

HOW ABOUT WE CAMP

By Donna R. Jensen

When Carole and I were making plans to take a month and visit New England on faith, looking for opportunities to speak and share my stories, we had very little cash on hand.

It was early September so we thought even in New England, it would still be warm enough to camp out. I had only been on one campout and that was in my late teens. Because of a visit in the middle of the night from wild boars, it had only lasted one day.

Now in our mid-seventies, Carole and I purchased air mattresses and a sleeping tent for four. (When set up we could never picture where two more would have fit.)

A trial campout was planned for Carole's back yard with her son, Brian, demonstrating how to set up the tent. The air mattresses didn't get off her living room floor because the pump that came with them was battery operated. We expected to have to set up and break camp many times and batteries would be too costly.

Setting off for Walmart to look for options to replace the air mattresses, we each selected a yoga exercise mat for a foundation. To this Carole added a cushion from her glider. I had an old comforter that had lost much of its umph and an egg crate in the same condition. I laid the comforter on my bed and the egg crate on it. Folding the other side over I pinned it together with safety pins since I no longer owned a sewing machine. And that was *my* sleeping pad.

In a small town in N.Y. a church allowed us to set up our tent at the back of their property. We were hidden from view behind a storage shed. It was a very serene location with picnic tables, a dry stream bed, bushes and tall trees. An opening in the trees about twenty-five feet away exposed to view the train that sped by loudly blowing its whistle, night and day.

It was late afternoon when we started setting up our tent. The stakes were very light weight. Brian had been able to push them most of the way into the ground by hand. That wasn't happening for me. He'd finished them up with a mallet. I was trying to pound them in using the side of the hammer.

Bending over makes me dizzy so I was sitting in a small out-door chair to do the job. I decided to switch to the little shovel Carole had packed. Reaching down for it, the chair tipped over throwing me roughly to the ground on my side and frightening Carole. No damage was done. I just needed to lie there a few moments to collect myself.

Back at the job I slammed at the stakes with the shovel, bending a couple of them. Within the hour the tent was up but I felt it was being held as much by our imaginations as by the flimsy stakes, barely in the ground. With us and our stuff in it though, I didn't think it would blow away and it *was* holding its shape. (The next day we purchased and pounded in stronger stakes.)

At the door we placed a heavy-duty step-stool as something to hold on to as we pulled ourselves up off the ground and balanced precariously on one foot while bending over to duck through the opening and step out over the bottom of the tent which was six inches high. To enter we basically had to tuck and roll as we dove through the entrance.

Once settled in, it was a real effort just to roll over in the night. Carole had had both hips replaced in the last year so it was all harder on her. One or the other of us was frequently unzipping the screen and raising the flap to use our near-by portable pot. It sat beneath a low frame. By it we had placed a sturdy computer stand to have something to steady ourselves. Of course, the seat was always wet and cold in the night.

One day I saw something at the edge of the trees about fifty yards away. I hadn't noticed it before and as I focused on it I wondered if it was just a bush. Sometimes my eyes play tricks on me. As I studied it further it moved. It was some kind of animal. Turning its head, it looked over its shoulder at me. Sitting there, it resembled a German Shepherd dog but when it rose and bounded into the woods, it moved like a cat. We were told it was probably a coyote. I grabbed my camera one afternoon and waited for the train as it roared toward us. It was my first attempt to capture something on video. Pressing the button, I waited excitedly. There it came, right at me! Its cargo was the most interesting one we'd seen them haul. The others had been tankers and boxcars, dark and dreary. This was a dismantled circus! Talk about colorful!! I couldn't believe what I was seeing through the viewer. When I showed it to Carole later, I was so pleased to find the sound of the train rattling rapidly down the tracks was captured as well.

We met many interesting people from all walks of life and were able to share Jesus in many different ways. We kept our sense of humor and laughed at the predicaments we got into. The Lord made it possible for us to accomplish what we set out to do and to return safely.

Our campout lasted six long days with a few hours of it spent sitting in the car when strong winds whipped the grounds in the middle of the night. We were told later they were from the north and not the usual thing around there.

And thus we packed to move on to our destination in Maine. We came, we camped, but we don't want to camp again. We did it because we didn't know we couldn't...

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