

Summer is for Camping

By Ana Hetherman

As the slogan "Summertime is for children" is played on TV and the song "Summertime and the Living is Easy" lyrics resonate in my mind, I am reminded of some carefree, happy, summer days spent camping at the local California mountains when our children were growing up. As was standard in the '70's and '80's, husbands and fathers worked while wives and mothers stayed home to care for their families. They cooked daily; many sewed their own clothes, and did most of their gardening and cleaning to save on expenses.

Our family was no exception. Vacations were usually very simple consisting of day trips to Disneyland or Knott's Berry Farm, but coming home late in the evening to eat and sleep. Camping was also very popular for our family. Having four children who thoroughly enjoyed wandering about, commuting with nature, this kind of vacation suited us perfectly. We, however, weren't the only ones. We joined many more families, with our children, including Church families.

Camping requires much planning, preparation and packing for all who partake. Equipment included tents, stoves, sleeping bags, lanterns, coolers and flashlights, not to mention lawn chairs, food and clothing for all days at the campsite.

Arriving late on Fridays, we set up camp, ate very simply, then ending with a campfire, popped popcorn and roasted marshmallows while making plans for Saturday.

Saturdays were spent on short hikes and always attending Mass at one of the local churches, rain or shine. We left camp set up with all our belongings; and as a caravan, following each other so as not to get lost. We tried to dress in our best and cleanest

camping clothes, but to be honest, at rare times when it rained or was particularly windy, we must have looked a sight, all sitting together, huddled in the pews to keep warm and give each other confidence, sometimes looking like country folk in the city!

Saturdays, after church, we had extremely simple meals. Each family cooked their own dinner, but contributed a dish to the community table.

All meal simplicity was lost on Sunday mornings; the wafting aroma of good, strong coffee aroused us. One family scrambled all the eggs, (we pooled eggs, meats, potatoes and fruit brought together from home), another family would be responsible for the onion glazed cottage potatoes, and yet another family was delegated to prepare the sausages and bacon. Oh, cinnamon donut holes, toast, juice and hot chocolate were also on the menu. This was truly a feast! Many helpful hands worked! All thankfully ate of the large feast under the canopy of pines and oaks!

We rarely, if ever, camped near water or recreational facilities, preferring the solitude of the forest and companionship of our fellow guests, chatting, telling stories, and taking short hikes.

The older children amused, entertained and cared for their younger siblings at camp, giving their parents a much-needed break to enjoy adult conversation.

This scene played itself out for many years until one by one, the older children reached their teens and started working. It was not practical for us to leave half the family at home. This was the end of an era, but the beginning of many lasting friendships.