

Chapter XXI

The Camping Trip From Hell

April 10, 1929 – May 18, 1929

Much attention was given to planning for their western adventure. They decided to make a swing through seven states and visit the national parks. Three thousand miles in thirty days. In preparation they decided to acquire some camping equipment. Neither one of them had done any camping other than going to the cabin. The plan was to use it on occasion and mostly stay in lodges and inns along the way. Curly got some road maps from the service station and began plotting the route they would take.

As Curly continued to work with his section, they became very efficient. During April they spent a couple of days operating from the old Langley off shore while the Saratoga remained at anchor at San Pedro. The squadron flew out each morning and returned in the afternoon.

Curly decided it was time to have a section social. Again it was a barbecue in the playground. Scoop showed up with a date; a pretty redhead named Veronica Weston who he had been seeing for a while. Cowboy brought his wife, Francis and their two year old son, Jake. As usual the men talked airplanes while women engaged in girl talk. It was odd. Now Curly and Geannie were the oldest in the group. The other couples were both four or five years younger.

One afternoon Curly was having some mechanical difficulties with 2-B-10 so he brought it down to have it looked over. He directed Scoop and Cowboy to practice touch and gos and he went home early. When he walked in the door he found Geannie, Sandy, and Austin all in the bath tub.

“What do we have here?” Curly chuckled.

“Were having a party.” Geannie snickered. “Do you want to join us?”

“No, thanks. I think I'll pass.” he responded. Then he grabbed a towel and asked, “Do you do this often?” He put out his hand.

Geannie took his hand and stood up and wrapped herself in the towel and gave him a hug. “Wouldn't you like to know, Flyboy?” she teased. Then she explained, “I took them to the beach for a while. When we came home we were all so filthy that I stuck them in the tub. That's when I decided to climb in too, so we all had a bath together. I wasn't expecting you home this early.”

“Obviously.” Curly said. Then he said to the kids, “Come on kids, lets get you out and go get you dressed.” Curly picked up Austin and wrapped him in a towel while Geannie did the same with Sandy. With Austin in one arm Curly took Sandy by the other hand and took them into their bedroom and got them dressed. Geannie also got dressed and came to help him finish with the kids.

“Don't you think their starting to get a little big to be sharing a room?” Geannie asked.

“Ya, I guess so.” Curly answered. “Maybe I should put our name name on the list for a three bedroom duplex. Maybe by the time we get around to having another baby, one will come open.” That

was the first time they discussed having another baby openly.

“That would be a good idea.” Geannie agreed.

Then Curly asked, “What would you think renting a house in town?”

“Oh I don't know.” Geannie replied. “I have thought it would be nice to have a home of our own sometime. But we can save a lot of money on rent here and this is where most of our friends live and it is so convenient to the air station.”

“Okay, then.” Curly stated. “I'll stop by the housing office tomorrow and put in a request. There are always people coming and going around here, I'm sure something will open up in the next few months.”

With everyone properly clothed, they turned their attention to dinner. The rest of the evening was spent discussing their trip. Curly suggested that since they were inexperienced with camping that maybe they should make a practice run first.

Curly arranged for the day off on the following Friday so they could go camping. Since they were new at this, they decided they would be better off going to a developed campground. They had asked around and were told of a couple of spots that sounded nice. Curly got a map directing them to these campgrounds. After studying them he was sure he could find either one without any trouble. After all, he was a trained navigator who could fly off of an aircraft carrier out in the middle of the ocean and find his way back.

Of the two campsites, they decided on the one at Lake Laguna, just over sixty miles from home. Curly thought that there would be no problem finding it. Just go east on US 80, turn off a mile past Pine Valley onto San Diego County Road S1 and it takes you right to it. How hard can it be?

That morning they loaded up the car with their equipment and enough supplies for three days. It was a beautiful day in mid May and they got an early start and got across the bay. After leaving the city they drove through the countryside with the top down. They soaked in the fresh air and sunshine as they drove past farms and orchards. Before long they were driving through the chaparral of the Cleveland National Forest in the Laguna Mountains east of San Diego.

