

**The Twelve Greatest Adventures of My  
Childhood  
(1945-1963)**

by

John Gunther

This book was created as part of *Lifescapes*, a senior writing project sponsored by Washoe County Library System, University of Nevada English Department, and Nevada Humanities.

Copyright © by the author 2008

Sparks Library Press  
1125 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Sparks, NV 89431

[www.lifescapesmemoirs.net](http://www.lifescapesmemoirs.net)

## PREFACE

I had a great childhood with many stories and adventures throughout my younger years until I left home in 1963. I have taken the time to write about the twelve most memorable adventures in my life. I hope that the readers will enjoy these moments I have frozen in time. Here are the twelve best adventures in my life up to my entry into college.

## BIOGRAPHY

John Gunther was born into a family of seventeen children. He loved his many years of sharing and these stories have been in the creative stage for many years. John is married to Barbara. They have three children and five grandchildren.

John and Barbara live in Verdi, Nevada, and they enjoy camping, hiking, sharing new adventures, golf, and traveling in their motor home. They spend time with their grandchildren doing many outdoor activities.

John enjoys writing, fly fishing, running, and spending time outdoors.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Adventure one: Following the railroad tracks to Grandma Fritz's house

Adventure two: An empty field full of adventures

Adventure three: The large pond behind South Bay Bowling Center

Adventure four: Riding trains in Torrance and related railroad events

Adventure five: The Thrifty Drug Store at the South Bay Shopping Center

Adventure six: Driving with Dave Nelson to Riverside

Adventure seven: The water balloon caper

Adventure eight: My first fish

Adventure nine: Fire on the railroad tracks

Adventure ten: The dance at Crestline, California

Adventure eleven: The great underground fort

Adventure twelve: The first camping trip of the brothers



## Adventure One

### “Following the Railroad Tracks to Grandma Fritz’s House”

We lived at 4119 W. 176 Street in Torrance, California, and Grandma Fritz lived at 2024 W. 41 Street in Los Angeles, California. The family had lived two doors down from Grandma Fritz’s house for a short 6 months before moving to Torrance in the early 1950’s. The four oldest boys often went to Grandmother Fritz’s house for candy, ice cream and other sweet treats. She was an awesome grandmother. After we moved to Torrance, the family had often traveled from our house to grandma’s house by car, visited, and then a few hours later we returned home. Probably a half hour drive as freeways did not exist to travel on. One summer day, Steve and I wanted an adventure, so we packed provisions in our army packs. We packed two bottles of Coca Cola, two candy bars and maybe some of mom’s cookies. Early mid morning we walked to the north-south train tracks just west of our house and began our walk to grandma’s house, telling mom we would be gone until later that day. If this adventure had happened today in 2008, our parents would probably be worried and I am sure the police would be called in to find us. Anyway back to the story.

It was a warm sunny day as we left our neighborhood and headed north on the railroad tracks and began our trek. Previously we had explored a mile in either direction of the railroad tracks that were located just west of the South Bay Shopping Center at Hawthorne Blvd. Soon we’re in uncharted territory and I don’t remember if we had any money with us. As the hours went by we eventually came to major intersections that looked familiar and others that didn’t look familiar. We asked a few adults questions regarding directions and a few times we got lost. Yet, we continued in the direction that generally headed north. We followed our instincts and within a few hours we found Van Ness Ave. and it seemed a street that sounded familiar to both of us. We kept heading northwest in our travels with the goal of having goodies at Grandma’s house. The goodies were usually raiding the candy dish, having a “black cow” root beer float and maybe a few chocolate chip cookies. We never once thought about the reaction of mom and dad to this adventure. We keep going and sometime later we found a familiar landmark and followed it north until we saw 41<sup>st</sup> Street on the sign above us. We turned the corner and finally saw Grandma Fritz’s house, so we suddenly ran the last 50 yards, knocked on the door, and waited for the treats she would share with us. Grandma looked very surprised as she opened the door. She asked us, “Where is your mom?” as she must have brought us by car. We both replied that we had walked by ourselves. The end of this story is unclear, but I am sure that Dad arrived later that day, picked us up and listened to our side of the story and that we received some discipline. Yet to this day, the story gives me fond memories of being 12 years old.

