

The
Backyard
Campout

Margaret & Kat King

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The
Backyard
Campout

Margaret & Kat King

Illustrated by Herb C. Fowle

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Dedication

The Backyard Campout is dedicated to our illustrator, Herb Fowle, an incredible man from “The Greatest Generation.” A combat veteran of World War II, he fought with F Co. 22nd infantry regiment of the 4th infantry division in France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany earning three campaign stars and was awarded the Combat Infantryman’s Badge with a bronze star. Herb continued his public service after the war as a founding member of the Hillsdale JayCees, Mayor and Postmaster of Hillsdale, Michigan, as well as completing 25 years as a member of the US Army Reserve, retiring at the rank of Sergeant Major. His book, *Against All Odds*, about WWII drew positive responses from readers in many countries.

Herb began drawing at an early age and after retiring in 1980 began painting seriously and began working back into caricatures and pencil sketches, his latest project being the illustration of *The Backyard Campout*—at the age of 92!

We were impressed with Herb from the first time we talked with him. We found out he served in World War II with Ernest Hemmingway and enjoyed listening to his tales. Sometimes we couldn’t figure out if he was pulling our leg—probably was, knowing Herb.

Herb passed away Monday, February 16, 2015 at the age of 94. A few weeks before his death, we were able to speak with him by phone and say our goodbyes and to thank him

for all he has done for our country and for us personally.
Herb Fowle was a precious gentle man.

We thank his sweet wife, Wanda, for sharing him with us.



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THE BACKYARD CAMPOUT

CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGGERS

Kathy had been grouching about camping out in the backyard again this summer. After several days listening to her fuss, I faced her and responded a bit sharply, “I don’t think I want to camp out again this summer, not after what Billy pulled on us last year. Why don’t you just drop it and let’s go play.”

“But don’t you see?” Kathy insisted. “If Mama will let us camp out tonight with the boys, we can pay Billy back for what he did to us last summer. So what do you think? Will she let us camp out tonight or not?” she continued, refusing to give up.

Kathy and I are nine-year old identical twins. We were sitting Indian style on the hard concrete carport slab on an unusually cool morning in mid-June. I was more than irritated and replied curtly, “Ugh! You never give up, do you? Said she’d tell us at lunch today. Guess you’ll just have to wait and see just like me. Remember, she told you not to ask her again.”

“Yeah, I know, but I really wish we could camp out like Billy and Johnny tonight. Boys are lucky ’cause they get to do lots more things than girls,” Kathy complained.

“Yeah, but it’s Billy’s birthday after all. He’s ten years old and this is what he wants instead of a birthday party.

He wants to have his best friend over to camp outdoors,” I pointed out.

“Well, it’s still not fair that he gets to camp out and we don’t. Don’t you want to get him back for taking us over to that haunted house last year and scaring the beeebees out of us? I’ve been thinking about it for a long time now, trying to figure out how to get him back and here’s our opportunity,” Kathy stated emphatically, irritated because of the double standard.

Our six-year old sister, Carol, stared wide-eyed at us, suddenly realizing what Kathy said. “What do you mean a haunted house? Are you talking about that spooky old house across the creek over there?” she asked, pointing to the back of our property.

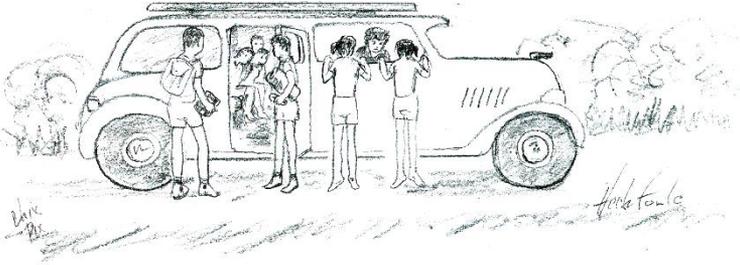
“Yeah, Billy tricked us into going over there last summer and I’m never, ever going to do that again because it was too creepy,” I responded, shivering at the thought.

