

CAMPING, CANINES & OTHER CANDID TALES

Life Lessons From Out and About

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G. ROGER SCHOENHALS



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Dedication



To Jonathan, my one and only son,
a man of faith and integrity who
has been my partner in many
adventures, including several
recorded in this book.

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Introduction



Camping, Canines & Other Candid Tales—Life Lessons From Out and About is a collection of stories from my adventures, mostly in the out-of-doors. The episodes are roughly arranged according to content.

Before giving you an overlook of the chapters, I want you to know that these stories include some of my favorite memories. They span more than 50 years of my life and take place mostly in the Pacific Northwest. I am confident you will enjoy them.

Also, I should point out that the grouping below is somewhat arbitrary. For example, the section on camping does not include every reference to camping in the book. Some of the Land Cruiser stories also contain camping episodes. This is especially true with the chapter titled, “Mozart and Snapping Bungees.”

The first four chapters focus on camping tales, such as the way I managed to botch our honeymoon in the wilds of Canada.

The next four chapters feature accounts involving dogs in happy and unhappy circumstances. Either you will feel sorry for the dog...or for me...or for both of us.

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I then take you for a six-chapter ride in my two Toyota Land Cruisers. Some of these experiences are probably best left untold, especially the accounts involving my long-suffering wife. Yet I am compelled to get these memories off my chest.

Chapters 15 through 23 usher you to some sad and happy times during my early years. The title of chapter 15 reveals the underlying theme of the section: “Dumb Things I’ve Done.” Actually, this theme seems to run through the entire book!

The final 10 chapters relate a hodgepodge of happenings during my adult years. We go from living off the grid in the wilderness, to standing in a swift-moving river, to a timeshare pitch in Orlando, Florida, to a lavish outside dinner on a ridge in Eastern Washington—and various places between. I conclude with one of my favorite stories of a two-mile race that ended in hilarious laughter.

As in my other life-lesson books, you will find that I end most of the stories with a moral or spiritual connection. I hope you consider this helpful in applying the experiences to your own life. After all, life itself is a schoolroom that teaches us about values and how to live in a worthwhile way.

In these pages you will discover honest reporting of my errors of judgment and some just plain dumb decisions. At times you may wince or laugh, or perhaps even experience a bit of inspiration. All of the stories are true.

If you enjoy these stories, you will like my other life-lesson books: *Saga of the Red Truck—Life Lessons From Here and There*; and *Hikes, Flights & Lookout Stories—Life Lessons from High Places*. You will find information about these and my other publications at www.papathree.com.

How I Botched Our Honeymoon

Sandy and I were married August 15, 1964 in Ferndale, Michigan. We had a simple, sacred ceremony and the bride was extraordinarily beautiful. The honeymoon deserves attention, but not before relating the gaff I made during the actual wedding.

We were exchanging vows and I held my breath as Sandy repeated the words of the pastor. I hoped she could make it through without flubbing the lines. After all, I was a few years older and a recent seminary graduate. If there was to be a mistake, it would doubtless come from my dear bride.

She made it through perfectly and the minister turned to me and said, “Repeat after me.” I stepped up to the plate, as it were, and with a commanding voice echoed the phrases directed to me, “I, Roger Schoenhals, take you, Sandra Quantrell, to be my wedded wife. To have and to hold, from this day forward, in sickness and in health...”

I’m sure my voice carried across the congregation with bold confidence and crystal clarity. I thought to myself, *this is going*

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very well. I'm glad we're recording the service. The pastor boomed out the next phrase, “To love and to cherish.” With equal flare and volume I declared, “To love and to perish!”

Instantly aware of my *faux pas*, I bellowed, “*Cherish!*”

It was too late; *perish* hung there in space—a word long to be remembered by all.

Sandy smiled. Pastor Cleveland grinned. The congregation snickered. And I, with beet-red face, simply stood there with a renewed sense of personal fallibility.

