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For us, fun on the farm beats theme park any day

I REMEMBER an interview with Walt Disney and Julie Andrews sometime in the early '70s in which they discussed the opening of Disney World. He was showing her the tree that was built there as part of the Robinson Crusoe movie set. He said—and this is what I've always remembered—“and they say that only God can make a tree.”

Well, Walt did make a tree and created Disney World, a major entertainment venue.

These days all good parents make the pilgrimage to Disney World when the kids are young, which encourages them to accept “being entertained,” rather than finding entertainment and joy in exploring and discovering for themselves.

Having been somewhat of a bohemian in my youth, as a parent I chose vacations that were active and participatory. Climb a mountain if you really want to see and feel it. Experience things that are real—the things that only God can create—sunsets, mountains, beaches, or a small creature in the woods. The true treasures are the ones you find yourself. Don't follow a map—explore.

Whether by chance or intelligent design, I did marry, raise three wonderful children and live on a farm. Eventually, sometime in the 1980s, we opened our farm to visitors—and around the same time I decided I wanted a new kitchen floor. I asked husband Emmett to sell pumpkins in October, and he agreed. I painted a big sign: “Pick Your Own Pumpkins \$2 each” (now they are \$7). By now, I have had years of experience observing parents and visitors to our farm and how they react to being in the natural environment here. Some love it immediately, while others look around quite bored and say, “What do you have for

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the kids to do here?”

On a farm, kids can explore fields of pumpkins, gourds and squashes, all different colors and shapes. They can walk through a peach tree grove; between the grape, blackberry and raspberry vines; or explore Christmas tree patches that are home to birds and rabbits.

For the really adventure-some, you can get your feet wet in the creek and turn over rocks to look for crawdads. Or you can swing across the creek on a rope, or just walk the wooded trails.

Then there are barns with soft but itchy straw bales to climb and ropes to swing on.

There is nothing like the feel of being in a barn. Why not just enjoy the webs and spiders, the swallows and mud dauber nests? This is a place where you can love to get dirty and delight in the lovely earthy smells.

Isn't it nice also to see happy farm animals? Chickens who run to greet you, horses come looking to have their noses rubbed (and maybe a carrot), llamas who just look at you with a combination of arrogance, curiosity and aloofness.

Have you ever felt the rough and scratchy tongue of a small calf or let it suck your thumb? Nothing is a more peaceful sight than a herd of

sheep with their bells on, grazing their own patch of Christmas trees.

So if you're looking for pure entertainment, head off to Disney World or Kings Dominion. But for me and my family, the preferred destinations are the national and state parks, or just hanging out down on the farm.

Ellen Snead runs Snead's Farm with her husband, Emmett, along Tidewater Trail in Caroline County.