

HONEY, YOU'RE GONNA LOVE TENT CAMPING!

“Honey, you’re gonna love tent camping”, sez my Rebecca to me as she labored to convince me that this would be a great recreational stress reliever for a healthy male just months away from receiving his red, white and blue Medicare card!

Rebecca’s daughter, Gretchen and her husband Rich, along with daughters Meghan and Maureen had been tent camping for several years and at some undetermined point in time, Rebecca and Gretchen had decided it would be great fun if we joined in. Now, don’t get me wrong, if finances were better I would probably love camping...in an oversized motor home with air conditioning, soft beds and of course the single most important item needed for proper camping...a color TV! Truth be known, Rebecca would probably prefer a pop-up camper, but a tent fit our budget best, so off we went to that great retail camping Mecca... Wal-Mart! The tent of our choice was a large eleven by twenty foot tent with room dividers. This was a tent that was advertized to sleep ten which meant there was room for me at one end, Rebecca at the other end with space in the center for all of the items Rebecca had decided was needed for proper camping and also a grandchild or two. *More about that in a bit!* I am proud to say that I did my part by picking up two full size air mattresses at Sears on clearance. **Guaranteed not to leak! *We’ll talk about that later!***

After weeks of preparation which involved a combination of shopping at stores, attending yard sales in search of camping items and the two women planning a menu for meals each day, we were off on our grand adventure. The weather was perfect with warm sunny days, and cool nights that bode well for sleeping in the wildernessalongside a couple of hundred other seasoned and tough campers. I was aware we had a possibility of thunderstorms moving into the area and I fretted a bit about that, but when we arrived at the campground and found our site had no large trees nearby, my fears of dying in my sleep as a result of an oversized Oak tree coming to rest on my chest soon disappeared. *For the record, a bit of paranoia can be a good thing!*

The campground we selected was Sugarloaf State park in the Waterloo recreational area, just twenty minutes away from Jackson, Mi., civilization,

motels, and several McDonalds. That alone made me feel better, after all, when camping one cannot be too prepared! Sugarloaf campground is actually quite a nice campground, with a lake, beach area, playground, toilets that flush, showers with hot water and the scenery is lovely to look at. Gretchen & Rich took a campsite adjoining ours and it came with a nice shade tree. This pleased me because it was too far away to fall on my tent and killing me while I slept! *For the record, a bit of minor paranoia can be a good thing!* Our campsite was on fairly level ground, with green grass and a large storm drain. I remember thinking that would be a good thing as there should be no concerns about heavy rain and flooding. This was looking more and more like the perfect campsite and soon my frivolous worries began fading away! With Rich's assistance, the tent went up quicker, and easier than I had thought. Although I would have liked the tent to be a bit closer to the storm drain, we were close enough to stay dry, and far enough from the road that we should be safe from drunken campers driving past late at night. *For the record, a bit of minor paranoia can be a good thing!* Once the tent was up and after we had moved all of the necessities of camping life out of my Suburban and into the tent, the rest of the evening was ours to enjoy, just sitting around the campfire and visiting. *This camping thing was starting to look pretty darn good!*

Benjamin Franklin once said; "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise. I figured one out of three wouldn't be too bad and so I was the first to retire for the evening. Leaving the sleeping section for Rebecca, I climbed onto the Sears air mattress located in the snoring section, and spent the next few hours listening to the evening campground sounds. First the chitchat coming from our campsite, then voices of old and young alike from neighboring campsites. *Yep! This camping thing wasn't too bad at all.* Rebecca came to bed a little later and shortly after the rain came to visit. Well, it wasn't exactly visiting. More like moving in...uninvited! The rain came down fast and hard; it wasn't long before it was pounding steadily on the tent, accompanied with explosive thunder and lightening. We learned later that it rained several hours at the rate of an inch and a half an hour and a steady rain the rest of the night. For some stupid reason, I found all of this amusing and lay on my bed giggling senselessly. I couldn't help myself. It seemed funny to be snuggled up in the tent and feel the mist from the rain come down on my face. *Who said you can't get wet in a tent?*

Rich had pitched a smaller tent between his tent and ours and this smaller tent was for Miss Meghan and Miss Maureen. I don't think this was a very good plan because while the storm was at its peak, Gretchen came in and asked if Meghan could sleep with us and they would take Maureen into their tent. For some reason those two little girls were scared of the rain and thunder. Like a little bit of

water was going to hurt them! I guess Rich and Gretchen also spent some quality time together outside in the storm putting a tarp over top their tent. *A good son-in-law would have put the tarp over my tent...something about respecting and taking care of your elders.* Guess he figured taking care of his wife was a higher priority! Of course, she got wet and I didn't!

