

My sister-in-law and I were both about to turn 50, although neither one of us could quite believe it. Judy is what I lovingly call an “old hippie,” a Chapel Hill, N.C., lawyer who befriends the truly needy, a good steward of the planet who recycles everything from the drippings from her pancetta (fancy bacon, y’all) to her Whole Foods cereal boxes. She runs, rides her bike (with her helmet on) and keeps her naturally gray hair close-cropped.

I, on the other hand, have been dyeing my hair back to its rightful bloneness for decades, fighting gray with the kind of campaign normally waged against a third-grader’s lice.

Judy loves nature, can’t get enough of the stuff. When a colleague told her several months ago that he owned a house in the maritime forest on Bald Head Island, she immediately devised a house-swap plan where he’d get to stay at her vacation home in the mountains of Ashe County.

The colleague’s house was beautiful, but what Judy didn’t know was that I was, for once, one step ahead. I’d already arranged a surprise birthday treat for the whole family at an oceanfront home on Bald Head Island.

In a sort of exchange that reminds me of the old “Green Acres” theme song, we both excitedly described what we loved about the island as we planned the birthday getaway.

I won’t say that she was “Ah-lee-vah” and I was socialite Lisa Douglas like in the old sitcom, but it was close.

“Hiking and biking trails!” she squealed.

“A Jacuzzi and a two-person shower!” I gushed.

“Kayaking the marsh!” she countered.

“A six-man golf cart comes with!” I exclaimed.

“Raccoons and snakes and beautiful egrets and herons,” she said.

“Dinner at the club and dancing, too!” I responded.

“Fantastic sunrises and sunsets,” she said.

“Fantastic sunsets,” I said. (Well. We all can’t be morning people, now can we?)

And so it went, over phone and email conversations for several weeks until we both realized, rather suddenly, that the best thing about



50 Reasons to Love Bald Head Island

By Celia Rivenbark Painting by Deborah Cavanaugh

the last word

Bald Head Island might just be how much it has to offer to all kinds of folks. Hippies and priss pots, generations from “the greatest” to the boomers, to the X’s and the Y’s, and any and all that come after.

Yes, you can wear your croquet whites and sip frosty mojitos at the club.

Or you can just wear your old Habitat for Humanity T-shirt and cargo shorts and fill the pockets with sand dollars and seashells before grabbing a Bud Light.

Our long birthday weekend came and went all too quickly. There was cake, a family dinner with a spectacular ocean view, a fun collage of pictures of Judy through the ages and even a mini-museum with “artifacts” from her past. Fifty was FUN on Bald Head Island.

For the umpteenth time, I had felt exhilarated and inspired on the ferry ride over and a little

depressed on the ride back. The mood lifts eventually, of course, but I have to admit feeling more than a little envious when I saw the happy faces of the folks who were waiting for us to disembark so they could start their island retreat.

“We’ll be back,” I told Judy as we leaned against the ferry’s railing and admired the captain’s expert docking maneuver. She was wearing a healthy, beachy glow along with her new BHI T-shirt.

“You betcha,” she smiled back.

“Pools and golf and maybe a massage,” I began.

“Climbing Old Baldy and learning about loggerhead nesting areas,” she responded.

See? We have to come back.

Celia Rivenbark, author of best-selling books Bless Your Heart, Tramp; We’re Just Like You, Only Prettier and Stop Dressing Your Six Year Old Like A Skank lives in Wilmington, N.C., with her husband and daughter. She writes a weekly syndicated humor column for McClatchey-Tribune News Services.

Called joyful, playful and uplifting, Deborah Cavanaugh’s art is compared in the press to both Matisse and Minnie Evans. She paints the things we love about home, family and life down by the sea. Learn more about the artist at her website: deborahcavanaugh.com.