



I've Got a Better One

Stories from Sid Feldman



*Sid's stories
from solo adventures
on the mountains of Africa,
to a cabin with Harriet
in the mountains of Georgia.*



I've Got a Better One

Stories from Sidney Feldman



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*For
Harriet*

Forward

I've known Sid since the 1960 Boy Scout Jamboree. We've been best friends ever since, well, maybe more like brothers.

One of the things about Sid from back then to now is his love of telling stories. He got me doing it too. For the whole 64 years we've known each other we've told each other stories, about big events and small, and after hearing one of mine, he'd always say "I've got a better one!"

He often did.

I've always enjoyed hearing them, and especially enjoyed gathering a bunch together for this book, some I'd never heard before.

Dennis Merritt

Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts 2024

Preface

The first part of this book tells of my adventures. By adventure I mean entering wilderness areas to face my fears with no safety net other than my own determination and abilities to make it in, and out.

I paddled wild rivers, climbed mountains and walked through jungles filled with the sorts of animals you usually only see on TV.

And I had fears. I had severe acrophobia, fear of heights. How bad was it? When I went to the Boy Scout Jamboree in 1960, in Colorado Springs, I got up on Steamboat Rock in the Garden of the Gods. It wasn't very high and was about 12 feet wide with a railing around it and gentle stairs going up and down. I had a full-on anxiety attack and never got near the edge and wound up crawling down the center of the stairs, grasping the center handrail.



5643. Balanced Rock and Steamboat Rock, Garden of the Gods, Colorado

Steamboat Rock in Garden of the Gods

I didn't want to live my life that way and when I got to college I willed myself to learn to rock climb, and from there started up mountains. I pushed myself to paddle more and more challenging rivers, and in Africa confronted my fears and walked alone through wild jungles.

I was seeking adventure, seeking experiences that would cause trepidation and then dealing with it. I wanted to overcome my fears.

I did just that.

The first part of this book tells of some of those adventures.

The second part tells of life as a tour guide for Harriet, my wife of 42 years.

The time when Harriet and I went from adventurers to tourists was when we went on our first trip out west and we were leaving Yellowstone to go to the Tetons.

As you leave Yellowstone you go down this long 20 mile slope and the entire time you can see a view of the Tetons. There's a lake at the bottom of a road and it looks across at Mount Moran.

As we approached I could sense Harriet was getting more and more nervous. We finally reached the lake in the Tetons and I pulled into a parking area. I said "aren't these the most beautiful mountains you've ever seen?"

She said some kind of crazy nervous thing and I asked what was wrong. She said she was scared because she thought I would want to make her climb them.

I looked back at her in amazement and said, “I don't even want to climb them!” So that was the moment we went from adventurers to tourists. And that was the change, from battling fear in the wilderness to enjoying the view.



“I don't even want to climb them.”

I didn't have to reach the top of the Grand Teton. I didn't have to rappel 180' into Hell Hole cave. I didn't have to walk among the elephants in the Rwenzori, and I didn't have to paddle the wild Middle Fork of the Salmon River before it became a rafting destination.

Now all I wanted to do was to enjoy being outdoors with Harriet, to walk some trail easy enough that you didn't lose your breath, and enjoy pretty scenes along the way. She taught me to slow down.

And it was good.

Sidney Feldman
Athens, Georgia 2024

Thank You

Those of us born in the 1940s were very lucky. We were born right after visionaries such as Teddy Roosevelt started preserving wilderness areas. Others following him kept expanding our national parks, and, in Africa, leaders and governments there, were also creating national parks around the peaks I was to climb.

It was in these places that I went for my adventures.

Wilderness that had been explored and preserved but not yet commercialized by professional guide services. So like in the Rwenzori and the Middle Fork of the Salmon I got to explore wild country as it was, with hardly any human contact.

Thank you to all the visionaries who saw the value in preserving these lands.

Table of Contents

Adventure.....	1
1 Africa.....	2
Mt. Kundudo.....	3
Mt. Kilimanjaro.....	5
Ngorongoro Crater.....	11
Mt. Kenya.....	12
Rwenzori Mountains.....	15
2 Canoeing.....	19
Early Canoeing.....	20
Trophies.....	22
Loyalsock.....	25
National Team.....	27
Middle Fork of the Salmon.....	29
Georgia White.....	31
Esopus.....	34
3 Mountains and Caves.....	36
Hell Hole.....	37
Mt. Moran.....	44
Grand Teton.....	48
4 Photos.....	51

Tour Guide.....	57
5 Harriet.....	58
First Meeting.....	60
Couch.....	65
Buck Stove.....	66
Harriet's First Canoe Race.....	68
Out West with Harriet.....	69
Elk.....	74
The Best Restaurant.....	75
The Golf Cart.....	76
Cruise.....	77
Killer Whales.....	78
Fossils.....	80
Alaskan Salmon.....	81
St. Thomas.....	82
Snorkel.....	83
Hawaii.....	84
Myrtle Beach.....	85
Windy Tent.....	86
Skiing.....	87
Cabin.....	88

Part I

Adventure

1

Africa



I was in the Peace Corp in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, and used some of my time there to explore the mountains of Africa. This brought me through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Mt. Kundudo



Sid's photo of Mt. Kundudo.

I was in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia for a full year. I saved all my money because I wanted to travel to the mountains of Africa and climb Kilimanjaro, Kenya and the Rwenzori. But I needed to warm up for those climbs, so I first went to Ethiopia's Mt. Kundudo, not too far from Dire Dawa where I was stationed.

I rode a bus through the town of Harar to a small village further on where I stayed in a Peace Corps volunteer's house. I found a local kid who knew the mountain and who agreed to climb it with me.

