

On the road again with the Fort family

They're coming back.

Twin sisters Ellen and Alice Fort grew up spending summers at the cottage their grandfather built, Summer House (#97), with their extended family. Their dad would load the family up into their station wagon, sing Willie Nelson's song, "On the Road Again," and point the car down south towards Monteagle. After driving through the gates, they'd roll the windows down, breathe in the Monteagle air, pull up to the cottage, and get to work sweeping out the various critters who had kept the cottage company while they were away.

This summer, for the first time since their childhood summers here, Ellen and Alice are renting cottages with their own kids. They're staying at #81 – Peace and Plenty—a cottage, Ellen notes, with air conditioning and wifi.

Talking to Ellen for just a few minutes makes clear that her memories of time in Monteagle are multidimensional. She talks about the unique "smell of Monteagle," the cool air and warm days, the freedom everyone feels to make their own day, especially the kids.

Ellen remembers going to movies at the Auditorium with her sister on summer nights, riding their bikes down from the family's cottage (#97 – Summer House) and returning after the movie ended. As girls, the twins were worried someone might be hiding along the road to snatch them, so they'd tear home in the dark, pedaling quickly to avoid being caught. Their parents would be sitting on the porch with cocktails, waiting for the girls to return. As Ellen remembers that feeling of rushing back, she laughs, recalling the sensation of hurrying home to avoid the monsters.

After two years of "being on top of each other" during the pandemic, and after moving back to Tennessee after having lived on opposite sides of the country, both sisters look forward to the time to unplug—at least, *to try* to unplug—and give their children the chance to find some of that freedom, too.

As a child, Ellen remembers finding books at the library in Winfield that she never found anywhere else. In particular, she remembers reading *Carbonel: The King of the Cats* (by Barbara Sleigh), a chapter book that she's never found anywhere else. "It was a Monteagle-only book," she reminisces. Alice had a book about the Flamingo Hotel. Both had elements of fantasy, and the curiosity about whether that book still exists in the library has Ellen delighting in what her kids might find during their two weeks here.

What she hopes they *won't* find is the key to the golf cart they've rented. Her family had a 1940s-era military-grade golf cart that (shhh!) she and her sister tried to sneak out and floor the gas pedal of. She says she's threatening her kids with the "wrath of God" should they try similar rule violations.

But mostly, Ellen looks forward to a slower pace, a chance to reconnect with old Assembly friends (and making new ones!), and giving her kids the gift of freedom that so many generations of Assembly children have relished.