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Looking to the past to ensure a bright future

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When I was growing up in the rural Pacific Northwest, vacations consisted of trips by car or the occasional RV to state parks and, if we were super-duper lucky, a stay in a hotel room.

I'm not sure if you'd call them vacations, because in addition to the Spartan traveling and lodging accommodations, most of the time we just visited relatives.

Even so, we all looked forward to these treks to faraway small towns with people who really knew us; people we could be ourselves around.

When I graduated from high school and we moved to the Northeast these family trips tapered off as everyone grew up and got lives of their own. Most of us married, some have divorced, and almost everyone had kids -- a couple of us even have grandchildren (ahem, not me). So, last year I made a commitment to myself to revive this family tradition and make a trip home with my son and mom.

Well, a couple of emergency rooms trips later, thousands of miles in the air and another 500 or so by car, our trip came to an end.

Left were memories of growing up in a town where we roamed the streets all day in search of adventure and where we knew by dusk we better be home or we'd be housebound the following days.

I remember how I felt boarding that plane to go home, filled once again with the passion of youth and the warmth of family bonds. That trip was made even more memorable by meeting my little brother for the first time (long story, not scandalous, just too tangential for this article).

Anyway, it's spring break and it's my second annual trip back home. Here I sit by a window overlooking the town pool that I haunted from Memorial Day to Labor Day almost every summer of my life. I think about how I set my goals back then, by writing them on napkins with my cousins and girlfriends, something like 1) marry Ben 2) have a baby 3) get a job and 4) live in this town. It's with this same singlemindedness that I think about my current goals.

Even as I type the word goal, I'm struck with the feeling that I've lost sight of setting them. In the race otherwise known as my life I've forgotten to take a step back and make sure I'm heading in the direction I want to go.

It's a defining moment when you realize you've just been putting one foot in front of the other instead of charging to the goal line.

Despite my feelings of guilt over being so lazy on this particularly important issue I find a piece of scrap paper and jot a few things down. None of them are too lofty or too easy, they are just right. I stare at the chicken scratch of my handwriting and I revel in how big those goals might've seemed when I was 12 and this puts a lot of things into perspective.

So I weave this rather long-winded tale for you, Generation X, so you'll join me in making vacations a priority and that while on them you'll take a few moments and relive that magical time in your life when writing something you wanted to do on a piece of paper practically made it come true.

I want you to think big, because that's what propels you. But I also want you to think about what would you make you happy -- feel fulfilled and alive.

For me, spending time with family members I've lost touch with allowed me to be myself again and remember what it means to be Bettyjo, the girl from Oregon, who had what I thought were big dreams at age 12 and now find that I have so much more than I would've ever dared write down back then.

Find that place, Generation X, and let it fill you up and move you forward. Take the time to remember who you were, are and are becoming so you can look back on this life and say that you rocked it.

For rocking it, you will, my friends . . . long live rock n' roll, Gen X!

NextGen Workbytes is written locally by and for Gen Xers learning the realities of the workplace. Bettyjo H. Bouchey is vice president of campus operations at Empire Education Corp. in Albany, and is involved with a local young professionals' group.