

## Columnists

### Baird: How I spent my summer vacation

By Esther C. Baird  
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BEVERLY, MASS. -

Well, it's been . . . all summer since my last *Baird Facts* column. Instead of writing columns and hitting the beach, I spent my summer studying, researching, reading, writing, breathing and dreaming in ancient Biblical Hebrew.

Best I can tell, I missed a lot of rain. My babysitter (and by that I mean the girl to which I owe my sanity) didn't quite have to put masks and snorkels on my two daughters back in June and July, but that might be because they grew gills.

And that was that. That's how I spent my summer. Oh, except for the small matter of my daughter's 5th birthday party.

Her birthday was in July. She began planning last October. I'm not saying she's Type A, or that I am, or that my husband is. I'm just saying that when she asked me to use a separate notebook to keep party ideas in, I was proud.

She wanted an underwater theme. I wanted a party location where the parents could relax, preferably with a grown-up beverage in hand, while the kids did birthday things.

My girlfriend and I brainstormed one evening . . . in January.

Short of digging a hole down to the water line in my backyard and tossing in some goldfish, I had no great ideas for the location.

My girlfriend sat up. "I've got it!"

And she did. She pointed me to the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center, a fun mini-aquarium with outdoor touch tanks, observations pools, a working dock and outside event space on the water.

I hastily contacted the program director and scheduled a site visit . . . in March.

Sure it was cold, but it was also fun tromping through the ice and wind of winter-scourged Gloucester looking at the mostly closed maritime center.

"And here," the program director pointed with a gloved hand, "is where the tent will be," she paused and looked at me shivering in my down coat, "in the summer."

"Perfect!" I chattered.

We set the party date for Aug. 1, a mere five months away.

The rest of the spring and summer was exactly as we'd anticipated: busy and full of Hebrew, camps, Vacation Bible School and rainy, waterlogged afternoons. Finally it was the week before the party and I called the program director to touch base. She confirmed that they were ready for us. Ready to provide circle-time demonstrations at the touch tanks. Ready to whip up aquatic-themed arts and crafts. And ready with staff to help corral the children.

"There's just one thing," she said.

"Oh yes?"

"Yesterday, the tent blew away in all the rain and wind."

The tent? The location of the party? I imagined 17 children and 20 adults in the hot August sun with no tent. She explained that we could use the indoor classroom and reminded me that the touch tanks were shaded.

"Hmmm," I said trying to sound unflappable.

"It was an act of God," she sighed.

Fair enough. I'd just written the first of two 40-page papers about acts of God. Flapped as I might be, some things you don't argue with.

But I'd also been writing about the miracles of God, and the day before the party, the tent was back in place. The forecast called for a beautiful Saturday with merely a possible storm on Friday. No big deal. In the grand scheme of things, what was another day of rain? Except of course, Friday, July 31 was not just another day of rain.

That Friday afternoon as we were whittling away at the final party to-do list, it got dark. Dark and windy. Dark and windy and...WHOOSH!! Within five minutes our neighborhood, and our power, was blown to pieces from the storm that was officially labeled a microburst. Call it what you want, but there was nothing micro about it. Prospect Hill looked like it had gone through a wood chipper.

With no power, a cake about to be delivered that needed prompt refrigeration, two gallons of sangria to make and errands to run on now impassable roads, I burst into tears.

"If it's this hard to plan a birthday party for a 5-year-old, how will I ever manage weddings!?" My husband wisely left the question alone, handed me a glass of sangria and dug out some flashlights.

Of course, it all worked out. The sun came out, the children painted fish prints, and held starfish and crabs, and ate pizza and cake. Meanwhile, the parents sipped sangria in the sea breeze under the shade of the microburst-enduring-tent. It was a fantastic party, at a fantastic location. And while it was only a few hours, if asked, *that* is how I spent my summer. Mazal Tov.

*Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact her with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: [esther@estherbaird.com](mailto:esther@estherbaird.com), or visit her Web site at: [www.estherbaird.com](http://www.estherbaird.com).*