

A Mother and Daughter Camp Out

Adapted from A Father & Son Camp Out at Camp Belzer by Chester Price Sr

http://www.honorpub.com/scout-e-zine/vol03/sez_v3_09.htm

Scouter's Digest - Scouting E-Zine, Vol 3, Issue No. 9, Oct 3, 2001

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On the eighth day, noting that man had rested enough, God created Scout Camps. "To be a good parent and keep your child from hating you when you are old." He said, "you shall go forth in your child's 10th year to a rainy spot in the forest and sleep on the ground under a piece of canvas. To this spot I will call forth the mosquitoes of the air and all manner of bugs which crawlth on the earth and you shall live with them for a night. You shall eat graham crackers, marshmallow, and chocolate sandwiches. You shall not curse the tree root which poketh into your back whilest you try to sleep.

I do not go camping much. In fact, until last Friday night I thought "roughing it" meant spending the night in a motel room with a black and white TV. I had heard rumors about people forsaking the technological advances of the past 2000 years and going to sleep in tents and cook food over open fire. I had dismissed these rumors and filed them away with other incredible claims about UFO's and rabbits that lay colored eggs.

Then my daughter signed up for Brownies, which was great. I remember being a Brownie and making a clay ashtray (which was a politically correct craft way back when) and had a vague recollection of camping. My daughter loved Brownies. She loved her uniform. She loved what she was learning. One day, though, she came home from a meeting and told me of an upcoming trip. She excitedly spoke about tents and campfires and all the wonders of sleeping in the woods. But the thing that most interested me was that when she spoke about these wonders, she used the pronoun "We". Since my daughter has never been a whiz in English grammar. I clung for a long time to the hope that she was simply unskilled at selecting pronouns. Turns out her grammar was perfect. She had volunteered me to help as a camp Mom. This was to be a fun-filled adventure with exploration, nature, cooking over a campfire, and outdoor crafts. My daughter's enthusiasm was bursting at the seams. How on earth could I say "no"?

Somewhere in the quiet of evening we gathered around the Camp flagpole, about 15 Brownies and a few brave moms, awaiting instructions. Since I had a traumatic week at work, my husband agreed to prepare all the gear for our campout. After three trips to the car to unload it all, I began to worry about the distance to the campsite.

"How far is the camp?" I asked her. "It's over there by the trees," she comforted me. "Is this too much to carry?" I asked her. On the ground around us lay two sleeping bags, two pillows, two sacks of clothing, a bag of assorted items, a folding lawn chair, and a cooler which I had not opened but which, judging by the weight, I assumed contained either a lawnmower or a set of encyclopedias. She assured me that "we" could carry it. By now she was beginning to mix-up her pronouns.

Moments later we were struggling across an open field toward the trees. We had discovered that her arms were just long enough to encompass a sleeping bag and two pillows. Under one arm I carried a sleeping bag and the lawn chair. Two sacks of clothing were clutched in the hand of the same arm. I carried the cooler in the other hand, with the third sack tucked under that arm that was slowly going numb. By now it was dark and we had discovered we had forgotten our flashlights. But since it was only about 100 yards to the trees, I figured we could make it. It was about then that I noticed the flashlights ahead of us were not stopping at the trees. When they reached the trees, they appeared to be going straight up into the air. "There's a hill back of the trees," my daughter told me with no expression in her voice. "It a big hill?" I grunted, tugging on the cooler and losing my grip on one of the sacks.

"No," she said, "it's just a little hill." She was right. Compared to Mount McKinley it was small, only about 100 yards of 45 degree incline. Several times I thought about faking a heart attack and getting them to carry me up on a stretcher. I also considered dropping the cooler into a ravine and telling my husband it was stolen by muggers.

But my daughter encouraged me with promise that the tents were just a little ways ahead. And just when I thought I could go no farther, there they were. "Which one is ours?" I asked, dropping all the gear.

"Oh, these aren't ours," she said, "we get to sleep in the "Eagle's Nest." It's up the trail. I will spare you the details from this point on.

It turned out the cooler contained half a watermelon, a stalk of bananas, six Diet Cokes, some peaches, and about 300 pounds of ice out of which we consumed one Diet Coke. In fact, the only useful item other than the sleeping bags was the lawn chair, I got good use of that.

After we once reached the "Eagle's Nest." the evening turned out to be pretty nice, even fun. I found my daughter had pitched our tent herself, careful to place it right over some tree roots for comfort. We went for a hike and she pointed out the different wonders along the trail. I was particularly proud of myself for not screaming when the large beetle landed on my arm. She showed me some new ways to burn marshmallows in the campfire. She even showed me how to fold the tent the next morning when we took it down.

But best of all was right before we went to sleep when she patted me on the arm (which was still numb from carrying the cooler) and told me "how neat" it was to share her tent with me.

That was worth the walk up the hill. It was "neat" sharing a tent with my daughter too. We plan to do it again next year but we'll leave the cooler at home.