Pine Valley was just where the map said they would find it. A mile down the road they found the sign indicating the turnoff onto County Road S1. It was a good gravel road that took them through the forest of oak and Jeffrey pine as they climbed higher and higher in elevation. The higher the elevation, the more winding the road became. All of a sudden the road became extremely narrow and rough.

“I think we are on the wrong road. Are you sure we're not lost, Lieutenant?” Geannie asked.

“I've been following the map.” Curly said confidently that he was on the right road and kept going. That is until they came to a place where high water covered the bridge across a creek.

“Okay. Maybe we are lost.” Curly got out his map and studied it more closely. “If we were going north, like we should be, the sun should be to our left.” Curly said glancing to where the sun should have been.

“Well, guess what? It's on our right.” Geannie snapped.

“We've been driving in the wrong direction.” Curly admitted sheepishly. He retraced the route from the main highway on the map. “Here's where we went wrong.” he said. “We should have veered to the left a few miles back. Instead we went straight.”

“Who's we? You're the one drivin'.” Geannie gave him a hard time. “Aren't you supposed to be an experienced navigator?” Then she eased up on him, “Well, at least we have seen some pretty country.”

The only option was to turn back. That wasn't so easy. The road at that point was narrow with no place to turn around. Curly had to back about fifty yards to a clearing where he could turn around. Backing off the road into the clearing should have done the trick. All of a sudden they heard a pop followed by a fizzing sound. That could only mean one thing.

Curly got out of the car to take a look. “Yeah, it's flat alright. I backed right into the pointed end of a downed limb that was poking out of the ground.”

“That's all we need. First we get lost and now this.” Geannie grumbled. Then she said to the kids as she got out of the car, “You kids stay here. I'll help Daddy with the tire.”

Fortunately the spare was mounted on the back of the car so they had easy access to it. After about a half an hour, he had the tire changed.

While Curly was changing the tire, Geannie managed to pull the limb out of the ground and cleared the area so they could turn around. In the process she snagged the sleeve of her dress on a limb and ripped it. She was okay until that happened. Then she began getting more irritated. As Curly backed into the clearing, she stood behind the car to make sure he didn't run into anything else.

Finally on the road again, they backtracked to the fork in the road. Sure enough there was a sign obscured by the underbrush that pointed the way to go. The detour had cost them two hours, a flat tire, and a torn dress. The road to the campground was good all the rest of the way. They found the campground without any further problems. A sign at the campground indicated that they were six thousand feet above sea level! That was quite a climb.

Being so early in the season there wasn't anyone else there so they had their pick of the campsites. They selected a nice one in the shade and with a great view of the mountain and began unloading their equipment.

Curly spread the tent out on the ground and laid out the support poles and stakes. That is when he discovered that he forgot to get an ax. He found a rock with a flat surface that he used to pound the tent

pegs part way into the ground. They felt tight and secure as he raised the tent. He did fumble a little with the center poles but got it up. Last of all he laid down the canvas ground cover inside the tent.

Their home for the weekend consisted of an eight foot by eight foot tent, a picnic table and a fire pit. They had a Primus Dual Burner liquid fuel pressure stove for cooking and a portable ice chest for their perishable food.

Geannie was busy unloading their supplies and getting things ready for lunch. By then it was mid afternoon and they hadn't had anything to eat yet. The kids were particularly grumpy and fussy. That is when Geannie discovered that she had forgot to bring can opener. Using a knife to open a can of pork and beans, it slipped and she cut her thumb. She ripped off a piece of her torn sleeve and wrapped it around her throbbing thumb and applied pressure until the bleeding stopped. Then she tore off another piece and wrapped it around it to keep it clean. With the tent up and lunch ready they shared their afternoon picnic with the ants and flies.