Kundudo (9,728') is a tall mountain that you can see from miles away, but the problem is the top is absolutely

flat. When I got up there, in the middle of a fog, I didn't know if I was on top of the mountain or not so I asked the kid to walk me around the outside of the mountain. That way I'd know I had been on top at some point. I wish to this day I could remember if I gave him a tip for taking me up there. I can't really remember.

I got back down and an Army Colonel offered me a ride through Harar and back to Dire Dawa. That was a theme that would carry through all my African adventures.

Yes, I did them alone, but on this trip the Peace Corp volunteer provided lodging, the Colonel provided a ride, and the kid from the village showed me the way up the mountain. The following stories are as much about the adventures as the people I encountered who helped me on my way.

Mt. Kilimanjaro



Mt. Kilimanjaro

Mount Kilimanjaro (19,341') is the highest mountain in Africa and the highest free standing mountain in the world. It is made up of three separate volcanic cones, Kibo, Mawenzi, and Shira. It's just 200 miles (325 Km) from the equator and rises above the African Great Rift Valley.

Getting There

A couple of days after climbing Mt. Kundudo I flew to Nairobi where I looked for a bus to Kilimanjaro. I didn't know where I was going or what I was doing, I just knew I

wanted to go to Mt. Kilimanjaro. The people there helped and pointed me at a bus. I ran over and got on it.

All I had with me was a sleeping bag, a canteen of water, a wad of toilet paper and a small amount of food stuffed in my pockets. And off I went.

In the middle of the night my fellow passengers were waking me up trying to tell me something. I finally realized we were crossing the border from Kenya into Tanzania (where Kilimanjaro is) and a border patrol guard was checking passports. I grabbed mine and showed it to him.

I ducked my head back down to go to sleep, but after only about 25 feet they were grabbing me and trying to get me off the bus.

They were all black men who spoke Swahili and I only knew Amharic, so there was absolutely no communication. Anyway, they're pulling me off the bus and finally get me off and then... they drag me into a restaurant and buy me dinner!

How very, very generous. It just proves that people are the same all over the world. So I got back on the bus and it's early morning and I'm sleeping and again they start shoving my chair and pushing me and telling me to get off. They pointed at a Volkswagen micro-bus.

So I got out, walked across a field and got in this VW just assuming they knew what they were talking about. It took me about 10 miles to a gorgeous hotel. A nice

Japanese lady at the desk, who speaks impeccable English, tells me this is the hotel where you start climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

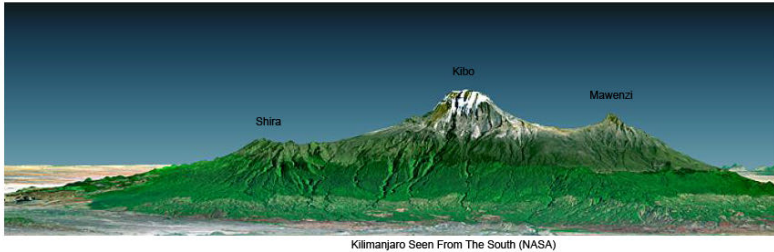
I told her my plans, and she told me that the week before somebody had died climbing the mountain alone. She said there's a Japanese girl with a guide who had recently started up and that I might possibly catch up to them.

The Climb

So I started trekking through farmland, constantly uphill on a single-track trail. After 10 miles I got to a hut, made my bed, and laid down. The next morning I got up, and continued on the trail. There were no trail signs, no people, just that single-track trail heading up.

I got to the second cabin and sure enough, that's where the Japanese girl was with her guide. She was a journalist writing stories as to what it was like to climb these mountains, a pleasant person to talk to. Her guide, as well, was generous and kind.

On the third day, I got up early and left. The reason why I left early was I wanted to acclimatize. The earlier I'd get up to the next cabin, the more time I'd have at altitude.



I climbed up to the shoulder of Mawenzi peak (16,893' on the right), down into the valley between and then up to the summit of Kibo (19,341').

From the third cabin, the next day is a climb up and over a ridge going to Mawenzi Peak with a descent of a thousand feet into the valley between it and Kibo Peak. It's then seven miles across the valley to a fourth hut at the base of Kibo Peak.

On that descent, everybody tells you not to run, there's no oxygen. But like every fool, I just started walking faster and faster and got to sprinting down the slope because it felt so good to move so fast.

When I got down to the bottom, I just fell down, opened a can of roast beef and ate lunch. I saw how desolate that high altitude valley between the peaks was. Crossing it was, again, a single track trail. And I was alone on Mt. Kilimanjaro.

I made my way to the Kibo hut, set up my bunk, laid down, got warm, and waited to cook dinner. Sure enough, the Japanese girl and her guide showed up. He made dinner for her and everybody went to sleep.

At 12 o'clock at night, we awoke, got dressed, and started together, in the dark, heading straight up Kibo peak. The trail was literally straight up, no switchbacks. After a short time the guide came to me and explained the girl has to move faster because she's cold. But I couldn't move any faster so they took off and now I was all alone again with only one direction to go and that was up.

It was hard going, I'd been at it for a while, it was still dark, it was cold (note the snows on top), and I was tired. If I sat down I was sure my feet would freeze and I would die. It would be a simple and peaceful death. I sat down.

And just then the sun came up.

You can't imagine what that sun did to my spirit. It made me move. It breathed a spark of life into my body. I remember it to this day. Energized, I started up the mountain again.