“And now, here’s our chance to get him back if only Mama will let us camp out tonight,” Kathy explained. Then, back to the pressing matter at hand, added, “Is it almost lunch? I’m hungry. Hope we’re having peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. That’s my favorite.” Then changing the subject again, as was Kathy’s habit, she asked, “Reckon when Johnny will get here?”

“Don’t know, but we can’t eat lunch ’til he does. Bet we’re having hot dogs. Mama always has hot dogs when Johnny comes over,” I speculated, hoping I was wrong.

“I like playing games with him because he’s funny, makes me laugh,” Carol joined the conversation.

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The crunching of tires on the driveway drew our attention as a car full of young 'uns came rolling up the driveway. We jumped up, ran toward the approaching car to greet our guests. Ms. Dotty braked to a stop, then Johnny hopped out and, with a backpack slung over his shoulder, swaggered toward us.

“Hey, Johnny, did you bring books over to read?” I asked, curious about the backpack.

“Yeah, don’t tell us you brought books over to read. You don’t read in the summer, do you?” Kathy interrupted, bemused that anyone would even think about doing school work during summer vacation.

“Nope,” Johnny replied, “I stuffed my clean clothes and pjs in it. Got some snack food for camping out tonight, too. I didn’t bring any regular books, but I did bring one scary book about ghosts, ghouls and goblins. And a can of sardines,” he added as an afterthought and grinned mischievously, fishing for a reaction.

Ms. Dotty rolled down the passenger side window and reminded Johnny, “Mind your manners and help with chores.” Then realizing we were standing side by side,

greeted, "Hello, girls." Smiling sweetly, she asked the same old question, "Which is which?" Before we could answer, she held up a hand and exclaimed, "Wait! Let me guess!" We poked our heads inside the car window waiting for the guessing game to begin. "Well, let's see," she said looking at me, "you're Kathy. Am I right?"

"No ma'am. She's Maggie," Kathy corrected, making eye contact with Ms. Dotty.

"Y'all look so much alike today. Tell your Mother I'll visit with her tomorrow morning when I come by to get Johnny. Y'all be good and have fun."

"Yes ma'am, we will and it doesn't matter if you can't tell which is which because sometimes we can't even tell our pictures apart," Kathy interjected, wanting Ms. Dotty to know that lots of people get us confused.

"Can I stay, too?" Tom, who was Carol's age, whined. He was ready to jump from the open back door of the idling car.

Older by two years, Tom's brother, Matt, grabbed Tom's arm and pulled the struggling boy back in, slammed the door, and shouted, "No, get back in here. You can't stay 'cause you weren't invited."

"You can come play with me," Carol spoke up, wanting someone her own age to play with.

Kathy squeezed Carol's arm to shut her up. Before Ms. Dotty could respond, Kathy assumed a little-girl look and after hesitating for a moment, pleaded, "Mama might let us spend the night outside, too. If you talk to her today will you tell her we really want to sleep outside?"

"Yeah, that's a good idea. Ms. Dotty, will you tell Mama we want to camp out, too," I backed Kathy's plea.

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“Don’t you want to go in and talk to her?” Kathy implored and glanced sideways at me, pleased to have an ally in her corner.

“Wish I could, but I can’t right now. I’ve got errands to run, but I’ll visit with her tomorrow. I do hope you get your wish to camp out. Now, you kids have a good time and don’t let the mosquitoes eat you alive,” Ms. Dotty replied, putting the car in gear to leave.

“No ma’am. They won’t. We’ve got lots of bug spray. We’ll spray it all over us and for sure we’ll spray inside our tent if we get to camp out. That bug spray will kill them dead. It makes me choke so I know it’ll kill all those ol’ bugs,” Kathy shouted, wanting to be heard over the drone of the car engine. Not to be outdone, she turned her attention to our guest as the car pulled out of the driveway. Taking every opportunity to get permission to camp out, she asked, “Johnny, when we have lunch, will you ask Mama if she’ll let us sleep outside tonight?”

“Sure, that’ll be fun with all of us out here together, telling ghost stories and eating the sardines and crackers I brought,” Johnny teased, a wicked glint in his eyes.