This was supposed to be an adventure so they didn't let their misfortunes spoil their spirits and set out exploring. Not too far from the campground was Little Laguna Lake. There was a nice stretch of pebbly shoreline with plenty of nice skipping rocks. It was just like being kids again at the lake back home. Curly and Geannie had a skipping contest while Sandy and Austin had ball throwing pebbles into water and got a real kick out of watching the splashes and ripples.

The inner primitive man came out in Curly and he set out to build a fire, ax or no ax. He found a stack of cut logs that someone had left behind. Without a way to split them, they were useless. So he went around gathering dry sticks and limbs scattered about on the ground. Before long he had gathered quite a pile. Some of the limbs needed to be broken into smaller pieces to fit in the fire pit. That wasn't a problem, until he attempted to break up a rather thick limb. It was more brittle than he expected. Holding it firmly on the ground with one foot, he gave it yank. The limb snapped and flipped up hitting him right in the kisser. That hurt! Geannie tore off another piece of her sleeve and gave it to him to apply to his bleeding lower lip.

Undeterred, Curly began to build a fire. Remembering his survival training, he laid two larger sticks spaced apart in the bottom of the pit to make a bed for the kindling. Not trusting his fire making skills, he stuffed a piece of paper in amongst the kindling. Then he carefully built a pyramid of larger sticks over the kindling. The real test came when he put a match to it. It didn't light on the first or the second match, but the third match did the trick. Soon the flame from the kindling touched of the pyramid. Curly felt like a real man, "Me make fire!" He grunted.

While he got the fire going, Geannie turned her attention to dinner. She peeled some potatoes and cubed them and sliced some carrots. She wrapped them in tin foil with a small chuck roast. Once the fire had spread out, Curly placed it right in the middle of the fire. He asked Geannie, "How long will it take to

cook through?”

“I would reckon about an hour,” Geannie answered. “Take it out then and I’ll check it.”

Geannie set about the other preparations for dinner while keeping a close eye on Austin. Sandy tagged along behind Curly as he set out looking for more firewood.

When the hour was up, everything was ready. Using a stick, Curly carefully slid the foil pouch out of the fire and retrieved it using a couple of hotpads. He set it on the picnic table and opened it to find a black charcoal brick. He burst out laughing.

Geannie took one look and she to began laughing and asked, “Burnt offerins, anyone?” Then she added, “Its a good thing I brought some wieners.”

Curly went down to the edge of the lake and cut a couple of willows and and soon had some hot dogs roasting over the fire. Geannie got out the hot dog fixings only to discover that she failed to bring some buns. Bread was substituted instead. She opened the bag of potato chips and retrieved two bottles of Coca Cola from the ice chest. Thats right, no bottle opener either. Curly managed to pry the caps of with a pair of pliers. Supper turned out alright after all.

Curly stoked up the fire while Geannie cleared away. That was easy, Curly tossed the paper plates into the fire while Geannie put the rest of the fixings away. Dusk was settling and that meant time for s’mores!

Sandy and Austin were worn right out. Geannie made up their beds and put them down for night. Curly and Geannie sat around the campfire talking until it was quite dark. Finally, they let the fire die out and went to bed too. They took off their shoes and and climbed into bed. The ground was hard and the blankets didn’t offer much padding. Nevertheless sleep overcame the tired couple.

About midnight, Geannie woke up with a start. “Did you hear that!” she whispered as she shook curly awake. “Somethin’s out there!”

Curly listened for a moment and concluded, “There’s nothing out there. Go back to sleep.”

“I swear, I heard somethin.” she whispered emphatically.

“It was probably just some little night critters scurrying around.” Curly yawned. “Go back to sleep.”

Geannie laid there for a while listening intently until she too drifted back to sleep.

Around two in the morning it began to rain. All of a sudden it began to rain hard and strong wind came up out of nowhere. The tent pegs were not enough to hold up against such a strong wind and the stakes on one side of the tent worked their way out of the ground. The tent collapsed and blew off exposing the little family to the drenching rain.