But the air kept getting thinner and soon the lack of oxygen got to me. Really got to me. I would stand up, breathe ten breaths, take a step, fall down, and breathe ten breaths. Then I'd stand up, breathe ten breaths, take a step, fall down and breathe ten breaths. And stand up, breathe ten breaths, take a step, fall down and...

I repeated that pattern for over an hour.

And then I reached the flag. I'd made it. I was at the top.

I turned around, and I went straight downhill towards the huts. I could see the huts the entire time I was

descending and at one I caught up with the Japanese girl and her guide. He gave me a glass of some very strong tea and boy it tasted good and packed a lot of energy. It was just the right drink and generous of him to give it to me.

Well there was still daylight so I figured I'd keep going down and descended all the way to the hotel. What took me four days to get up, I went down in one. The Japanese girl stayed at the last hut.

I was too exhausted to buy dinner, so I just bought some sugar cane and chewed on that.

And that was the end of the biggest mountain trip I ever went on.

Ngorongoro Crater



Ngorongoro Crater

From Mount Kilimanjaro I went to the Ngorongoro Crater, a natural wild life preserve. The hotel was expensive so I didn't stay there. I made a makeshift tent out of my tarp and camped on their lawn.

The next day I went to the tour guide service, got in the truck and took a ride around the crater. I saw the wildebeest herds, I saw rhino charges, I saw a herd of lions, and lots and lots of birds.

It was a plethora of animals all living in harmony, none of them attacking, a day of thorough enjoyment.

At the end of the day I got back on the bus and took it to Mount Kenya.

Mt. Kenya



Mt. Kenya

Mt. Kenya is the second highest mountain in Africa at around 17,000 feet. Rather than one peak though, it's three. The two highest are technical rock climbs requiring ropes and gear. The third, Point Lenana can be reached by hiking. The book "No Picnic on Mt. Kenya" is a true story of three Italian prisoners of war who, in 1943 broke out of camp to climb the mountain, and then broke back into camp.

Mount Kenya is in a national park. Climbing the mountain was supervised and required a guide. So I went to the cabin where the guides were and found them all

really upset. It turns out someone had been up at the hut the night before and, to get warm, had burned the historical log book kept there. I was trying to get set to climb the mountain, but all the guide did was complain about the book being ruined. I really couldn't blame him. To begin, there's a 25 mile road to the start of the climb, and it cost \$25 for a ride, each way. Well, I had neither the \$25 in nor the \$25 out, but the driver was sympathetic and willing to do me a favor as he was going to go in to pick someone else up for a ride out. He dropped me and my guide off at the end of the road, but we were going to have to walk out when we were done.

Then we started to hike up the mountain. The guide had not been acclimatized so I carried his pack. We hiked up and hiked up and hiked up.

I began to understand the difficulties described in "No Picnic on Mount Kenya." Mount Kenya has three summits and it's not clear which one to climb. One was snow covered and easily conquered and the other two were a bit higher but required climbing gear I didn't have. Somewhat disappointed I hiked up the snow covered one. At the top I was 7,750 feet above the cabin at the start.

On the descent we stayed in a hut. Some poachers came in late at night and I was truly scared. They could easily have killed me and no one would ever know. I kept myself occupied reading a Samuel Beckett book with its depressing existential theme. In fact, I finished it, but the

entire night I was scared, truly scared that those guys wanted nothing to do with me. I got up early in the morning and started down the mountain.

We got down to the flat and the end of the road. We threw a fire cracker into the woods, but it never went off. I now realized we had to hike out 25 miles with wild buffaloes, elephants and all kinds of dangerous creatures that would easily love to kill us.

After about five minutes a car came down the road, went by us and continued to the end of the road. It then turned around and headed back out so we stuck out our fingers to hitch. Thank God they picked us up and the first thing a guy asked us was, "where are you from?"

And I said, "the city." He said, "oh, you mean New York?" Here was a British guy in the middle of Africa who identifies "the city" as New York. I knew I was home.

Rwenzori Mountains



Rwenzori Mountains

After Mt. Kenya, I got on a bus and went to Rangel in Uganda. That's where the Rwenzori Mountains are, also called the Mountains of the Moon. These mountains run north south and are the true source of the Blue Nile. It was really funny—there was a country club there and you could play golf. So I did. I wasn't very good at golf in those days, but I played anyway. I rented some clubs and bought some balls and hit them all into the woods on a really tight course. In any case, I played golf in the middle of a jungle in the middle of Africa.

The next morning I had my bowl of Rice Krispies and went out to hike the Rwenzori.

For the first part of the trail you walk through elephant grass. That's grass that is high enough to hide elephants. So you could very well walk into a herd of elephants without realizing it. From there you quickly hike up to an elevation of about 10,000 feet.

It was beautiful. The river was down below. The jungle was all around me. And it was a very peaceful scene. I got to the first hut and went on to a second hut. It was still early in the afternoon and I thought I could get to the next shelter, either a cave or the third hut.

Then it got scary. It was late in the afternoon when I got to the cave. I knew if I stayed there overnight I'd have to build a fire to chase the panthers away. Instead I took a gamble and walked on past the cave hoping to reach the next hut. I finally got there and screamed, "is anybody in there?" A British accent answered back. I went in and just as I did I heard whooshing noises behind me. Those were the panthers. They had just come out and my life had been at risk.

But luckily, I made it to that hut. Unfortunately, we couldn't get a fire going because there was limited oxygen. In any case, this British guy and I stayed in the hut overnight. He was a nice guy, amenable and, it would turn out, a good climbing companion.

The next day, we hiked up and got to an area that was extremely steep, about a class three scramble (the easiest grade of climbing where ropes are recommended but not

necessary) and we kept going. It scared me because we needed to ensure that we had the ability to come down.