## **Adventure Two**

### **“An Empty Field Full of Adventures”**

The field offered many adventures for us young boys. This field was bordered by Hawthorne Blvd. to the west, a row of house on 176 Street on the south, a small urban street to the east, and Artesia Blvd. to the north. There was a small farm house and field to the north. The field had been used to dump mounds of dirt over the years by housing tract dump trucks. It was a great place to play war and other games with the neighborhood boys: Joey Rutchmen, Billy Whitlow, Duane Lyman, and my brothers, Steve, Don and Greg.

One day Steve and I climbed on a piece of construction equipment that had a large metal roller on the front, and two smaller metal rollers on the back. They used it to flatten out the dirt and level the ground for grading. While sitting in the driver's seat, I suddenly got it rolling slowly with no idea how to stop the machine. While moving, one of us jump out and put a large boulder in front of roller and it stopped rolling, but the engine was still running. We left the equipment and ran to the nearby Top Hat Pancake Restaurant at Hawthorne Blvd. and Artesia Blvd. and called the police and described the situation. Nervously we waited nearby, but out of sight, until the police car arrived and they got the engine turned off. What a relief it was for us. We were glad that they never discovered who had started the equipment. Another time in the same field, we were playing with matches and building small fires in hand carved dirt caves. What began as a small controlled fire soon became a larger fire, as we continued to add more dry branches and fanned the flames. Suddenly, the wind came up and we started the adjacent field on fire, and eventually by the time the fire department arrived we had burned about an acre of field. We stopped playing with matches after that day.

We would often play hide and seek in the farmer's corn fields and occasionally took a tomato from the vine and consumed it between the two or three of us. Once, I took a bite of the red ripe tomato, and looking back at the other half, saw a half of a tomato worm wiggling in the tomato. I had eaten the other half. I spat and spat and couldn't get that awful taste out of my mouth. A memory I still recall to this day when eating a whole tomato.

Other times we would divide the groups of friends and our brothers into two separate warring factions in the field. We would be divided by 20 feet of flat ground, with the two sides hidden from view by the mounds of earth. Then upon a prearranged signal, the two teams began throwing clumps of grass, small rocks, and scrap pieces of wood at each other, occasionally hearing a scream or holler from one of the opposing teams. After 15 minutes of this, we would pile up the projectiles on both sides, wave a flag of truce, and head off in another direction. We would return another day and reenact another battle. This field for many years gave all of us hours of pleasure and many adventures.

Later, at the east end we created a baseball diamond and played many games of baseball with the neighborhood kids.

Baseball, whether it was a game with some of the neighborhood kids, or a game of “Over the line” with a few kids, took up hours of our time during the many summer months and provided us with months of joy and laughter.



### **Adventure Three**

#### **“The Large Pond Behind South Bay Bowling Center”**

Often we saw the pond encircled by the chain link fence as we walked on the railroad tracks behind the bowling center called South Bay Bowling Center. One day we dug a hole under the fence and we got up onto the elevated bank around the pond. I am sure there were signs restricting entrance to this area, but we never noticed them. The pond was probably 100 feet by 100 feet, it had cattails and weeds growing on the edges of this body of water we called “The Pond.” Also, a tall woody plant that smelled like licorice lined the edges, anise I believe it is called. We used our ingenuity and built a small wooden raft, and using a tall pole, we would paddle across the pond. We often encountered water snakes, tad poles and different size frogs and toads. Using rocks, we would attempt to repel the denizens from this pond as they attacked our raft. It is amazing the fun we had at this man made pond. No one ever bothered us until the day we decided to build a tree house in the large trees just north of the pond. Maybe cottonwoods or elm trees, they were 25 feet tall with great branches to climb up to the smaller branches. We often played on a very small branch platform in the trees we had constructed. Until one day when the older teenagers showed up.

They told us to get down, and suddenly we were outnumbered. They told us to get ready to run and they were going to shot us with their BB guns. The tears were running down our faces and suddenly they told us to run. We did. We never looked back and no BB's ever attacked us. Our fort and our pond would never be the same and I believe that we never went back and played in that area.

