

RANDOM REFLECTIONS: Packing for Vacations!

By Kathryn Wishlow

Just about this time of the year, sometimes plans for a family summer vacation are being made. When I was young, the excitement for the upcoming summer holidays made the last couple of weeks of school seem more tolerable. Between the final exams, and stifling hot classrooms, it became increasingly hard to concentrate and much easier to daydream.

Since my father was a teacher, our family was able to use both summer months to travel. Plans were made to visit important geological and historical sites in between staying for a few days at a time with relatives all across North America. Yes, even vacations had to be valuable learning experiences in my family. I sure am more grateful for that now, than I was then! However, packing for a vacation has really changed, or course, so has family camping.

My mother made extensive lists in advance, not only for all of the necessary camping and fishing gear, the all weather clothing, and toys to occupy three children in a car for many hours, but also for insect spray, stocking the first aid kit, snacks and groceries. She sent away for maps and destination information from the CAA. Routes were carefully planned, friends and relatives notified, and arrangements made for someone to feed our cat and my hamster while we were away.

As a child, I had no idea how much work that took! The car was loaded, money converted at the bank, while the Coleman stove, lantern and cooler were safely stored in the back of our station wagon along with the tent, air mattresses and sleeping bags. Away we went! Everyone was in high spirits. I could write a least a hundred books about the adventures we had, some of them amazing, and some of them not so great. But, all of those shared experiences, brought our family closer together.

Like my parents before me, I strongly believed in the importance of our family camping trips. Many years later it was my turn. Lists were made, just like my mother had done. Equipment was checked, gear inspected, Coleman items replaced by a more expensive but safer propane stove, heater, and lantern, and a coffee maker and cooler that plugged into the car's cigarette lighter. The tent did not leak, and the air mattresses had automatic pumps instead of people having to blow them up. Roughing it was not so rough!

Camping became much easier, and more expensive. No more five-dollar-a-night stays for tenters! The campgrounds now had restrooms with showers and even flush-toilets instead of outhouses. Of course, our vacations were only two or three weeks long. So, much less had to be packed and taken, and

more could be purchased along the way. There was more money from two working parents, so rainy days were spent in hotels or motels, ordering in food and watching movies. No more waiting for the tent to dry out before rolling it up when you were ready to leave. Yes, camping vacations were changing!

Nowadays, people can go "glamping" a term that essentially means "glamorous camping". No longer do you have to make extensive lists and pack. Camping has become more of a "luxury lark". I am not judging the modern experience, because quite frankly, I have yet to experience sleeping in a tent, with a real bed and duvet, plus a kitchen and full bathroom with a tub. I understand, you only need to pack your clothes as everything else is provided ... for a price.

(Kathryn Wishlow is one of the White Pine Writers you can follow on FaceBook. Their published collection of true short stories titled, "The Art of ... Repurposing Yourself!" is available locally, at Chapters/Indigo and on their website www.whitepinewriters.ca)