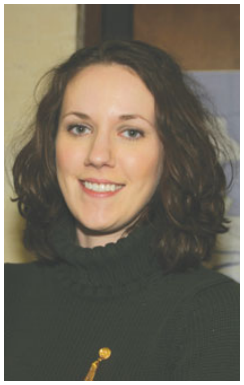

When I was a child, a family vacation was one of the most exciting times of the year.
The only thing I didn't like was the long drive to our destination. Momma never wanted to fly, sail or ride a train. She was all about driving.
Momma thought a car trip made the trips more exciting for us. It was nice to see the different regions of the country outside your window. From the mountains to the ocean to the desert, it was a real treat to see it all through young eyes.
These days children barely look out the window on car trips. The most I ever see of kids now is the top of their heads because they are always looking down at a cell phone, an Ipod or a movie in the portable DVD player.
When I was a kid, you either looked out the window or counted cars or listened to music. You could read a book if you got really bored. And sometimes there was actual human conversation.

And I didn't know any better. I never complained. Not once did I ask for instant entertainment. I was just along for the ride.
James is only two years old, but Jason and I got our first dose of how this new generation travels.
Our beach vacation that we took last week was wonderful. There was cool water, hot sand, great food and fun times.
Jason and I agreed that the almost nine hour drive might go a little more smoothly if we left Friday evening, took a half-way point overnight stop and finished the trip out the next morning. James doesn't do well with really long trips these days. So the idea of breaking it down into two short trips seemed reasonable.
We left Friday evening around 6 p.m. The stretch from Yazoo to Jackson went well. James pointed out the cows along the road. Jason and I sang a few corny songs together. And we all talked about what we would do once we arrived at the beach.
It was just like when I was a little kid.
But we noticed that right about Hattiesburg, James started to get a little restless. Cold juice wouldn't calm him down. Berry snacks were out of the question. And even his favorite radio songs fell on deaf ears.
I decided that we would stop, stretch our legs, get a quick bite to eat and resume with our trip. Then I had the great idea of providing some entertainment for James. I fell for the trap. Instant entertainment was the trick.
I would simply put the portable DVD player in front of James, and it would be smooth sailing from here on out.

The only problem was that the DVDs were in the box that was, of course, at the bottom of our mountain of stuff in the back of the truck.
I told Jason to take James off for a break, and I would find the movies. I had to remove every single beach chair, suitcase, diaper box and other container to find the movies tucked away. And you can never put everything back exactly the way it was.
I finally just slammed the door and prayed for the best. I hate to admit it, but I reminded myself to let Jason open the back so that I could play dumb when all the chairs avalanched out.
Settling back into the truck, I quickly plugged in the DVD player, inserted the movie and waited to be the hero when James arrived in the backseat.
As Jason put James in his car seat, the sounds of the latest penguin movie filled the truck. James clapped, yelled in excitement and held his arms up.
Then the screen went blank. There was nothing. No sound. No color. No movie. No penguins. Something was wrong with the plug-in, and there was no fixing it.
And then came the roar of disappointment.
“I want penguins,” James pleaded.
I knew it was the end of our happy journey when the sippy cup hit the floor, the head eased back into the seat and the eyes tightened up.
Jason and I listened to the screams of a devastated child for the next two hours....straight.
We had a goal to make it to Mobile before we got a room. But in Pascagoula, we immediately came in on two wheels to the first hotel we saw. As Jason paid for a room, I remained in the car with a child who still wanted his penguins.
The remainder of the trip went very well.
Things went back to how it was when I was a kid. James began to notice things other than a penguin movie.
James was excited to see the battleship as we passed through Mobile. The first sign of Gulf water had him demanding that we “go that way,” which would have required driving the truck off the bridge and literally into the bay. And the beach itself was greeted with a wide-eyed toddler.
Maybe the gadgets will get left at home next time to avoid any future mishaps, I thought to myself.
But as the thought crossed my mind, I realized that I was checking my Facebook account over Jason’s cell phone while trying to find a station on the satellite radio.
Maybe that’s where James gets it from.