

Jews Don't Camp

By Linda Parker Horowitz

I once listened to a soccer dad become positively poetic about a camping trip he took in the Sierra Nevadas. He went on and on about the difficulty of the climb, the cold wet boots, stiff fingers, the magnificence of the mountain streams with water so pure he could drink it, finally coming upon a valley that had been untouched by other hikers, providing a triumphant victory to his bone-chilling 3-day trek. I sat there next to a Pasadena soccer field totally captivated, right there with him, every step in his muddy hiking boots, visualizing the entire trip. Entranced I thought, "What an incredible experience!" Then I awoke from this bizarre reverie to the sharp realization, "*I will never have that experience.*" And honestly, I'm just fine with that.

I hate camping. It confounds me why anyone would want to work that hard, and on vacation! There are huge bugs that bite, it's uncomfortable (either too hot or too cold), and wild animals that will do you serious harm for your food or maybe just for fun. People choose to do this? They seek-out this activity! Why? To see a view? Buy a post card. For the challenge? Navigate the L.A. freeways; ride the New York City subways. Try dating again. *Those* are challenges.

Except for some truly horrific experiences at summer camp in my youth, I have avoided camping. This hasn't been difficult because I'm Jewish. Jews don't camp. We are urban people; as an ethnic group, we are city folk, have been for about 2,000 years. Met any Jewish farmers? Know any Jewish cowboys? You might have seen some Jewish guys wear cowboy boots when they were extremely trendy back in the '80's. These expensive shoes gave short Jewish boys another inch and a half to two inches of height while still being socially acceptable. Dare I say it? Fashionable.

You know the old joke, "What does a Jewish wife make for dinner? Reservations." And not for a prime spot to pull up the RV and make a rousing camp fire to cook. If I'm going to spend 50 to 100 thousand dollars, it's going to be on furniture for my home, not a home on wheels.

Perhaps another function of our urban nature is that we are not particularly athletic, either. This trait would also feed the lack of interest in those camping experiences. Though my husband is 6 feet 4 inches tall, the most athletic thing he does is move a computer mouse. Let's go. Now up and down and back, De-LETE. And type 2, 3, 4 and space 2, 3, 4.

I don't know any Jews that are handy around the house, either, skills that become imperative for actual *survival* when camping. My husband not only isn't handy, he's downright incapable. Mr. Top-of-Our-MBA-Class intuitively grasps this basic equation: $A = B, B = C, C = D$ therefore $A = D$. But grasp a hammer to build or repair anything? Not a chance it will turn out right. I know the letters that explain that situation ... D-N-A.

He blames his lack of knowledge and ability on two things: training and tools. His father wasn't handy and therefore, no one taught him. I think those three letters are a factor. Then there is the tool conundrum. He claims that for every task, you have to have the right tool. We have a garage full of tools – cabinets and cabinets of screw drivers and wrenches of every size and variety, cords, cleaners, electric drills, but Mr. Fix-It has yet to emerge victorious. More

correctly, emerge at all. He needs to make reservations, but with a local handyman. On second thought, I'll make that call after I decide *where* we are having dinner.

One of my more athletic gentile girlfriends once described a vacation her parents took where they snow shoed to a hut, then camped for several days. An activity that rugged wouldn't even occur to a Jew. Looking back, I realize that she did not comment on what must have been the "I-can't-believe-it's-a-girdle" look on my face as she recounted how much her parents enjoyed their vacation. Oy vey.

Another non-Jewish gal-pal breaks the mold a bit, but that must be because she was raised in New York City surrounded by Jews. She too, hates camping, and when absolutely forced to participate with her husband and children for the sake of quality time and family, she brings along her Laura Ashley sheets, blankets and curtains for the tent. Headed in the right direction, but still not enough to make me go and have to cook on an open fire. Yes, yes, I know. There are all kinds of stoves and utensils for outdoor life, but you have to SCHLEPP them! It's bad enough to have to cook in my own kitchen, much less haul equipment in order to do something I have mixed feelings about already.

What about s'mores and stories and singing around a camp fire? First, I have a gas stove. If I feel the need to cook s'mores, I can do so and without mosquitoes. Stories are at bedtime nightly in the comfort of heat or air conditioning, and when I sing in my car, my kids tell me that though I have a good voice, I should shut-up that I'm embarrassing them. In my own car!

Every morning, I open my kitchen blinds and gaze lovingly upon magnificent Mt. Wilson. I have NEVER considered hiking, climbing, skiing, or camping on it. I think of the eternal question — "Why? Why would anyone DO THAT?" I wrap my robe a bit more snugly, pour my cup of coffee which was waiting for me thanks to an automatic timer, and warmly settle-in to read the paper, unchallenged and quite content.