Well, we hiked for about three hours up this extremely steep slope/cliff and got views of the entire Rwenzori mountains. When we came down, it was absolutely gorgeous. The sun was shining brightly and we could truly see how it was a source of the Blue Nile.

We got to the hut and stayed there for the night. The next day we walked all the way down to the bottom. I can tell you we were concerned when we were walking through the elephant grass because the previous night we had thought we heard elephants stomping outside our cabin. But it wasn't elephants we found out later, it was an earthquake.

As soon as we got down I ran around and found two Peace Corp volunteers living in town. They took me in for the night and were very generous. There was tremendous respect amongst the volunteers for one another. Anytime one came through town you had a bed for them and you allowed them to sleep at your place. That's why the vacation was so cheap and I could go to all those places.

From the Rwenzori I went back into Kenya and then to the capital city, where I ate, and I ate. I met two volunteers at the YMCA and we'd go into town and have breakfast. Then we'd come back to the Y and have breakfast. And then we'd walk into town, and have lunch.

And then we'd walk back to the Y and have lunch. Then into town for a snack, and back for British tea.

Come evening I'd go into town and have dinner, and then come back to the Y for dinner. The guys I were with were just astounded at how much I ate. But I must have lost at least ten pounds climbing those mountains. All I ate on them was canned food, which was the only stuff I could carry.

But I did it. I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, I climbed Mount Kenya, and I climbed the Rwenzori. Thank you. Truly adventures. Did them alone. Maybe the last of the lone adventurers in Africa.

These were going to be party trips from now on with guided tourist events and cots and tents and food supplies carried for you. An era was passing.

2

Canoeing

I competed in white water slalom races. Gates are hung over a section of rapids and the paddlers have to navigate the gates, going downstream for some but upstream for others making skillful use of eddies to work back up a river. Fastest time wins, but a boat has penalty time added for gates missed and poles hit.



For much of my 20s I was involved in competitive white water canoeing.

Early Canoeing

In the Boy Scouts I had gone on an overnight canoe and camping trip down the Delaware River. I had a blast. When I got to college I was sad because I thought those adventures were over. I was wrong. I saw a sign inviting students to join the Outing Club which did all sorts of outdoor activities, including camping and canoeing.

I joined and soon took a canoe trip down the East Branch of the Delaware with the advisor, Dr. Simmons, and some others. Leddy Ziegler, also a member of the Outing Club, was in one of the canoes, so I jumped in a 15 foot canoe with her. I just started to paddle. I didn't know anything about correct strokes, but had a good time moving the boat through the water.

Dr. Simmons taught us some skills, like correct paddle strokes and the importance of leaning away from the current (otherwise the current flips you). There was a fun bit of water on the trip where we could practice. There were two sluice waves going under a road with eddies on the edges. The trick was to keep the canoe upright going between the waves and the eddies. Every time you crossed into an eddy line, you had to lean the boat away from the eddy, because the current went upstream in it.

It was a blast until we turned over. Soaking wet, we pulled the boat out of the river. Together, Leddy and I learned to paddle during that first year.

Next year Leddy and I became paddling mates again and we went off to try a race, the famous Lake George Race. It wasn't for experienced paddlers since it was designed all wrong, but it was a great race for spectators because they would drive up from Albany to have fun watching the events.

Our event was on the Hudson River with two races. On Saturday, it was a slalom race with gates. On Sunday, it was a down river race. We got there and did our best. We were total novices, but, thanks to Dr. Simmons, we knew the correct strokes and, to our amazement, when the results were announced we discovered we had won the slalom race! We beat all the kayakers and all the people paddling canoes. We actually won the race! It was a pretty spectacular day.

On the down river race we paced ourselves to conserve energy. I can't say it was good race, but it was fun and Leddy and I wound up taking second overall.

What a lesson for me, you paddle well, you do well, and then you get a first and a second place.

Leddy and I did it again in another white water downriver race. The rapids were difficult, but we paddled well and got second. That was my entry into competitive canoeing. I was hooked, and completely unaware of the high level of competition lying ahead of me.

Trophies

I was a trophy hound. For me, the idea was to win, get in the top three places and then win a trophy. Very few of the top paddlers cared about trophies. But I did. I wanted to do well and win a trophy. Except I often missed out on the trophy part.

One time we were at the Farmington race and we won, in different events, a first, a second and a third. Should have been three trophies, but when I went up for my trophies they said there's no trophies this year. They were going to save the money for next year and buy permanent ones for the races. Great.

One year we took third in the U.S. National Championships. That is, we were the third American boat. Only trouble is a Canadian won it. So the Canadian and top two Americans got trophies and I never got my third place trophy in the American race.

But the funniest one was with Homer Dodge. He was 80 years old and a legend in the local canoeing scene. He ran in the senior division where they gave time bonuses based on age and he, at 80, got a lot.

Now I ran in the expert division. So I'm running against the best paddlers in the country. And I beat Tommy Southworth and Bill Bickham and all the best paddlers in the country in the one man canoe (C1) division. Tommy Southworth asked me how I turned on the wave at gate

12. I said, well, that was easy. And he said, if that was easy for you, then you deserve to win this race. And he was the best paddler in the country.

So I got all dressed up. I looked real good and was sure I'd get a trophy. I went to dinner and they started handing out the trophies. But lo and behold, no trophy for the expert class. Instead, the well loved Homer Dodge got the most spectacular trophy of the race.

I'm standing there in jealous awe looking at this trophy that's about five feet high. The trophy is so large, it can't even get in a car. And they're giving it to somebody else. Even after I won the the expert race. Sigh.

