

### Past Tents

I have slept in many tents over the course of my life. On the flip side, I have also not slept in many tents. This is a story about a time when I managed to sleep in a tent against terrible odds. Whether this story is true depends completely on your discretion. In the words of Mark Twain, "If I told you the truth, then you wouldn't have to remember anything." It is your decision. Take this story with a grain of salt, or possibly the whole shaker, whatever fits your fancy.

It was my first campout as a Boy Scout. I had recently been inducted into the secretive order of youths and was ecstatic. The campground of choice happened to be the front yard of our Assistant Scoutmaster Doug Noren. One of the perks of having him as a leader is that he is a Master Bladesmith. Every May he invites the whole troop out to his shop to learn the art of bladesmithing. Given the inherent love that all Boy Scouts have for every type of knife, shank, bayonet, dagger, karambit, and machete, there was a large turnout. Mr. Noren's whole front yard was filled with all kinds of tents, sleeping apparatuses, and enclosures. It would not be that way for long. We gladly idled away the afternoon throwing tomahawks and pounding on hot metal. About mid-afternoon, a brisk wind sprang up from the Northwest. The wind was made far more chilling by the fact that Mr. Noren's house sits on the edge of a large local bayou. This gave the icy wind a good 500 yards to pick up steam and gain traction before ramming its broad shoulder into our encampment. Some of the guys had the bright idea to build a lean-to under a small embankment next to the water. Luckily, they were talked out of it by a fellow scout and were convinced to sleep in a parachute-shaped tent about five feet from the water. I didn't notice at that moment that the tent was shaped like a parachute, but the image quickly came to mind afterward.

As the day drew to a close, our Scoutmaster warned us that, according to the weatherman, a small thunderstorm was coming across Lake Michigan. He told us not to worry,

and that all we should do was make sure that our rain flies were taught. Every disaster is prefaced by a series of mistakes and misunderstandings. Pearl Harbor, Titanic, World War 1, on and on the list goes. The first in our scenario was the blue skies that had filled our blissful afternoon with happiness. The smiling sun had given us a false sense of security that had caused us to pitch our tents too close to the water. The second was that for many of us this was our first campout as Boy Scouts. Boy Scout camping is an entirely different animal than Cub Scout camping, you have to set up your own tent. We lacked experience. The third, final, and gravest mistake had gone right under our noses like water under a fish finder. Our Scoutmaster had listened to the weatherman! The weatherman is a fiendish, dubious, and treacherous beast. He finds joy in posting fake forecasts and then watching the aftermath from the comfort of his television screen. No man on this earth is immune to his fickle forecasts, and few lucky enough to escape them. Such were the circumstances that precluded our campout and led to the ultimate demise of many a fine tent.

Night fell. The wind hastened its winged feet as it flew through the cloud-striped sky. The chilled water lapped on the frosty shore. The skeleton trees waved their long bony arms in the air. It must have been near midnight when a distant rumbling was heard off in the turpentine black night. At first, we thought that it might be the sound of trucks on a far-off freeway, but nay, it was something larger. A flash of lightning illuminated the yard like the flash of a camera. The wind howled like a pack of banshees and the gentle lapping of the water crescendoed into a tremendous pounding. I have found, however, that repetitive noises make me sleepy. It only took me about twenty minutes to doze off. All information after this point I had to coerce out of fellow scouts post-disaster. Little to my knowledge, the storm had exacerbated into a modest hurricane. Then it got bad. According to local seismologists, there was a small earthquake in our vicinity that same night. I, for one, know for a fact that it was no earthquake. A flash of lightning revealed the phenomena to multiple security cameras and orbiting satellites trained on that area. And they will corroborate my story. As a huge wall of wind slammed into the camp,

thirty boys leapt out of their tents and shot towards the nearby house in perfect synchronization, rivaling even that of a school of sardines. Shaking the ground beneath them. Some were not even out of their sleeping bags but instead chose to thrust their legs through the bottoms and waddle like giant penguins. I snored on. As the wind increased, the rain flies became filled with air and began pulling viciously on the small metal stakes striving to hold their position.

Unweighted as they were by a lack of Scouts, one by one the stakes broke formation and popped loose. The freed tents then proceeded to fly off into the night like mighty thunderbirds soaring high on the fields of the sky. Some just rolled like massive tumbleweeds, meandering in no specific direction. Mine was one of the few tents that remained attached to the ground. The storm bellowed on.

When morning finally came, there was an eerie stillness surrounding the place. Foggy eyed and lethargic, I stumbled out of my weather-beaten shelter. I surveyed the area. Heavy fog drifted off the bayou, in which was floating a fleet of tents, and various other camping paraphernalia. All of the tents close to the water were gone. A light drizzle beaded on the sleeves of my jacket. A lone duck staggered through the air. It looked lost. Several tents were scattered throughout the area, most of them flipped on their backs like awkward tortoises. There was not a soul to be seen. Confused, I shambled over toward the Scoutmaster's house. When I opened the door, what a sight met my eyes! On every surface, flat or otherwise, lay a frazzled looking boy. Two or three were up and about, making themselves some pop tarts. The toaster was not working. They were huddled around it trying to figure out what was wrong with the machine. I saw right away that it was not plugged in, but chose to let them figure that out for themselves. Not that it would have done much good anyway. The power was out.

And so, on my first actual by-myself campout, I somehow managed to fall asleep and was the only one to do so. Something inside of me, however, almost makes me wish that I hadn't. Part of me wishes that I had joined that midnight stampede for shelter. Call it a herd mentality or what you will, but a piece of me felt left out. I spent the night sleeping in a wet, cold,

tent, while everybody else was sitting in the living room playing board games and drinking root beer. I guess you could call this an opportunity cost situation. If I had been awake to go inside with the rest, then I would not have been able to write about this, because it never would have happened. Maybe something else exciting would have happened that night while making microwave s'mores. Maybe my buddies and I would have sat around the gas fireplace telling ghost stories. Maybe there would have been a good one that I would have been able to write about today. Instead, I stayed in a tent and wrote about that. Kind of makes you think, huh? I guess that if you boil it all down, the moral of this story could be that all of our actions have rewards and consequences. Your actions of today could very well influence your actions of a decade in the future. So make good choices today, because they will influence the person you are tomorrow.