

The King of Where-I-Go

by Howard Waldrop

When I was eight, in 1954, my sister caught polio.

It wasn't my fault, although it took twenty years before I talked myself out of believing it was. See, we had this fight ...

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We were at my paternal grandparents' house in Alabama, where we were always taken in the summer, either being driven from Texas to there on Memorial Day and picked up on the Fourth of July, or taken the Fourth and retrieved Labor Day weekend, just before school started again in Texas.

This was the first of the two times when we spent the whole summer in Alabama. Our parents were taking a break from us for three entire months. We essentially ran wild all that time. This was a whole new experience. Ten years later, when it happened the second time, we would return to find our parents separated—me and my sister living with my mother in a garage apartment that backed up on the railroad tracks and my father living in what was a former motel that had been turned into day-laborer apartments a half mile away.

Our father worked as an assembler in a radio factory that would go out of business in the early 1960s, when the Japanese started making them better, smaller, and cheaper. Our mother worked in the Ben Franklin 5¢-10¢-25¢ store downtown. Our father had to carpool every day into a Dallas suburb, so he would come and get the car one day a week. We would be going to junior high by then, and it was two blocks away.

But that was in the future. *This* was the summer of 1954.

Every two weeks we would get in our aunt's purple Kaiser and she would drive us the forty-five miles to our maternal grandparents' farm in the next county, and we would spend the next two weeks there. Then they'd come and get us after two weeks and bring us back. Like the movie title says, two weeks in another town.