## **Adventure Four**

### **“Riding Trains in Torrance and Related Railroad Events”**

The railroad train tracks were just west of our home in Torrance and offered many different adventures for us boys, often involving neighborhood kids and our brothers. At night, the train whistle could be heard as it crossed over different intersections in our neighborhood. I am going to recount a few of the better remembered memories.

We often stood 15 feet away from the tracks and waved as the engineer brought the engine, the cars, and the caboose heading south to north or north to south. I can still remember the pitch smell on the wooden ties and the hot pitch sticking on our soles of our shoes on a hot day.

One day near El Nido Park, a local park, we noticed that the train slowed down to navigate the large curve on the tracks. We discussed often the possibility of trying to ride the train by jumping onto a box car.

So weeks later while visiting El Nido Park we ran up to the edge of the railroad tracks and after the engine and a few cars passed, we suddenly ran along the side the train and jumped, we grabbed hold of the ladder and ascended up 3 feet. What an exciting few minutes we enjoyed and soon we came down and jumped off near a section of soft dirt just off the tracks. A few times, all of us misjudged the jump off area and got scraped and scratched by tumbleweeds that gathered below the bottom of the railroad bed. I remember one time, we yelled to Joey Rutchmen to jump, and in doing so he delayed and ended up in a patch of prickly tumbleweeds. He was scratched from head to toe.

We would often walk the railroad tracks and just gather souvenirs of passing trains. We found rocks, railroad metal stakes, odds and ends that we felt were treasures.

One time, we noticed that the train had stopped and we approached the man in the caboose who was outside on the metal porch. We talked to him for a while, and then he asked us to take a bag and gather some of the ears of corn that was growing in an adjacent field. Being experienced tomato pickers from prior adventures, we grabbed the bag and headed into the corn fields and harvested two grocery sacks of fresh corn on the cob. He then gave each of us two railroad flares as a thank you. Later, that day we started a small fire in our favorite field with one of the flares which caused the fire department to come out with sirens and flashing lights to put the field fire out.

The story gets a little fuzzy, but I remember the railroad detectives coming to the house one evening and talking to dad. Mom said when they came to the house we returned the remaining flares. Dad told her that it was just a boy's prank, and we got off with a verbal warning not to do it again. And we never did it again.

## **Adventure Five**

### **“The Thrifty Drug Store at the South Bay Shopping Center”**

The South Bay Shopping Center was built in the late 1950's just west of our home. We lived at 4119 W. 176 Street in Torrance, California. The shopping center located at Hawthorne Blvd, today is called the South Bay Galleria. It originally had a May Co. as an anchor store and many other stores, none of which I remember except the Thrifty Drug Store. Before the center opened, we would play in the mounds of dirt and explore the construction site until the shopping center was completed.

Just past the May Co. Department store on the right side was a Thrifty Drug Store. The center of this store was the soda fountain counter and the ice cream section of the store was just across from the lunch counter. Both were great attractions for us. Soon, we developed a relationship with a wonderful woman named Sue, who worked both the soda fountain and the ice cream counter. Often a group of us would come and sit at the soda fountain counter and we would all order vanilla cokes in a tall glass logoed with “Coca Cola.” After putting the ice in the glass, Sue would then fill the glass with coca cola, and put a few squirts of vanilla syrup into the glass. With great anticipation, we would then fill the glasses with a few ounces of half and half. Slowly we would sip this delicious drink with a big smile on our faces. I can remember Sue, filling our glasses for a second serving of one of our favorite drinks A great memory of my childhood. She would charge us \$.25 each for the drinks. We always found the money and visited Thrifty's often in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

This drug store was only a short two block walk from our house, with a safe crossing of the four lanes dividing Hawthorne Blvd. because of the crosswalk.

During this phase of our lives, we also would visit the ice cream counter and look at the 5 gallon cardboard containers with all the different flavor of ice cream and sherbet that teased our senses. Sue would pile the cones five flavors high with the rounded scoop and we would pay \$.25 cents and walk out into the Shopping mall and enjoy every lick and bite of these multi-flavored ice cream cones. I always will remember Sue smiling as we left the store in our delight with the cones.