Another great trophy story happened at the Canadian National Championships out in the Calgary. They had these gorgeous trophies, beautiful, beautiful trophies in the shape of Alberta because that's where they were held. When the guy was giving out trophies I went to get mine. I took first place in the two man, took third place in the mixed division and took second place in the one man division. I got two of those nice trophies, but for that last one, they gave me an unfinished block of wood.

When it was all done, I'm looking at the table and there's one trophy left and Dave Knight looks at me and says, what's the one trophy out there? I said, I don't know. He goes up to the table and asks, what are these beautiful pieces of glass for?

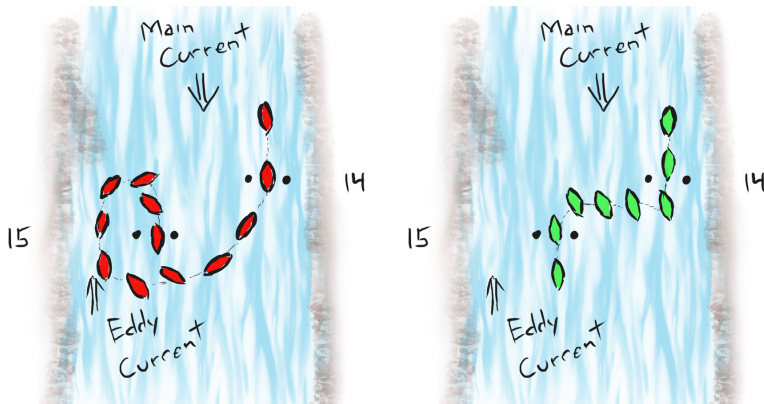
He's told they're interchangeable. So there's Dave Knight grabbing the piece of glass and my wooden trophy and saying, well, if these are interchangeable, Sid wants to interchange them. So Dave did me a favor and got me one of the good trophies to complete my set instead of a broken piece of wood.

I loved my trophies.

Loyalsock

By this time I was heart and soul into competing and I was trying to get on the National Team. Art Hohmann and I trained every night on a lake in Staten Island. Then on Friday we drove down to the Loyalsock.

Each race is different with the designers of a course setting the gates to create the challenges they thought best for the water. For this race they designed the course so that you would have to go down stream through gate 14, cut across the river, and then down stream through gate 15. Well nobody made it to gate 15 and everyone wound up going down river and circling back up along the side to play gate 15. Nobody went directly from gate 14 to gate 15 except for Art and me! On both runs we went directly from gate 14 to gate 15.



Left — other boats going down and around 15, Right — Sid and Art back paddling to get to 15.

We did this by paddling backwards after gate 14 with the boat at an angle so the current took us to gate 15. This was possible because Art was extremely strong (a national champion breast stroker) and with one back stroke was able to stop the boat's downstream progress. When the organizers saw the results and saw how much time we gained on the rest of the paddlers, they decided it was an error and changed our score so that it was 30 seconds slower. They claimed that the scorekeeper incorrectly kept score. They would do anything to make our score look bad so we had to argue that our score was legitimate. Both times we had the proof of the gatekeepers that we went straight through from one gate to the other.

They went so far as to take a top paddler and his partner and have them run the course to prove that you couldn't do it. They didn't do it but we did. But that was it, we still won the race but lost that 30 seconds.

National Team

My first attempts to compete in the white water slalom racing circuit were with Dr. Simmons, who I'd started paddling with at college. In our first trip to the Brandywine race we turned over twice and were unsure if we should continue. But we did.

And we started to get better. I was paddling with Art Hohmann now and had found a partner whose strengths complemented mine as we both improved. We started finishing in the top three or four in the races we entered.

And we continued to get better. It seemed possible that we could even make the US National Team and compete in World Championships. We weren't the best two person canoe (C2) team in the country but we were consistently in the top four, and four boats always went to the championships.

But each year there were disappointments, but they weren't related to our skill. It was the politics of competitive canoeing. The National Team at the time was controlled by a cliquish group centered around the coach of those years. We weren't part of that circle and they didn't want us to be.

I already told the story of the Loyalsock where they added 30 seconds to our score. The reason behind that had to do with the rules about how individual race results counted for the National Team. By making that gate which no one else had, we won by so much it moved us

way up in the standings. So they changed our score and said we shouldn't complain because we still won.

There were many, many incidents like that in the years I was trying to get on the National Team. Some were blatant, like one year we clearly made it into the top three or four, and they decided to take only two C2 teams that year.

Others were subtle. Boats ran a race course individually, with a time delay between each boat's start. If a boat catches up with the boat in front, the gatekeeper blows a whistle signifying the slower boat has to give way for the faster boat. In one race we had caught the boat in front, but the gatekeeper didn't blow the whistle costing us about 120 seconds. Who was that gatekeeper? That very same coach of the National Team.

It went on and on like that. Eventually, another concerned paddler analyzed all the data and wrote a long letter with facts and figures showing, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we deserved to be on the National Team.

We made the team.

The actual World Championships in Italy were a bit anti-climatic. The course wasn't that well thought out, and we didn't do that well. But I was really proud to be there and to know I deserved to be there. And, Bill Heinzling, my partner there, and I used it as a good start to an enjoyable European summer vacation.

Middle Fork of the Salmon



Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho

I really was an adventurer between the ages. When Ron Vincent and I first paddled the Middle Fork of the Salmon, there was nobody on it. We went six days, didn't see another human being. Except on the last night we met the ranger. We met up with him, but other than that, there were no other travelers, adventurers, tourists. It was just me and Ron, reading the water as we paddled down the river.