At some point in the evening, with the storm raging outside, and in spite of my leak proof mattress being about half deflated I drifted into a deep sleep. Morning came much too soon, but right on schedule as far as the hundred, nay, thousands of chirping birds were concerned. *Alarm clocks are not a necessary item for successful tent camping. The birds are happy to help out!* I remember waking up, thankful the rain was finally over. I reached over to the side of my deflated air mattress, now known as an "air pad", and grabbed my jeans, only to discover I no longer had dry clothes as they were soaked! My groggy brain was not yet at full functioning mode, but I was alert enough to think, "No problem. I will get something dry out of my suitcase." I soon discovered that everything there was wet as well. I did find a pair of partially dry shorts, got dressed and was ready to face the world. As I stood up, I had the sensation of the floor of the tent not feeling quite right. It seemed a bit squishy, but ignoring that, I went outside to finish the waking up process... and stepped into over three inches of cold wet water! No more groggy sleepy brain and tired body. I was now officially awake!

The heavy rains had left the adult's tents right on the edge of what was now a small lake and the girls' tent was resting in about six inches of water. This body of water which shall now be referred to as Lake Wannabee was about fifty feet at its widest, and an estimated 200 feet in length. At its deepest, which just happened to be at the infamous storm drain, was about sixteen inches in depth or more accurately, just a few inches below Rich's kneecaps! *"Honey, you're gonna love tent camping"* began reverberating through my brain as I took stock of my recently acquired lakefront property and watched Rich and the girls having a lot of fun playing and splashing in Lake Wannabee! Well ok; Rich was gauging the depth of the water... the girls were playing!

The staff at the campground soon learned of our misfortune as did every other camper that was camped there. Apparently the staff believed this was an opportune time to tell us our storm drain that I had such confidence in was broken down, somewhere between where the water goes in and where the water goes out. The timing for when they chose to give us this bit of information could have been better. *Like when we reserved our campsite would have been good!*

We were offered an opportunity to take our tents down and move to a dryer spot, but nobody relished the thought of taking down three tents, one screen house and loading all of the other items the ladies had thought were necessary to a good camping experience. We declined that offer, but we did accept an offer of a loaner submersible pump and thus we spent our Saturday pumping Lake Wannabee dry, and making a clothes line between Rich's station wagon and my Suburban. Seventy foot of makeshift clothesline burdened down with blankets, sheets, jackets and more, made for quite the tourist attraction as most of the other campers went on a pilgrimage to look at us, our mess and of course our newly acquired, but now shrinking lake. I felt like an exhibit at a zoo with all the people pointing, giggling and shaking their heads as we spent the day convincing each other that this was fun, and dare I mention the two young boys who snuck a fish into our "lake" and tried to convince Rebecca that they had just caught it in our new lake... *"Honey, you're gonna love tent camping!"*

By Sunday morning Lake Wannabee was nothing more than wet grass and a bad memory. I am an auctioneer and had an auction to conduct, so Rebecca and I got dressed, drove an hour to the auction site and did what I enjoy most...conducting a public auction. We came back with one of our grandsons in tow because we had promised Austin that if he worked the auction for Grampa running clerking tickets, he could spend the night camping with us. Gretchen and chief fire tender, Rich, had a delicious and hot meal of burgers and sweet corn, cooked over a campfire waiting for us, and the remainder of our time at Sugarloaf was pretty uneventful; the kids enjoying swimming in the real lake, the adults relaxing and visiting around a campfire at their now dry campsite. I think this is more like what Rebecca had in mind when she said we would have fun!

I am sure I had a good time because Rebecca told me I did, and yes, we are planning another round of tent camping because Rebecca sez... *"Honey, you loved tent camping...and I think perhaps I did!"*

Written by Auctioneer Lyn Liechty

July 12, 2009

This and other articles by Lyn can be found at www.arealauction.com