## **Adventure Six**

### **“Driving with Dave Nelson to Riverside”**

In high school, our friend Dave Nelson got to borrow his father's car and with Steve and me, we went with him for a ride to Riverside, California, a journey of 36 miles. The purpose of this journey is lost in time, but we didn't wear safety belts back then and we listened to loud music, probably Rock and Roll. I believe the car was a 1957 Chevy, a two tone green with four doors. We felt that we were so special driving on the highways and streets in Dave's father's car. Along the way near Riverside, the car developed an automotive problem and it stopped running. Of course, we all got out, opened the hood and hoping this would solve our problem, but not one of us could discover the ailment. After a few minutes all three of us had puzzled looks on our faces. At this point the adventure began. Well, we couldn't discover the car problem. So we began pushing the car on the roads we came on, retracing our journey, and soon motorists were giving us pushes with their vehicles as long as we were going in their direction. At one point I remember coming off a U shaped off ramp and the car almost felt like it was going up on two wheels, because of the excessive speed we were traveling. I imagine that over the journey of 36 miles, we were pushed or did the pushing with help from many good hearted souls. We did finally end up in Compton and got home safe. Dave's father was so glad that his son and his car got home safely. What a great memory.

## **Adventure Seven**

### **“The Water Balloon Caper”**

It began with water balloon fights in the backyard of our home at 4119 W. 176 Street in Torrance, California. We would buy a package of 10 balloons for ten cents, fill them with water and then chase each other trying to soak our adversaries. The backyard was small because of the large room dad had added on to accommodate the 14 children in our family. We would hide around corners and wait with our water balloons and then toss them at the next person that entered our secret hiding space, few that they were.

Soon, this became boring and we started tossing water balloons at other kids passing our house on bicycles, to see if we could douse them with water. Soon, there was no one to challenge. So putting our child-like minds together and thinking like pseudo scientists, we build a catapult in the backyard and began launching the water balloons over the house, attempting to have them land in the middle of our street. The first few attempts were futile and landed on the roof. We kept working with the catapult and starting filling bigger balloons. Finally, we launched one over the roof and into the street and we yelled with delight over our major success. Then we thought we would see if we could hit a moving target. As fate would have it, Ed Price, our neighbor was driving home from work, and guessing on our logistical problem, we launched a large balloon and it hit his windshield dead on, I am sure now, scaring him. We suddenly realized the danger of this activity, and disassembled the catapult and tossed the remaining balloons in the garbage can.

## Adventure Eight

### “My First Fish”

This is one of my fondest memories, the family vacation to the California State Park at Big Sur and the story of catching my first fish. This fish was a monster to me, and a memory bigger than the fish.

We had visited this great state park the year before and I had begun to get interested in fishing. I had walked the river that flowed through the campgrounds and the state park. I had seen others catching fish and having big smiles on their faces with their catches. So I am going to begin with the family’s second visit to Big Sur and the majestic redwood forest.

The drive from Torrance in the southern part of the state to Big Sur, just south of Monterey on the California coast took probably 8-10 hours with nine children and mom and dad, pulling a U-Haul trailer full of camping gear, clothes, food, supplies, and other items we would need for our 14 day vacation. The first year had taught Dad how to get a campground permit, and our favorite large campground was available, camp site number 109, which had the stream running next to it. We set up the tents, got the gear organized, and we began to enjoy our time away from the city.



I had purchased a small rod and reel set, had the line strung on the reel, and had purchased a few treble and single barbed hooks, weights in a variety of sizes, and a red and white bobber. Understand, I had all of this gear and attachments, but had no idea what needed to be done to catch a fish. Well, fate took a hand in this matter and next to our campsite was a seasoned fisherman and a great adult who shared his time and experience with me over the first few days. I sat near this man and admired his simple techniques for fishing this stream. He taught me how to tie the knot to attach the hook, a knot I still tie to this day when fishing with lures or flies. He showed me the placement of the weight above the hook, which would be measured by judging the depth of the fishing hole on this stream. He mentioned to approach the fishing area with stealth, as not to spook the fish. But the biggest secret was the bait he suggested. He told me to ask mom to buy a jar of Cheese Whiz and mix the cheese contents with a small amount of Bisquick (used for pancakes and biscuits) and then roll the cheese mixture into a ball a little smaller than a cat-eye marble. Then he showed me how to surround the single and treble

hook with this super secret bait combination. At first, my mixture would not stick to the hooks, so he told me to add more Bisquick, and finally I succeed in duplicating what he had used to catch fish in the park. I do remember that he came back every afternoon with a stringer of fish, and as a child I was in awe of this great accomplishment.