We made it through the remainder of the ceremony without further incident. But then came the merciless ribbing as family and friends kidded me about the error. At first I thought I should pretend it had been purposeful, a clever act to add some spice to the service. Instead, I humbly owned my mistake and bore the consequences.

Following the reception, we ran through a shower of rice, climbed into our car, and headed for our honeymoon in northern Michigan. Tin cans clanged behind us for several miles.

Our first stop was a fancy motel near Pontiac—\$35 for a special room (big money in those days). We stayed one night, then headed to the Upper Peninsula and Sault Saint Marie. Another one-night stay.

The next morning I stopped at a little army surplus store and asked Sandy to wait in the car. Soon I returned with a small pup tent and a few camping supplies. I knew she had never been camping before and I wanted to treat her to a unique experience while on our honeymoon. I figured this would be a fitting prelude to many years of enjoyable camping during our life together.

How I Botched Our Honeymoon

We drove across the border into Canada and began looking for the perfect spot to spend our first night together in the woods.

As we began to scout out a place to set up camp, we couldn't find anything like I had been accustomed to in the Pacific Northwest. The further north we drove, the thicker the undergrowth and the worse the camping conditions. Night drew near. Raindrops appeared on the windshield. I tasted the first spoonful of frustration.

We finally arrived at a campground, only to find every established camping spot taken. However, I was able to locate a patch of grass near the entrance with a small fire ring. We claimed it. I jumped out and hurriedly erected the tent (did I say it was small?). I tossed the double sleeping bag inside and we piled into the tent.

Within a few moments we both discovered something new about my bride—she is claustrophobic. The small tent and cramped bag eventually caused her to flee to the car.

I remained in the tent, determined to see this thing through. Alone and awake, I urged the dawn to arrive so I could get out of the tiny tent and fix breakfast over a fire. The night dragged on.

As soon as the faintest light appeared, I crawled out and rounded up some damp wood to start a fire. Sandy staggered out of the car to observe my camp-cooking skills. I noted she looked different than she did walking down the aisle a few nights before.

With mounting frustration, I tried desperately to coax the wet wood into a flame. A frying pan with gooey pancake batter sat nearby in the drizzling rain. Smoke filled my eyes and lungs. My nose ran. I groused about my city-slicker wife. Finally, in exasperation, I gave up on breakfast and gathered all the camping

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gear and hurled it into the trunk of the car. I slammed the lid and barked, “Get in the car.” We left the scene with tires spraying mud and gravel in every direction.

For at least an hour we traveled in stony silence—two people who had so recently known marital bliss, now mired in the swamp of human discord.

What had begun as a romantic, delightful honeymoon had disintegrated into a tense, angry conflict. Sweet unity fled our marriage.

Eventually, as you might surmise, we resolved the conflict and our happy honeymoon continued. The account of that reconciliation is a story I will keep to myself. Suffice it to say, we enjoyed the process.

The point I want to make here is the senselessness of the conflict and the speediness with which it arose. I blame 99.9 percent of it on myself. I was intolerant, insensitive, inconsiderate, and prideful. I wince as I recall the experience.

Conflict in marriage and in other relationships is often so needless. It is unproductive and, especially to others, unattractive. It undercuts God’s will for unity and leaves a bad taste in everyone’s mouth.

I heard a sermon on the words of Jesus about being servant-minded. The preacher had a hand towel that he draped across his arm as a symbol of humble service. He referred to it throughout his message.

He said the secret to unity in marriage and other areas of life is to humble ourselves in service to others. Unity is not achieved by lording over another, but by kneeling in service, as Jesus did when he washed his disciple’s feet and dried them with a towel.

How I Botched Our Honeymoon

I would like to say that the attitude and behavior I displayed on our first camping excursion was a one-time thing. Sadly, that is not the case. I have had to repent many times and relearn the lesson of the towel. I am blessed to have a forgiving wife.

Though some of my rough edges have smoothed out over the years, the Lord continues to work on those that remain. I marvel at his patience and tenacity. And I am comforted by the promise that he who began a good work in me will keep at it throughout my life.