The second time we went down we had kayaks loaded with supplies and went with 12 people, six of them from

the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York City. We were the only 12 people on the river that week. There might have been a few other rafts, kayaks and canoes, but we didn't see them.

The third time we rode the Middle Fork, there were 3,000 people on the river, all tourists riding in rafts. The growth of the sport was immense during that 20 years.

And that was true of the Grand Canyon, of the Green, and of several other western rivers. It was true about mountain climbing. When we first got to the mountains nobody else was on them. It was just us fighting with the elements.

And then ten years later, there were people all over.

I lived in a sweet window after the wilderness had become easily accessible and before guides started bringing in hoards of people.

Georgia White

When I was about four years old I was laying on the living room floor and on the TV comes a show of an older lady taking a group of tourists down the Grand Canyon. I got kind of excited about it. She was the first person, man or woman, to take tourists down the Grand Canyon. I became so enamored with the show that I decided then and there that, someday, I would take that same trip down the Grand Canyon.

I got the opportunity. There were a bunch of us and we were paddling canoes, me in a one-man boat, but we'd paid to be part of a guided rafting trip. All our supplies were in the rafts and we could just enjoy the days paddling those rolling waves. It was a spectacular 12 day trip.

One evening, at dinner on the river, one of the guides asked me "why are you paddling the Grand Canyon?" and my answer was "well..." and out of nowhere this story pops up in my head and I remember that I'm paddling the Grand Canyon because of that TV show. I got kind of excited talking about it and the guide turned around and said "well Sid you'll be happy to know that the woman on that show was Georgia White and she was on the beach when we left for this trip" and I said "no way!" and he said "no, really, she was on the beach. Make sure you check your film (I was filming (yes film, 8mm) the trip) when you get home."

So when we got home, I checked the film and sure enough there she was leading her group off the beach and into the waves. It was kind of amazing to realize that I not only watched her years before but I had also watched her there and then. So I edited the films to make one film out of it and sure enough Georgia White is in it taking a group of tourists down the Grand Canyon. Wow. I was just absolutely thrilled.

This was the woman who was the inspiration for my life's pleasure, paddling rivers and rapids in races like North Creek and Loyalsock each spring when the water was high and then qualifying for the US National Team and paddling in Europe with that team and the whole thing was such a huge experience for me that I decided to call Georgia White and tell her what kind of influence she had on my life. But I never picked up the phone.

One day Harriet said, yeah, get out the phone and call her. And I didn't do it. I don't know why I didn't do it, but I didn't. And then the next day, I said, you know, I better call Georgia White. And again, just decided not to do it. No good reason, but I just decided not to do it. Harriet kept sayin "go call Georgia White." And I kept saying nah, nah, nah.

Years went by, always intending to call and never doing it. Then one day something was different. Harriet said "you're going to call her right now. Get on the phone and call her now."

So I did. I called the National Park Service and asked for Georgia White. The lady who answered the phone was very suspicious so I explained who I was and why I wanted to talk to her. And she said, “well, she's dying of cancer and probably will not be alive tomorrow, but I can definitely share this story with her tonight. I know she'll enjoy hearing it.”

So I didn't actually personally talk to her but at least the secretary was going to relay the message of how much influence she had had on my life.

And really, 99% of the fun, the happiness and all of the adventures I owe to Georgia White because she's the one who gave me the motivation to travel all these big rivers and get on the United States Canoe Team.

Every time I tell this story, I just burst out in tears because of the joy this woman had given me in my life. And I appreciate it so much. But it was really amazing that at first, I said to my wife, I'm not gonna talk to her.

And then, out of nowhere, I just agreed to talk to her on the last day of her life.

Esopus

This is one of my favorite stories about canoeing. It was after I retired from racing and had sold my boats and it was the last canoe race I was going to paddle. It was the Esopus which is in the Catskills Mountains of New York. I was going to paddle with my sister and we just made out a nice plan and we're going to run it slow and keep it under control.

So we did just that and there's a real steep very fast railroad rapids right in the middle of the course. Then you get down to the end and have to turn around for an upstream gate. I asked Fran is she doing okay and she said yes so she got a drink of water and I asked if she needed another, and she said no so we entered that steep rapid. I was really careful to get the boat to go through the upstream gate. When we finished up, sure enough, we won that race and we won it by one second.

It was a beautiful trophy that we still have today. It's a one-of-a-kind glass bowl and it's made personally by a guy from the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York City. We keep it in an honored place as it was a fun experience that goes back to my original love of canoeing. Paddling against the competition and then getting a pretty trophy.



The Esopus Trophy

3

Mountains and Caves

With my acrophobia, fear of heights, I climbed many mountains, and with my claustrophobia, fear of enclosed spaces, I entered many caves. Here's three stories.

Hell Hole



Rappelling into Hell Hole

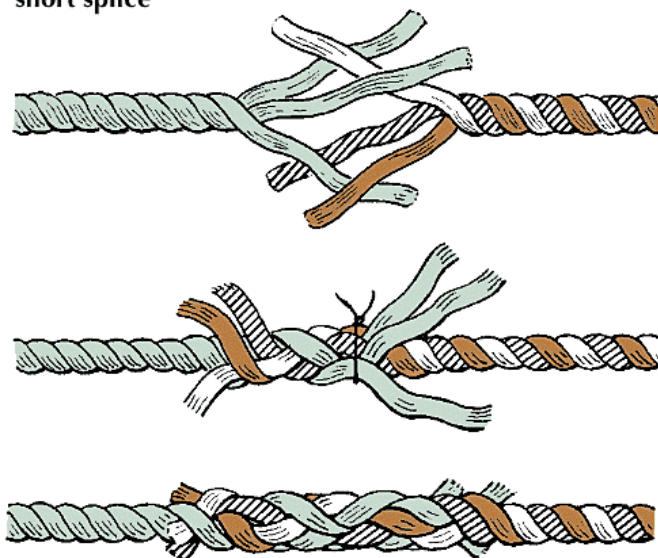
The greatest misadventure of all was in a West Virginia cave called Hell Hole. It was a “technical” cave, meaning you needed ropes and climbing gear to get into and out of it. It was a giant cavern that had grown under ground, larger and larger, until the top of its dome broke through the surface. And that’s how you entered the cave.