The next day, I left camp after breakfast and started walking the edge of the stream looking for likely places to fish. My first few attempts were frustrating, losing the bait, getting the weight stuck between rocks, and while attempting to cast snagging a bush or tree behind me. Soon, after a few hours, I began to grasp the basics of bait fishing. Then a new phenomenon occurred, the fish stole the cheese bait or I yanked too hard and took the bait out of their mouths before the hook was set.

This learning went on for most of the day, and soon I walked the half mile back to camp and put away the fishing equipment. Getting back to camp, I would play with my brothers and sisters in the area of camp number #109. The next morning, after a breakfast of pancakes and eggs prepared by Dad, I decided to go fishing again up stream. I took my fishing equipment and the super secret bait, and headed up stream along the well worn trail that others had used. I often would see the fish in the shallow section of the river, and I would move too fast and they would dart under a log and hide under a submerged boulder. After three hours of learning the lessons of fishing, I was near a wide pool in the stream, and suddenly I had a strike, gently set the hook and I had landed my first fish, a rainbow trout. I was so excited, that I grabbed my gear, the jar of Cheese Whiz mixture, and ran the half mile back to camp. I am sure I had the biggest smile I had ever experienced in my young life, and approaching camp I yelled and hollered for all to hear that I had caught my first fish. Mom or Dad took the photo that is attached to this chapter. My Dad often said that my smile was bigger than my fish. You can be the judge of that.

Later, I visited our neighbor's campsite and shared my story and his smile was as big as mine. He listened over and over again as I told and retold this adventure. What a fabulous memory of my youth.



## **Adventure Nine**

### **“Fire on the Railroad Tracks”**

Once in our youth, while walking on the railroad tracks, to the west of our house in Torrance, we began playing on the train trestle over Redondo Beach Blvd. We would lie under the trestle on the sidewalk below and watch the colors of the swiftly passing train and box cars above us feeling the vibration of the train. The metal of the bridge and the tar of the railroad ties blended into our nostrils. This adventure often lasted a couple of hours until we were off onto another adventure nearby. While playing on this super structure we often talked about being heroic and climbing into the structure of the trestle while a train was traveling across it, but often hearing the train whistle at a train crossing would send us scurrying away from the trestle and the approaching train.

Often, we would place a couple of pennies on the train tracks waiting for an approaching train, and after the passing of the train, we would search for our flattened pennies. Later, an adult told us we could derail the train with our pennies, so we stopped our fun practice of this activity. Hard to believe that a penny could derail a multi-ton train, but we believed him.

On summer day, the Gunther boys came up with a brainstorm. We would find tumbleweeds and pile them on the train tracks. So over the course of a few early morning hours we began gathering a variety of sizes of tumbleweeds near the area of the tracks. Throughout the day we gathered 50 tumbleweeds and began amassing them. Occasionally a train pulling a variety of box and oil cars followed by a caboose would come by and we would all innocently just stand by our treasure of tumbleweeds, and wave our hands and smile at the engineers in the engine and the men in the caboose. This motion of waving at trains is still a great feeling I still do today.

Anyway, as the day progressed, we found a quiet moment in the surrounding neighborhood and we stacked the tumbleweeds on the tracks about 5 feet high. Earlier in the early morning mist of the beach fog, we acquired a can of gasoline and a few stick matches in a box with a striker pad on the side. After we were satisfied after looking in the four directions, and feeling safe from discovery, we doused the tumbleweeds with gasoline and then we trailed a small amount of gas about 6 feet from the main pile. We had seen similar actions on TV shows while lighting dynamite. So we followed the example.