Kathy took him seriously and responded, “Yuck. That sounds nasty. I’m not going eat that stinky stuff. I’m bringing peanut butter to eat on my crackers.” Then getting back to her original request repeated, “You will ask her, won’t you? She likes you a lot, laughs a lot when you’re around. I know she’ll let us camp out tonight if you ask her. Will you?”

“Yep, I will as soon as we get to the kitchen table. Hope we’re having hot dogs. Her hot dogs are good, you know those all beef weenies? Would you believe my mama

told me that when she was a kid all the cheap weenies had little bits of bone in them? Can you imagine eating weenies with ground up bone in them?” Johnny grimaced at the thought.

I looked at him and wondered aloud, “Are you for real, Johnny? Did weenies really have bones in them? Mama doesn’t buy cheap weenies and I’ve never eaten a weenie with a bone in it.”

“Yuck. That’s disgusting. Makes me want to puke,” Kathy shivered and spat into the dirt at her feet. Then seeing what she had done, used the toe of her flip flop to scuff the dirt to cover the spit.

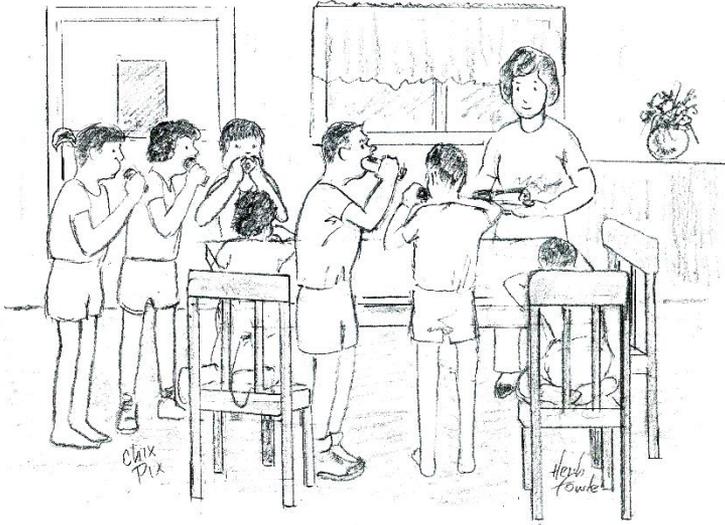
“Yeah. Crunching down on an ol’ piece of bone is disgusting,” Carol echoed and mimicking Kathy, spat in the dirt at her feet.

Eager to know what was on the menu, Kathy opened the carport screen door, stuck her head in and called, “Mama, Johnny’s here and he’s ready to eat.” She hollered, “Says he thinks we’re having hot dogs. Is that right?”

“Yes, he’s right. Tell everyone to come in and wash up. I’m putting the hot dogs in the buns right now,” Mama responded. “Now, shut that door before you let all the flies in.”

“Come on, everyone. Mama says it’s time to eat! Johnny’s right. We’re having weenies. We need to hurry and clean up,” Kathy called.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE INVITATION

We crowded around the rectangular wooden table, blessed the food, and then each double-fisted a hot dog, chowing down hungrily, hoping not to bite into bits and pieces of ground-up bone.

Kathy, more determined than ever that we girls be included in the campout, guided the conversation to where she wanted it to go by asking, “Where are you going set up camp tonight?”

“Probably right out there by the carport so if any critters come up we can just move and be sheltered,” Billy answered, hoping the mention of wild animals might deter Kathy’s interest in joining his party.

“What kind of critters are you talking about? Cats and dogs?” I stopped in mid-bite and asked. I had a feeling he was up to no good and was trying to cause us trouble.

Winking subtly at Billy, Johnny answered mischievously, “Naw, not dogs or cats. Probably wild animals like raccoons and ’possums and things like that. They’ll probably smell the sardines and come around sometime during the night.” He divided a knowing look between the two of us and added slyly, “Why don’t you girls join us? It’d be fun for all of us to camp out together. I’ve got some real good scary stories to tell.”

