

July 3, 2013 (but my May letter)

Hi Samatha

I was delighted to find your May letter in our mailbox – and laughed at the adventures you had on your school canoe-camping trip. It reminded me of the times we went camping with your mother and uncle when they were very young.

We started when they were very young. This first photo, for example, was taken at Alice Lake in BC. Daegan was about 9 months old and we went camping with your great uncle John. We named this picture “The Spaghetti Queen” at the time – for obvious reasons.



When we got to Québec we went backpacking for a number of years in the Adirondack mountains of New York State. We all had backpacks – even Samwise – as you can see in this photo. It includes Rachel DeVries – the daughter of a friend of ours from Concordia. Daegan was about 7 years old in this photo.

After a few trips we figured that we could hike in about 2 km with the kids at this age – before there was a melt-down. They would take so long because there were always frogs, slugs, troll bridges, or “root groups” that would be interesting to them.

Fran and I would carry very heavy packs on these hikes since we had to include all the food and camping supplies. It was very difficult to carry such heavy packs at such a slow pace, so we came up with a scheme that allowed us to carry them quicker – and recover in the process. One of us would hike at a fast pace about a half a km along the trail and put the backpack down behind a bush. We would then walk back to where the rest of the group was slowly tramping along and let the second person go on ahead and dump their pack farther down the trail. When we got to a spot where our pack was in the bush, we would take it quickly down the path and leap-frog like this all the way to the camping site. It was much easier since we didn’t have to carry the heavy pack when walking with the slow-poke kids.

We even had a formula to estimate how long it would take us to get somewhere. It took into account the distance travelled as well as the elevation. It was $T = \text{mi} + 1000\text{ft}$. T was in hours. It means that the total time was 1 hour for each mile plus 1 hour for each 1000 feet of elevation climbed.

We camped like this for a few years until one year we saw a spot where they were renting canoes. We decided to try canoe camping for a change so planned out a trip for the following year that would take us through some of the many lakes (or “ponds” as they were called in the region). We discovered that there were campsites scattered through the region that were only accessible by water, so we got the maps and made our plans for canoe camping in the Saranac lake region of northern New York State.

It was fantastic! Not only could we travel further, but we didn’t have to carry packs full of supplies to get there. As you can see from this photo (taken in 1978) even Samwise adapted well to the new form of travel.



I remember one trip as we were paddling home a huge lightning and rainstorm began. We pulled over to someone’s

dock to get out of the rain and off the open water during the lightning. While we were there, the owners of the dock came down from their cabin with some tea for us. We had a lovely chat and waited until the storm passed before continuing on our way.

Here's a photo of your mother in the canoe. As you can see, the campsites were very isolated, so we didn't have to worry about bathing suits when we went in for a swim. Daegan was about 9 years old in this photo. I'll spare you the embarrassment of the other photos of the swimmers that day!



Both of our kids also got plenty of camping and canoeing time as part of family trips and summer camps. One of the nicest photos we have is from Mum and Dad – when JP & Daegan were camping with them in the old VW van (they called it the “Jackrabbit” – Daegan can tell you why). In this photo, JP has his arm bandaged because he was recovering from a burn when he reached up to a table and pulled hot tea all over his arm. This photo was taken in 1973.

The photo of Daegan lighting a fire was taken in 1977. We were on a VW camper trip with your GG Jack and Dorothy. I think this was taken in an Ontario park between Toronto and Kingston – called Sandbanks Park. It reminds me of your contributions to our trip in that regard.



I have included a photo from one of the kids' camps – where they were teaching them about canoeing. By that time(1982) they both had plenty of canoeing experience – as well as portaging – since this was part of our history in the Saranac Lakes.

It is wonderful to see all the ways in which you and your brothers have had a chance to enjoy (and learn about) the joys of camping. It has always been a part of our family history on all sides of the family. Fran's father tells stories of camping – and building campsite equipment – with his father and I spent many happy holidays camping with my parents in BC. Dad always liked packing the car with camp gear and heading off to find some unmarked logging road or old highway to explore. This meant that we 3 boys were already well-versed in campfire building, tent assembly, fishing, and river adventures by the time we were in our teens (not much snow-camping, though).

Well – I'd better get back to my Westfalia camping since we are planning to leave for the East coast tomorrow. We'll be checking out the sites in case we can repeat a trip back there with you. This would mean that you would have travelled the country from coast to coast if you can arrange it!

I'll probably miss your June and July letters since I will be on the road. But I will have plenty of stories to tell myself when I get back. We may even get to see you and your Dad if things work out. This will be an exciting couple of months – for both of us!