Looking around a final time, we lit the trail of gasoline, and taking the can of gas with us, we high tailed it towards the train trestle and hid in it. Looking to the north, we saw the initial ignition of the gasoline and the flames taking over the pile of tumbleweeds and our hearts began to beat faster and perspiration ran off our foreheads. We had uncomfortable positions in the trestle, but we waited with anticipation and excitement. Within a few minutes, the fire must have been reported, for the Redondo Beach Fire Department came upon the scene with their lights flashing and the firemen in dark protective suits. Shortly, we heard the whistle of a southbound freight train. Soon, the scene became congested with spectators, local neighbors, a few we recognized from our church at St. Catherine Laboure, and the train was coming to a stop a short distance from the blaze. I remember being quite scared with what we had done.



We waited in the quiet of the metal structure, and as suddenly as this event started, it was over, with only the ashes remaining on the tracks. I have no idea to this day the motivation of this event or what we did with the can of gas on the way home. I am sure that we got rid of the evidence of our crime. Today, the memory still brings a smile to my face.

## **Adventure Ten**

### **“The Dance at Crestline California”**

In the 1960's dad and mom brought the family to a public campground near Crestline, California. We traveled down a three mile road to find the campground. We unhitched the U-Haul trailer and the family began establishing our campsite. Tents went up, sleeping bags were laid out and a table clothes covered the picnic tables. Then the ice chests were left in the trailer, the Coleman Stove and fuel were placed at one end of the picnic table to be used for mainly breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I remember that dad had to go into the town of Crestline for some items we had forgotten, and Steve and I rode with dad to the local general store. While shopping, I noticed on a bulletin board that a local group was sponsoring a dance at the recreation center just down the street. Being in high school, I thought a dance would be exciting to attend later that night. Dad said he would drive us to the dance, but we would have to walk home. I immediately said that I wanted to go, and Steve, with some doubts, said he would go also.

So that day we played with family members, dad led the family on a hike, and enjoyed the warmth of a summer day in the mountains. That evening after dinner, we cleaned up and put on nice clothes suitable for dancing and meeting girls of the opposite sex. Around 7 pm, dad drove us to town, and as he dropped us off at the recreation building, he reiterated that we needed to walk the three miles back to camp after the dance ended. It was a full moon night, so I decided against bringing a flashlight. Just as dad was leaving Crestline, Steve changed his mind and returned to camp with dad. I continued with my desire to go to the dance and meet some members of the opposite sex. I enjoyed the dance and did met one particular girl whose folks had a cabin on the lake. We danced, talked and said goodbye at the end of the dance. She gave me the address and location of her parent's cabin.

There was a full moon in the sky as I began my trek back to camp, half expecting dad to show up and rescue me from walking. But no, I was walking back to camp. The road was a fire road surrounded by large 30-40 foot evergreens and pines on either side. At first I was brave, then my mind began to see imaginary things and I started walking a bit faster. Time went by and the moon slowly began to settle in the sky, making the night darker and the road more ominous.

Somewhere on this journey the air was still and suddenly something let out a loud howl breaking the stillness of the forest. I suddenly began running away from the denizens of the forest, and not watching my feet, I fell into a small creek and my clothes became heavy with stream water. I got up and continued running. Finally, I reached our campsite and everyone was asleep in the tents. I quietly tried to find my sleeping bag, but couldn't, so I lay down in the trailer and covered myself with a tarp as a blanket.

The next day upon arising, I shared my story with the family. Well, the story had an interesting ending.

On Sunday we were leaving, and after loading the trailer and getting ready to head back to Torrance, we stopped in Crestline for a few last minute treats. I told dad I had to say goodbye to the girl that I met the evening before, and would be back in a few minutes. So I went off in the direction of her parent's cabin. Within a short time I found the cabin, and knocking on the door, I became reacquainted with the girl I had met at the

dance the night before. As fate had it, her parents were out, and within a short time, we were necking on the couch and the time flew. Suddenly I heard a car honking in the neighborhood. I looked out and dad and mom were ready to go home, and were trying to find their errant son. I said goodbye with a brief kiss, came down the front stairs of the cabin, and was reunited with the family. It proved to be a long trip home as dad reminded me of personal responsibility to be at a specific location when I promised to be.

