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**“Gatlinburg”**  
by  
Tom Holbrook

We’ve been on the road again even though we really hate to leave to travel about. Don’t get me wrong... we love to travel but since moving to The Villages we’re so involved with people and things going on that we find it difficult to jump up and take off for several days or a week or two. I guess this is the paradox of all paradoxes because we have a great time on the road and a great time at our ultimate destination but at the same time, we’re dying to get back home... here! Neither of us expected this feeling to be so great in us and we’re surprised that it’s there. When we first located here we were expecting this would be our base from which we would come and go to the farthest corners of the earth... or just across the line into another state, but it’s become *our home* from which we don’t want to go anywhere for any length of time. Even going back north to our previous home is a chore... sorry kids and grandkids... we didn’t plan it this way. I have no idea if any of you guys out there feels the same way but I bet you didn’t expect it either.

What made me think of this is we just got back from a week at Gatlinburg, TN and will be leaving to go north again for Thanksgiving. Being newlyweds (4 years today) might have something to do with our hesitancy to travel hither and yon... it’s hard to say for sure. I guess we’re just selfish with our time and don’t want to spread it around all that much.

We had a great time in Gatlinburg... neither of us had ever been there. No, we hadn’t been to Dollywood either and we still haven’t. We just stayed in Gatlinburg and walked the streets of that quaint little village that’s self-proclaimed as the official “Entryway into the Great Smoky Mountains.” Although it was extremely crowded with a plethora of pedestrians and vehicles to observe the annual “changing of the leaves” into their brilliant hues, the town was surprisingly clean and orderly.

Walking down the streets is like walking along the midway of a large State Fair or Carnival with shops on every side and places where kids and adults can play games, eat a variety of foodstuffs and be entertained by small bluegrass bands on the corner or back in a little nook outside the many shopping areas... pickin’ and a grinnin’ as good as any you’ll hear on the Grand Ole’ Opry down the road in Nashville.

The great attraction, however, was not the variety of food and entertainment the area offered... all of which was delightful but temporary in the true measure of things. The hook that had brought us there is as permanent and awe inspiring as anything could be, yet ever changing in its beauty and weather... I’m talking about those Great Smoky Mountains. So beautiful and regal they

never fail to take your breath away as you ride up the paved highways or climb up the well beaten trails. When one arrives at the top and looks down and all around at what lies below one can't help being mesmerized by the absolute majesty of the trees, the boulders, the many creeks spilling their contents over the rocks lining their bottoms. God's finest tableau of his creation placed there for our enjoyment and yes, even reverence. Your heart actually skips a beat at the magnificence.

We basked in the autumn sun, even warmer because our closeness to it, and shivered in the foggy mist that periodically enshrouded the entire chain of mountains. Changing our view of many miles to one of just a few feet in a matter of minutes as the wind blown clouds surrounded us like a wet, grey blanket. Many trees have been standing flourishing there for centuries and some that have been ravaged by centuries of storms and fires now stand guard over the valleys like ghostly sentries with their barren limbs all askew. What a blessing to have been in that wonderful place.

It was a glorious time and I recommend a visit to the area to everyone who can make the 11 hour trip from here to there. But folks, let me tell you, when Judy and I got home and drove past the sign stating that we were now entering "Florida's Friendliest Hometown" my heart also skipped a beat and we felt just as blessed to be living in a place like this. I hope you feel that way too.

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