It required a 186 foot rappel from the top of that dome to

enter the cave, with most of it just dangling in thin, dark, air.

The problem was our climbing ropes at the time were only 150'. Art, the most experienced caver of our group, spliced our ropes together so we wound up with two 300' ropes. (Note back then climbing ropes were made of three twisted strands so they could be spliced.) We were never sure that the splice idea would work, but off we went.

short splice



A short splice

We were driving around looking for the cave and got to a farmer's field and saw a sign that said, "Make Peace with Thy Maker." We knew we were there. It's a big hole in the

ground, surrounded by a barbed wire fence.

We tied our ropes to trees in two different places, dropped them in the hole, and began to rappel down. For the first 70 or so feet there was a solid, vertical, wall in front for your feet. After that you pushed off, let some rope slip, and there you were hanging over 100 feet above the darkness of the cave floor.

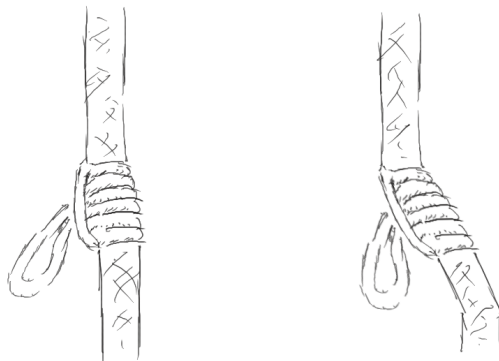
It was a long way down but at that point, you had no choice. I had a moment of panic when my sweatshirt got caught up in the carabiner. I was able to tear it loose and kept lowering myself and lowering myself.

Finally got down to the splice, slipped that through the carabiner, and continued on down. I was finally standing on a mound of bat guano in the middle of the cave at the bottom. The others got down as well and we all gathered up together and started to proceed to walk around Hell's Hole.

It took us about two hours, and then we discovered another drop-off. But nobody wanted to go get one of the ropes and drop it off, and we had had enough. So we were going to go back and Prusik out.

Today they have mechanical devices you attach to a rope to help you climb out, but back then it was done with a special knot called a Prusik knot. It was like a slip knot attached to the rope and you would have two of them, each with a long sling attached that you could put your foot through. So you would be standing in one sling

and unweighting the other. You could then loosen the unweighted knot and slide it higher. You keep doing this, alternating feet/knots until you reach the top.



Prusik knot, unweighted on the left so it can be slid up, weighted on the right so it binds on the rope

I got on the first rope and started up out of the hole. I couldn't believe when I got up to the splice how hard it was to get the Prusik knots loose enough to slide up over the splice which was about a foot long and fatter than the actual rope.

Everybody we talked to told us all you have to do is loosen up the Prusik knot wide enough. You just slip it over the splice in the ropes. It's easy to say it when you're standing on solid ground. It's not so easy to do it when you're hanging in midair 70' above the floor of the cave. In any case, I put my mind to it and got up over the splice

and proceeded on up.

When I reached the top, I did some stupid things like brag about leaving, brag about being the first out of the hole. Stupid things. I quickly grabbed the one rope I was on, pulled it out, and dropped it down the other hole so both ropes would be together.

Dennis got on one, Cherry got on the other, and they started up out of the hole. It took them more than a half hour to Prusik up out of the hole. We now had two last ones to come up. One, Art, was a really good caver and physically strong. The other a total novice, Ross.

Ross, it turns out, just couldn't do it, and Art, on the rope next to him worked the knots for both them. Until the splice. Try as he might, Ross was so tightly snared in the slings that Art couldn't get him over the splice.

We yelled down, "how you doing?" The answer we got back was, "we...are... okay..., but... very... tired." So we gave them a little more time. Eventually Art was exhausted and unable to get Ross over the splice, so he continued to the top. He was so tired we had to give him a hand getting out the last little bit.

We tried hauling the rope with Ross up, but with him hanging free and the friction of the rope over the upper section, we couldn't budge it. So our plan, then, was to tie the rope to Ross's car and drag him out. We started the car up, drove it across the field, attached the rope, but it started to skid because, this was November, and there

was a light covering of snow on the ground. No problem, we built a road. We cut down some pine branches and put them under the wheels and we managed to haul him up to the lip of the wall. And the car died. Just stopped working.

But since he could now help with his feet, all of us hauling on the rope got him up to within 10 feet of us and then we couldn't move him anymore. It turns out we'd tied the pack to the end of his rope so we could haul it out, and the pack was now jammed under the lip of the vertical part.

Dennis climbed down and had to cut Ross out of his slings, they were so tight, and pull him the rest of the way out.

That wasn't the end of our troubles because we still had to get all the equipment that was now snagged on the underbelly of the rock formation. Tomorrow.

We walked back to the campsite, caught some sleep, got heckled by the advisor and went back to Hell Hole. Dennis rappelled down and was on belay and he shook loose the pack of equipment that was stuck below.