## **Adventure Eleven**

### **“The Great Underground Fort”**

To the south of our house in Torrance, near 179<sup>th</sup> Street, were large high tension power lines. We often would climb up 20 feet on the towers, and feel like the King of the Tower, then climb down, probably part of the neighborhood boy's initiation process.

The boys were Steve, my brother, and I, along with Bill, Duane, Joey and a few others. In the barren field where they power poles were built, people had dumped trash, wood and other treasures that we discovered.

Rather than going up, we began to dig a hole where we would hold our meetings. The top was covered with discarded pieces of wood and cardboard covered with dirt and bushes, and the entrance was covered with a large tumbleweed tied down to keep the entrance secret. The room inside the fort was maybe 10 by 10 feet, with a height of four feet. We often held meetings in this dark fort that smelled like wet dirt. Occasionally we would remove the pill bugs, ants and spiders that took residence in the corners near the roof. I am sure that 50 years ago we discussed many important issues, but none are remembered in my sixth decade of living. I do remember that we vowed to keep this area secret from the other kids. Then one day, with my brother Steve in the fort, we decide to dismantle and destroy this edifice we built. Luckily, Steve got out and wasn't buried alive. After that, the neighborhood boys and my brother were off to new adventures.

## **Adventure Twelve**

### **“The First Camping Trip of the Brothers”**

The year was 1962 and I had just celebrated my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. Steve, my younger brother had turned 16 a month earlier and had passed his test to get his California driver's license.

We came up with an idea, and after a lengthy discussion with mom and dad, we were told that we could drive and go on our first solo camping trip. It would be our first without the family. We had 13 brothers and sisters and camping was like a group camping situation whenever we went. The trip was made possible when my mom's brother, Uncle Jack, donated his 1955 light green Mercury to us. We were excited about this new adventure. We had to make one concession that our friend Paul would go with us for the 5 day trip.

Soon, that July weekend came and we began by carefully loading the trunk of our car with camping gear, food, snacks, a cooler for the protein we took, and room for three bags with our clothing. Mom did remind us about some real necessities: matches and flashlights and a bag of her homemade cookies. So we went to bed early that night with the hopes of an early start Monday morning.

The drive to King's Canyon National Park took 6 hours and gas was costing us \$0.18 per gallon. That's all I remember about the drive.

We registered for a campsite and began setting up camp for our 5 day stay. The first tent we set up was big enough for all of us to sleep in. After setting it up, we walked inside and noticed two safety pins on two flaps of canvas on opposite walls, and above the safety pins was written (probably by dad) the word “Window.” When I released the safety pin, a window flap was opened. Also, we had no rain sheet over the tent, and neither did we make a trench around the tent, in case of rain.

Early in the afternoon, the skies clouded up and rain began to fall. By 6pm, our dinner time, the rain continued to fall and we had a wet dinner inside a wet tent. The tent was getting soaked by small rivulets running under the tent. Finally, being tired and soaked we three crawled into three wet sleeping bags and fell asleep.

Waking up in the morning, the tent was water soaked and the tent floor was wet and the rain continued to fall. We made breakfast and being wet all over, the three of us decided that we had enough camping and decided we would go visit mom's sister, Aunt Jeannie, who lived in Fremont, California. So we loaded up the wet tent and sleeping bags, packed the dishes and camp gear, and headed out to visit our favorite “Aunt.”

I am sure we must have called mom and dad and discussed our plans. Leaving the campground, we all talked about the constant rain that within an hour heading northwest subsided and the sun was a great relief. In 4 hours we arrived at Aunt Jean's, and the weather was great. Also, we met her husband Uncle Sam and their five children. We arrived hungry and that was the last hunger pains we felt over the next two days. Aunt Jean constantly fed us, our breakfast could have fed 15 people and by mid morning more food was served, the lunch, then mid afternoon meal, then dinner, and then a large portion of dessert in the evening. This continued for two days. Being young teenagers, we ate even when we were not hungry. Finally, with a big hug and deciding to head south, Aunt Jean gave us more food in a large bag to take with us, and then we began driving

home. On the way home we laughed about the rain, getting soaked, and the vast food that Aunt Jean fed us for two days. This was a great adventure for 3 teenage boys.