Curly and Geannie, who had been sleeping in their clothes, quickly jumped out of bed and in their bare feet set about to secure the tent. Fortunately the pegs on the other side held and they pulled it back

into place. Geannie held on as the wind tried to blow it out of her grasp. She held it in place while Curly pounded the pegs into the ground with a rock. This time he made sure they were in deep.

With the tent secure, they crawled under the tent where Sandy and Austin were crying. Curly held up the top at one end while Geannie put the pole in place. They repeated the process at the front.

Curly lit the kerosene lamp so they could inspect the damage.

“Look at this mess, everything is soaked,” Geannie lamented in dismay. “Oh no, all of our bedding and clothes are soaking wet.” she moaned. “Even the clothes in the suitcase are soaked because it was left open.”

“Okay,” Geannie suggested. “Everybody take off your wet clothes.” So she and Curly stripped down to their underwear. Then they did the same with Sandy and Austin.

“Let’s roll all this stuff together in the tarp and put it outside.” Curly said. “At least the bare ground under it is dry.”

While Geannie comforted the kids, Curly put the roll outside and went out to the car to get the two remaining dry blankets. Fortunately the top was up!

When he came back he laid one blanket on the ground. They sandwiched the kids between them and covered up with the other blanket. Eventually the kids settled down and everyone went back to sleep. By then, the wind and rain had moved on.

The next morning dawned clear. The sun had begun to climb into the sky by the time anyone stirred. What a night! When they got up and went outside, the warmth of the sun felt so good.

The first thing that caught their attention was their food. It had been neatly left on the picnic table, covered with the vinyl picnic cloth. What the night critters hadn’t got, the wind had scattered around and the rain had ruined. Fortunately there was some fruit in the ice box.

Geannie had Curly get the clothesline she had thought to bring and had him string it up between two trees. Together they hung up their wet clothes and bedding to dry. What wouldn’t fit on the clothesline was strewn about on the lower tree limbs. “Until they dry, we’ll just have to get by in our underwear.” Geannie declared, then she added, “At least there isn’t anyone else around.”

Her hair was a tangled mess, Curly teased, “You look like a wild girl from Borneo! I should know, I’ve been there.”

Geannie said to Curly, “And just who are you, Tarzan of the Apes?”

Curly beat his chest and let out his best jungle call imitation. That made everyone laugh.

So as they were, they sat down to a breakfast of fruit and juice. While they were eating, another car pulled into the campground. “Oh great! That’s all we need right now.” Curly said as they drove past Camp Brason. The family in the car took one look at them and quickly left.

"I reckon we scared them off." Geannie snickered.

The rain the night before turned everything to mud. Before long, Sandy and Austin found a mud hole to play in and were covered in it. Geannie, already covered with her share of mud, went to pluck the kids out of the mud. She slipped and landed on her bottom right in the middle of the mud hole. She just sat there for a moment trying to decide whether she was mad or thought it was funny. She answered the dilemma when she burst out laughing.

Curly came to the rescue and extended his hand to help Geannie up.

She took his and gave it a sudden jerk, pulling Curly in with them. He landed face first. Rolling over and sitting up, he wiped the mud from his eyes. He hesitated, but then joined the laughter.

Curly reached deep down into the mud and got a big hand full of the black goo and planted it squarely on Geannie's chest and began smearing it on. She gasped! Then grabbed a handful of mud and flung it at Curly. He dodged and it missed him, but hit Sandy in the tummy, knocking her onto her seat. She squealed with laughter.

Sandy dropped a plop of mud onto Austin's head. He too giggled. Still needing to get even with Curly, Geannie stood up and poured mud over his head. He grabbed her around her knees and pulled her back down into the mud. As she tried to escape his clutches, Geannie squirmed out of his arms. Free, she whirled around and a full blown wrestling match broke out between the two of them. Curly came out victorious sitting straddle over his wife who was laying flat on her back in the mud.

