



I Like Not Camping

“The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun.”¹ I slipped the bookmark between the open pages, closed the book, and placed it at my side on the sleeping bag. The consistent pitter of rain on the tent canvas once again filled the claustrophobic void of our reality.

“The black 7 goes on the red eight...” I hinted. My wife continued to stare through the rows of cards spread out in front of her. *“Didn’t my mother tell you that I don’t like camping?!”* “Ahh...I believe she said that ‘this isn’t the life in which you are accustomed!’ It’ll do you good...I grew up camping; its fun! Anyways, tomorrow’s another day...nothing but sun!”

They called it a stationary front. Five solid days of rain; another two to dry everything out, including us.

Mind you, I **had** camped my entire life...campers, tents, hammocks, the top of boulders and, sometimes, the ground; it didn’t matter to me...it was the great outdoors...where I belonged. I enjoyed the sun during the day and the stars at night. Someday, I hoped to share that experience with my wife...and while my first four attempts barometrically failed, I maintained that hope that the timing of our next excursion would converge with a nice, stable high pressure system.

My wife is a patient woman. As years passed, that sunny camping day continued to allude us...it rained in Luray VA...Hershey, PA...and Orono, ME. It rained in Stockbridge, MA...Estes, CO...and Bennington, VT. It even rained in Moab,

¹Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. New York: Anchor, 1997.

UT ending a three month drought! I believe we were thanked by the local Ute tribe of Native Americans.

With the arrival of our kids, we continued to plan camping trips. I bought supplies...a bigger tent, sleeping bags, a camp stove, and kid's board games...in case it rained. My wife set us up for quality points at no less than four hotel chains!

I remember our first trip with the kids. We were loaded into a blue Dodge Omni. The kids sat in their car seats tucked between supplies, which filled every available space. I was the self-proclaimed king of packing! Our youngest wore a spaghetti colander on her head. As we turned left out of the neighborhood, the wiper blades swayed back and forth. "*Which way are those clouds going?*" asked my wife.

As I handed him my license and insurance certificate, the officer said I was driving a little over the speed limit. As he leaned in, rain water streamed from his hat. He looked back at our oldest daughter sitting patiently among all the camping supplies...the youngest with the colander remained silent and, thankfully, out of sight! "*You're going camping?*" he asked. "Well..." I started to reply. "*In weather like this?!*" he finished. My wife looked over awaiting my response. The officer returned my documents, told me to maintain the posted speed limit, and with a slight hesitation and perceived look of pity, wished us a "Good day!" The remaining twenty minute drive to the campground (at the posted speed limit) seemed more like two hours, with the sound of the rain getting louder against the windshield with every passing mile.

Years of camping in the rain don't pass without the development of a hypothesis; a plausible, science-based theory as to why it rained every time we camped. It was the main topic of discussion between the playing of board games! We employed the scientific method looking for a predictable variable - something that had changed or been added concurrently with the transition from sun-soaked camping to just soaked camping. It was not long before we arrived at that "Eureka" moment...it was us! (Yes, it was really my wife...she was the true variable, but let's keep that between you and me!)

Arriving at that moment, you would think that would be the end of our camping story. But it wasn't...we continued to camp. Albeit, we did change our expectations; we stopped looking for that "different sun"...any sun for that matter. We planned for rain and we told others who camped with us to expect rain too. We had insider information and it was just common courtesy to share it; to allow fellow campers to make their own informed decisions! Wherever we were, so too were the rains!

So we started telling our friends our camping story. Hell, we told everyone our camping story. We told our story to the folks from Bainbridge, NY who couldn't start a campfire due to water-logged logs; we told our story to the family from Scranton, PA who forgot to close the roof vent in their rented RV before they left on a rain-shortened hike. "Hello...we're here...expect rain...here's some towels to help soak up that water!"

The idea of a newsletter was borne from the remarks expressed by a delightful, retired couple from Denton, OH, who suggested that the lack of their knowledge regarding our itinerary misled them to our campground, which they would not have otherwise selected. "*Put us on your mailing list...send us a notice next time!*" "Will do Mr. and Mrs. Hildebrand...don't forget to mail us that Rainy Day Barbecue Chicken recipe." But they had already turned, sloshing their way back to their own campsite, under one, rather large, umbrella with a smiling sun motif.

We continued to camp. It continued to rain. We took responsibility by promoting our newsletter to the wet, huddled masses that desperately sought relief. On one occasion we were introduced to some friends-of-friends while camping near Syracuse, NY; we told them our story and the availability of our newsletter. We were all crowded into our friend's pop-up playing Pictionary[®], while the drum of rain didn't miss a beat outside.

Information is empowering. The more we shared our itinerary, the more we found ourselves camping alone. Whereas, the early camping days were often shared with friends and friends-of-friends, the on-set of the "newsletter" found us geographically and meteorologically separated from familiar faces.

The 1000 Island Region of New York has much to offer...when it's not raining. But it was and you knew that! Having run out of the dry pieces of paper you need to play Pictionary[®], we drove to the campground's Nature Center to "kill" a few hours. Lots of campers had the same idea. As we perused exhibits on the local, rain-timid wildlife, a shout came from across the room...near the door. "WE DIDN'T GET YOUR NEWSLETTER!" There, standing in an expanding puddle, were the water-sogged friends-of-friends, which were introduced to us three years prior. "We didn't get your newsletter.." The words trailed off and were replaced by the sad fixated eyes of their children and the uninterrupted pitter of the rain.

Nowadays, the only evidence of our camping experience is a magnet my wife has placed on our refrigerator. It reads "I Like Not Camping!" From here on, you're on your own. If you're camping and its raining...don't blame us (her)!