

A close-up photograph of a campfire. In the foreground, a single marshmallow is being roasted on a wooden stick. The marshmallow is white with some golden-brown charring on its bottom edge. The background is filled with bright orange and yellow flames, which are slightly out of focus, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. The overall scene is set against a dark background, likely at night.

Adventures in Camping

(and the Lessons Learned)

By Jenny Dee

Once upon a time there was a girl who did not like the outdoors, aside from the beauty of nature. She was a decidedly indoor girl, who changed her toddler dresses up to three times a day if she got dirty. There was no jumping in puddles, rolling around in the grass, no jumping in the leaves. There were no mud pies, unless you can count the kitchen bowl that I used a spoon to cleanly mix dirt and water without getting my hands dirty.

You've previously read about my unexpected adventure in gardening; allow me to introduce you to the Jenny who went camping.

As a Girl Scout, I hated when I had to go camping overnight one day, or even for those day hikes through the woods with the ticks and mosquitos. So imagine my own surprise when a friend of mine invited me to go camping with her family and I said, "Sure! Sounds fun!"

Wait, what? I had a 4- and 7-year-old at the time. Was I out of my mind? My mom seemed to think so, and when she asked what possessed me to agree to this, I found myself with a clever answer: Because I wanted to introduce my kids to all kinds of experiences, including those I would not like for myself.

How inspirational of me, right?! Well, turns out, that I actually liked camping. Bug spray was my friend, and although I did have to sleep outdoors in a tent, there was an actual bathroom with running water, so that helped. It wasn't technically "glamping"—it's totally okay to have showers, you know, and still be in the wilderness.

Anyway, the experience was enlightening, and even romantic. There was a sweet man I met there that I ended up chatting by the fireplace with, and it still remains to this day one of my fondest and most romantic memories of all time. But I digress.

After this magical camping outing, I ventured to go twice more—the next year with that family again, and another time with Boy Scouts. Neither measured up to the first time (gee, wonder why!), but they were still tolerable. My daughter didn't think so, but my son sure liked it.

Well, there came upon a camping trip we were meant to go on a few years later with the Boy Scouts when we moved to California, but I got sick and couldn't go. My son,

treasure that he is, was okay with us changing our plans and staying home at the last minute. I told him I could send him with the other dads, but he had said he only wanted to go on camping to have time with me. (Heart melt). So that summer, I found a Boy Scout campsite on Long Island that we could go to on our own while my daughter stayed with my family.

It was amazing. I had a cot AND a tent! And there was a dining hall and planned activities. So I didn't have to worry about a thing except for enjoying my special alone time with my son in the wilderness. I haven't been camping since, as I won't do it with rattlesnakes in California unless there is a strapping man or brave woman with me to fend them and any other creature off, but my last camping adventure surely left me with lots of important life lessons that I'd like to leave you with:

1. Parent/cub weekend at camping is the ONLY place in the world that there is not a line for the ladies room. Score.
2. When asked why is it I have to have my own style at archery, I respond, "Because I am Merida from Brave, and I'm shooting for my own hand." (Disney aficionados will get it)
3. Where are the single dads?? Like seriously?!?! #misedopportunity
4. Apparently campfires end with cake at the end instead of toasted marshmallows. That complaint went on my survey, though I am a cake lover.
5. When someone recommends taking the "shortcut", don't do it. **Do not ascend** upon the non-natural stairs of lung-death when there is a perfectly fine slightly inclined path around the bend.
6. Boy Scout dads and counselors are badass chefs. I've made a mental note of that.
7. Deep Wood Offs is your BFF. Apply liberally and often and survive without a single mosquito bite.
8. And finally...any time I get some alone time with any of my kids is precious and sacred. Although there are bugs and dirt and hills and uncomfortable cots, I'd do it again in a heartbeat to hear "I love being with you mom". <3