He climbed off and sat in the mud beside her as he sat up. All four of them laughing so hard they were about to burst. As she stood up, Geannie said, "I do declare, we all need to take a bath in the lake."

They all got up and exited the mud hole, every square inch of their bodies covered with thick black mud. No sooner had they got out of the mud hole that the sun began to dry it and cake to their bodies. Geannie carefully retrieved a bar of soap, a scrub brush, and some shampoo and she marched them all down to the lake. They must have looked like a tribe of aborigines as they followed the path to the lake.

The water was cold as they waded into the shallow end. Once in the water, Geannie had everyone remove what they were wearing. Sandy and Austin thought it was great fun to splash in the water as they tried to escape the brush. Once they were clean, she let them play in the water. Just so they didn't go up on the shore and get all dirty again. Then Geannie and Curly scrubbed each other off. While she washed her hair, Curly slushed out their muddy underwear.

Geannie carried Austin and took Sandy's hand as they walked back to the campsite while Curly brought their wet clothes. Just then the same car came back into the campground. With only Austin to hide behind, Geannie simply waved at the people in the car as they drove past them. Again the car left in a hurry.

Once back at the campsite, Geannie plopped the kids down on the picnic table with instructions to stay put so they wouldn't get dirty again. Curly spread out their wet underwear on the bushes to dry with the rest. Geannie checked on their other clothes, they were still wet. "You know what?" she burst out laughing. "Towels are another thing I forgot to bring! I reckon that with nothin else to wear, we'll just have to go in our birthday suits until our clothes are dry."

Austin, who had already been weaned, decided he wanted to nurse. Geannie cradled him in her arms and let him nurse. "I doubt if he's gettin anything, but he seems to be enjoyin it. This is one of the things that I miss as they get bigger." Geannie reflected. "That's why I want to have another one."

After a while the clothes on the line were dry enough to wear. Geannie set Austin back on the table and got up and took some clothes off of the line. Clean, dry, and dressed, they got Sandy and Austin dressed as well.

"Well, that was the most fun we've had on the whole trip," Geannie said in exasperation. "What should we do now?"

Curly was quick to respond, "Why don't we just pack up and go home?"

"Now you're talkin." Geannie agreed.

They not so neatly loaded everything back into the car and were soon ready to leave. As they pulled out of the campground, that car pulled in for the third time. Curly stopped the car and motioned for them to stop. He simply said, "The place is all yours. I hope you have more fun than we did." At that he waved and pulled onto the main road.

They stopped at a diner in Pine Valley and had something to eat before heading on home. On the drive back they talked about the fiasco that they had just been through.

"Do you really want to do this on our trip?" Curly asked with uncertainty.

With her adventuresome spirit not completely extinguished Geannie answered, "Sure. At least we now know what not to do. We'll still stay in places along the way but there will be a few times we'll want to camp out."

"Are you sure?" Curly asked again.

"Yeah," Geannie continued. "This time we didn't have a clue as to what we were doin and didn't plan very well. I'll make a list of everything we will possibly need and make sure we are prepared. It will be fun. Just wait and see."

"Okay then." Curly agreed.

When they got home late that afternoon there was all the work of cleaning up and putting things away. It was so good to sleep in their own bed that night.

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The potato chip bag was invented in 1926. It was made of wax paper. Prior that they came in tins.

Pop bottles used to be sealed with a metal bottle cap affixed to the rim of the neck of a bottle by being pleated or ruffled around the rim. A bottle opener is a specialized lever inserted beneath the pleated metalwork prying open the seal and lifting the cap off the bottle.

S'mores are a traditional nighttime campfire treat popular in the United States and Canada consisting of a roasted marshmallow and a layer of chocolate sandwiched between two pieces of graham cracker. S'more is a contraction of the phrase, "some more." While the origin of the dessert is unclear, the first recorded version of the recipe can be found in the publication "Tramping and Trailing with the Girl Scouts" of 1927.

