

An Ode to Camping

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Before summer deserts us altogether, I thought it time to pen my annual ode to camping. What's that, you say? You've never seen such an ode before? Well, yes technically you might be quite right. Many moons ago, in another lifetime and in fact at least one decade prior to the one I am living in now, I took my last camping trip. At least it was the last one as far as I'm concerned and it would take a whole heck of a lot of convincing for me to consider camping ever again. So, this ode to camping? It's not really an ode? after all and starts with something unprintable and probably ends that way too!

It's not so much that I am against the outdoors. I love a good hike, a beautiful walk along one of our many trails here in Caledon and elsewhere. I love kayaking on water glistening with little jewelled drops of sunshine. In fact, being on water makes me so happy that people paddling nearby who happen to glance in my direction (perhaps to wave) rightly paddle quite quickly in the opposite direction, even against the current, when they see my inordinately large, lopsided, goofy grin.

But I digress.

Walking and kayaking aside, both of which could (emphasis on could) be fun activities while camping, in absolutely no way make up for the downsides of sleeping, eating, bathing, or cooking in, on, or near the outdoors. As for bathrooming (sure, it's a word I made up) in a ?thunderbox?? Nope. Not. Ever. In an outhouse? Only out of sheer desperation. In the public facilities offered at many campsites? Well yes, out of necessity, but nothing says ?joy? quite like sharing a bathroom with people brushing their teeth, changing out of sandy bathing suits, showering and, well, ?using? the facilities if you catch my drift.

I did camp. Pretty regularly. It was certainly a more affordable way to see the country and enjoy some downtime, especially when you have little ones. We even upgraded to a little ?COW,? my ?cottage on wheels? that was maybe 15 square feet in total, but at least got me up off the ground. That happened after a particularly rain-sodden trip where absolutely everything we owned was damp for days and I refused to even consider the concept of camping without a roof (and not a porous tent roof) over my head. It was a temporary upgrade, only made better by the fact I now had a dry place to store my black coffee, and red wine, each, in equal measure, the only true essential survival camping necessities.

After a while, the kids grew up and toasting marshmallows over an open flame lost its lustre. One of them even outgrew the camper, literally growing so tall he couldn't fit inside and had to go back out into a tent nearby. Meanwhile, now that I think about roasting food over a flame, don't we spend most of the time telling our kids to stay away from fire? Yet when camping, we actively encourage them not only to get near it, but also, to light a little ball of sugar on fire, wave it about wildly close to their face, blow it out and then eat it while scalding hot!

Evolutionary speaking, it may be why we haven't evolved any further as humans.

Ahhh memories. I fondly recall another time hiking through craggy rocks and sky-high trees (all uphill) and reassuring my other kid (about four-years-old at the time) that they were not being pursued by a wasp. Until I tried to brush it away and it stung her instead. To say a whole forest of people, creatures, and probably even some of the fish in the nearby water were ?startled? by the ensuing screams would be an understatement. Turns out later, in an effort to distract, the cute little story I made up on the spot about this being the former stomping grounds of the elusive white elephant, instead scarred my kid for life. Did I say ?fondly recall?? Perhaps that's not the best choice of words.

Our last camping trip was actually just hubby and I. We went to the one place I did actually enjoy, mostly because it had a spectacular spot from which to watch the sunset. As an aside, wine still takes ok, even from a camping cup, when you are watching a sunset. However, little did we know it was the year of the great caterpillar invasion. Literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of caterpillars. Everywhere. On the beach, hanging from the trees, dropping into your hair, your food, the fire, EVERYWHERE.

People think I'm exaggerating until I show them the video I took on the beach one day when a veritable army of creepy crawlers were inching their way towards us all while the soundtrack from ?Jaws? played in my head.

With no other choice, and to escape them ever so briefly, we got in the kayaks (remember, my happy place) and paddled furiously away. Unfortunately, when we came back to shore and were lugging the two kayaks back to the campsite, hubby at one end and me at the other, I tripped, faceplanting straight into the dirt, rocks and yes, the kayaks. It all happened so quickly I never even dropped them; my hands were still holding the ropes as I lay there in shock. The resulting black eye, swollen, purple and sore - along with my broken glasses - was the final straw.

I swore.

I swore A LOT!

And, I swore off camping forever.

I've done my time and I'm not going back!