

Columnists

Needing a vacation from vacation

By Esther Baird
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BEVERLY, MASS. -

We recently visited my in-laws in Connecticut and, in an astonishing turn of events, it was cold and icy and we needed to spend most of our time indoors.

My mother-in-law had prepared for this by purchasing few tons of crafting supplies with the idea that my four and a half year old daughter could make her Valentine's Day cards. As regular readers may recall, if you give my girls some glue and glitter and perhaps a pair of safety scissors, you can pretty much guarantee an afternoon of sparkly, moderately sticky, peace. She presented my daughter with heart-shaped doilies, red construction paper, Hello Kitty valentines day cards, two different kinds of heart stickers *and* a sheet of puppy stickers, two separate glitters, her own vat of glue and of course scissors. I don't want to say we trashed her kitchen. So, I won't. But it's a good thing that my daughter spent the better part of an afternoon glittering and gluing little Hello Kitty faces to stickers of puppies awash in dripping golden glitter because this year Valentine's Day fell on a Saturday, forcing the school parties to fall on a Friday. And not just any Friday. The Friday that kicks off that much beloved and fabulous February School [Anything But A] Vacation Week.

Just in case parents weren't quite on the brink of winter meltdowns or had not yet reached the end of their creative rope, or were just hoping for a few more days shut in their homes building forts out broken crayons, we give ourselves a full week to reach the Chernobyl meltdown point.

And nothing kicks off a vacation week in the winter quite like a bag of candy hearts, heart-shaped cookies and other sugar bombs best left for perhaps, oh say, the *summer*.

My daughter actually needed to make two sets of Valentine's Day cards because she had a party both at school and at her church Bible club. Thankfully, in addition to the home-made cards, my mother in law also provided her with a more traditional, lick it and stick it set that required a simple signature and sticker on the envelope.

I wasn't totally sure which set would go where but last week, while picking my daughter up at Bible club, I heard the director and another mom discussing the Valentine's Day snacks: "So should we just bring say a big bag of Skittles we can pour into a bowl." The director froze. I froze.

"Um...." he said.

"Or would that be too sticky?" the mom asked.

Sticky? A valid concern. But not really my chief worry when it came to tasting the rainbow.

What about the concern that 20 children with germy hands might all plunge into the Skittle bowl and emerge with billions of the small pebble-hard candies that run colors the moment they are wet and turn children into rocket-propelled bouncing Tiggers?

What about that?

The director came to his senses: "No, I think perhaps they should go in the little bags to go home with the children."

Ah yes, far better to send them home with the skittles.

And for that, the Bible Club got the store-made set of cards. Placing the home-made gluey, glittery doily cards into the bags with the Skittletastic mix seemed like a sensory implosion waiting to happen. And really we have enough to deal with during this vacation week.

It's not like I'm against vacation. It's just that where I come from, we had one vacation week after the Christmas holiday. It was spring break. Simple, standard, and seasonal. To that end, we got out of school in early June – since June is, though I realize possibly confusing here in New England, considered an early part of the summer.

So imagine my consternation when I realized that there was not one, but two separate, weeks off—in *winter*—up here. Am I crazy to think families would be better off with only one break and a longer summer? Perhaps I am. But not nearly as crazy as I will be after my daughter comes home with two Valentine's Day party bags ready to sugar buzz her way through the week.

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