We looked to Mama for an answer, hoping that she had taken Johnny’s bait. “Well, Johnny, I’ve been thinking about it. As long as you and Billy will look after the girls,

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I suppose it'll be okay. But," she stressed, "I'm holding you two boys responsible that nothing happens to them."

"Oh boy! Can we have someone spend the night, too?" I blurted enthusiastically, hoping with our guest to outnumber the boys.

Mama raised an eyebrow and asked, a show of concern in her voice, "Who do you have in mind?"

"Maybe Kay can come over," Kathy suggested tentatively.

"Well, I suppose this would be a good time since you'll be sleeping outdoors. Go ahead and give Kay a call and see if she can come over. You girls will have to prepare your own snacks, and pack night clothes, sheets and covers. Make sure Kay knows you'll be sleeping outdoors and to bring long pajamas and a pillow. And you'll have to clean up everything you mess up. If you can do all that, then it's okay with me," Mama consented, a hint of doubt still evident. "Oh yes, the tent is in the storage room on one of the top shelves. Billy, will you and Johnny get it down for the girls?"

"Don't you remember we let our cousin Bobby borrow it last weekend for his Boy Scout camp out?" Billy said, hoping that tidbit of information would change Mama's mind.

Kathy and I looked at each other, afraid Mama would be swayed by Billy's comment. "Oh, we don't need a tent. I've got a great idea," Kathy blurted, refusing to be outdone by Billy. "And I'm not going tell you what it is, so don't ask," she continued, glaring at her brother.

"Kathy, there is no need to be rude. Would you explain to me what your great idea is?" Mama scolded. "I will need

to know your plans, especially if you are having a friend over.”

I sneaked a look in Billy’s direction only to see a grin spreading across his face, as if he knew he had won this battle.

“Yes ma’am, Mama. We have some really old sheets back in the hall closet that we can use to make a tent. I’m pretty sure that’s all we’ll need.” Even though Mama had tentatively agreed to let us camp out, Kathy wanted to make sure she didn’t back out. “So, if you let us camp out we’ll do everything you told us to do and won’t cause any trouble.”

Mama furrowed her eyebrows giving careful thought to Kathy’s reply. Moments later she said, “I’ve already given you permission. Just follow my instructions.”

We squealed delightedly and when Mama looked away we stuck our tongues out at the boys.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PREPARATION

We spent the hours before Kay's arrival gathering supplies for the campout. Kathy took charge and organized the priorities. "First, let's get out the old sheets and covers. We can use them to make a tent at the swing set."

"How are we going to make a tent with just sheets and blankets and what will we use to cover up with if we use them for the tent?" I questioned.

Kathy responded curtly, "Just wait and you'll see. I've got it all planned because I've been thinking about it all afternoon. Now help me gather up all this stuff and get it out to the picnic table. After that we need to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, get some vanilla wafers, graham crackers and pack some drinks. I'll make the sandwiches and you get out the sandwich baggies to wrap them in. How many you want to eat? Two? We might get hungry and need two each. Yeah, I'll make two for each of us and an extra one to split, just in case we get real hungry. I'll make sure to put grape jelly on Kay's sandwiches, because that's what she likes. Once you get them wrapped, put them in this bag and stuff some napkins in it, too. And grab some of those honey buns and cookies," Kathy droned on and on.

Before I could respond to her last ramblings, I heard Mama coming up the hallway.

"Kathy, while you're making sandwiches, make some for Billy and Johnny. They'll want a late night snack, too,

I'm sure," Mama suggested as she passed through the kitchen. "I don't want you kids running in and out of the house, so make sure you pack everything you need ahead of time."



"Yes ma'am," Kathy replied. Then under her breath mumbled softly enough that Mama wouldn't hear, "Wonder why Billy can't make his own sandwiches? Girls have to do all the work for boys, don't we?" Then turning back to Mama, Kathy continued in her normal voice, "We're getting it all ready." We saw the boys standing beside Mama snickering at us, when Kathy changed the subject, "Reckon where can we find a flashlight? I know Daddy has one we can use, but I don't know where it is."

"In the storage room inside the top drawer on the left. Make sure the batteries are strong and be sure you put it back tomorrow when you're finished with it," Mama answered.

