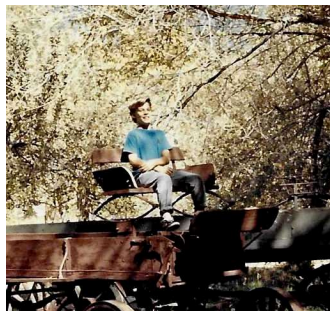


Chapter 6

Chill

You Bet!

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Ben during our camping trip.

We watched ducks fly over the lake at sunset while we savored a gourmet meal. Seated in an elegant restaurant with a marvelous view, we were presented with great food and wine accompanied by excellent service and a rustic ambiance. Who could ask for more? We couldn't wait to get back to the tent.

My husband and I have endured endless teasing for our unusual camping style. Those who taunt and tease us do not appreciate how hard it was for us to find common ground – in a campsite, in a tent, in our search for nature's way. Early in our marriage, we bonded our two views of the natural world, but not before one of us lost a \$50 bet.

My husband and I met and fell in love in the Rocky Mountains. Beneath the stars, we inhaled cool mountain air while our romance warmed. We married at Denver's City Hall and departed for California to begin our life together, with my two young children, and great optimism.

Shortly after we were married, my new husband planned a camping trip – a family bonding experience. It sounded like a good idea at the time. In the middle of July, we found ourselves on the floor of Yosemite Valley – in a tent, with only one of us ready to rough it. The rest of us were cold, hungry, and ready to go home.

My daughter Autumn cried her eyes out when she lost the stuffed animal that she had cuddled from birth. (We found it several years later in the bottom of her sleeping bag.) The next day a mama deer's hoof hit my son Ben center in his chest, propelling him several feet in the air, as he approached her fawn. This camping trip was a disaster.

The romantic, nature-loving couple tumbled head-on into reality. One morning we stood by a babbling mountain stream, arguing, yelling, and disturbing the pastoral scene. I wanted to shower, I wanted to eat a real meal. He was tired of my demands and wondered where his nature girl went. Where, indeed?

My new husband's campsite cuisine was wanting. His carefully planned meals often burned and took hours to clean up. The children and I stood by the camp stove, waiting for nourishment, watching it go up in smoke.

I hated the group showers with mounds of wet tissues and globs of hair gel clinging to the cement floor beneath me. My husband understood my need for cleanliness but bristled as I insisted on waiting in interminable lines every morning to shower. By the time we took two hours to prepare breakfast and two hours to shower it was time for lunch.

On that fateful morning, I looked at the icy water swirling around the rocks in the stream and squinted as the water reflected the summer sun. I wanted to go to the showers, he wanted to see El Capitan. Impulsively, I told him I would jump into the stream to get clean and forgo the hot but crowded shower.

"I dare you," he said. "Fifty bucks if I do?" I challenged.

He knew his whining camping companion would never jump into the cold water. Our eyes locked. I plunged into the icy mountain stream. He howled with laughter as I pulled myself from the water, dripping wet and laughing too.

It was time to compromise. He agreed to eat at restaurants for the rest of the trip. The Creampuff Brigade agreed to forgo the showers and to wash faces and hands at the campsite. Our compromise, forged by that babbling brook 20 years ago, holds today.

Our children are grown and gone, so it is just the two of us who pitch our tent at the campground. We depart to the nearest restaurant for a wonderful meal. Just before sundown, we return to the campsite and enjoy a lovely campfire.

When we tell people of our unique camping style the response is always the same: "That's not real camping!"

"What is real camping?" I reply.

We spend more time communing with nature than those folks who spend the day cooking and cleaning up. We don't camp to be self-sufficient, we camp the easy way to free ourselves for the true purpose of being out of doors – to see God through nature, to seek peace through quiet ways, and to spend cherished time together.

The compromise we struck all those years ago has enabled us to enjoy nature and each other and that is as "real" as camping gets.