great. Now I'm craving it.

We still do not worry about leaving the campground too often, because we still find a million ways to have fun with other people and on the beach. The fun of socializing with other college kids, getting invited to parties with new friends, and living life to the fullest on a beach in my 20s has been exhilarating. It is fascinating to think of the amount of innocent fun I had in the campground that I grew up visiting and how the campground has seen me develop into the

person that I am now. Lakewood is always going to be a very sentimental place. The memories I have there span from my earliest memory capability to this recent summer.

It may not be the most glamorous option for a vacation, but it is full of opportunities to make the best memories that I could have and will continue to make. Nobody will ever be able to convince me otherwise.



Lauren and I enjoying ice cream on the golf cart.