He was really frustrated because it seemed to snag on every possible rock on the way up. When he finally got out, we threw the equipment in the car. Dennis, Cherry and Art walked out and Ross and I went to sleep in the back of his station wagon.

I never forget telling myself to control my anger

because he should have never gone in that hole. But what I did was, I said, “how could you do that?” And I went to sleep. It was the wrong thing to do, but I did it.

Well we got out of that one. That was close. Because I want to tell you that my fear of heights really came through. It was a half hour of containing that fear against the mechanics of working those Prusik knots.



Dennis and I in West Virginia

Mt. Moran



Mt. Moran in the Tetons. We climbed over that notch on the left and then up the face to the left of the “Black Dike” seen near the top.

Another time I had to confront my fears was when Dennis and I climbed Mt. Moran in the Tetons. We had arrived and set up camp at the Teton’s climber’s camp, which is now a parking lot at Jenny Lake in the Tetons. There we met a bunch of people including Ron Perla, an experienced mountaineer, and Roger, a novice. Ron was willing to take us all up Mount Moran. He made the arrangements with the rangers, we got all the equipment set, and off we went. We hiked around Lee

Lake and String Lake and we're walking about seven times faster than is humanly possible to walk, but we just let Ron set the pace.

We get around the lakes and start up the mountain. We're walking directly parallel with a glacial debris field and we keep going up and we're impervious to the pain because we're just following Ron's lead.

We finally reach a nice flat spot and Ron says, this is where we're going to camp for the night. Okay, so we set up our tents, we get out our cook gear, cook a nice dinner, and go to sleep.

The next morning, we're up early and climb about 600 feet to a notch. From there we reach the top of a ridge line that's very narrow and we have to get down between that ridge line and the main part of the mountain. We rappelled down, and it turns out the most difficult rock climbing we'll have to do on the trip is climbing back up to that ridge.

We get down and there's a space about four feet by four feet that all four of us have to stand on. Off to your right is a 5,000 foot drop and off to your left is a 3,000 foot drop.

I was never so scared in my life. I had trouble containing my fear and wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. So, Ron and Roger started out onto the main face using one rope, Dennis and I using another, and off we went climbing up Mount Moran.

We made good time, Ron Perla knew exactly where to go, and Dennis did a good job leading our rope and we got up to the top of the mountain and it wasn't as exciting as we thought it would be, kind of flat, but we gave the world a finger, turned around and came down.

Now we got back to the notch and I was scared. I couldn't look down, I was really scared. The view straight down to the valley floor was too much for me.

I wanted to get out of there in the worst way, and Dennis was slow getting started, so I started up the climb myself and banged my nose and now I was furious at Dennis and he said that was good since I could now focus on my righteous indignation instead of my fear. I had to contain myself and let him lead the 5.7 climb out of the notch. As usual Dennis did a brilliant job getting us out of there and to the top of the notch. Once we reached that it was a long walk downhill.

The problem was Roger was nowhere around and had started off without us as we were packing up the equipment for the hike down. Ron, Dennis and I were afraid he was lost and were hiking down besides the glacial flow and we kept yelling for Roger, Roger, no answer, no answer. We got almost to the bottom and there was Roger there waiting for us.

He couldn't believe that we felt he was lost. He was having a good old time. Now it was time for the long flat hike out and Roger wanted to prove himself and got to

the head of the line and set a fast pace, with Ron right behind him and Dennis and I following.

We came to a fork in the trail and Roger steamed off down the wrong fork. Ron didn't say a word, and neither did Dennis or I, but we just continued on the correct trail. After about 30 feet Roger turned around and saw us. It took out all of his momentum and he sheepishly followed us back to camp.

We got to the ranger station about 20 minutes late so we had to sign up in the morning to tell them we were safe.

But we climbed Mount Moran. That was a big one.

Grand Teton



Grand Teton Mt. We climbed the Exum Route on the ridge on the left.

I climbed the Grand Teton with Dave Heiki, Davey Newhall and another canoe buddy. We did it in two days, with the first day hiking up to a notch and camping out, and, on the second continuing up to the final technical rock climbing that led to the summit.

To begin the technical section we had to walk out on a ledge about 20 feet long and at about a 45 degree angle off into nowhere. There were others on the mountain, so we had to sit on that ledge and wait our turn for about 45 minutes and I was getting more and more scared. Some

of the rock climbing we were about to do was very exposed with long drops if you fell, and some of it was technically more difficult than others. As I waited there I kept telling myself the famous saying about the climb, “The scary part is not difficult and the difficult part is not scary.”

Finally it was our turn. We stood up and walked along the ledge. I was third and Dave Heiki took off first, leading the way up the rock climbing and setting the rope for us. He turned the corner and started up. Davey Newhall was next, turned the corner and started up. Then I turned the corner and realized there were just five little nubs you could put your feet on and nothing really to get a good hand hold on. There was no edge on them and now I knew this was the difficult part and I just said start climbing and boy did I ever and got out of that spot. It was true, after that, there were frightening drops below us, but the climbing was easy.

We got up to the top and we were there a little while but when we were ready to come down we realized we didn't know how to because we had come up one route and we're gonna go down another. So we had to wait for some other climbers to come up and show us how to get off of the mountain. Sure enough we did it. It entailed rappelling on a rope that had been worn pretty thin but we got down to the level, and this is where I made a serious, serious mistake.

Dave Heiki could never keep up hiking. He always guided me through the rock sections. But once we got down to the flat, he just could not keep up. And I said, I'll meet you down the bottom. I should have never done that.

I truly left him. He was scared. He made that plain. And yet I took off and went down to the bottom and waited for him. It means nothing that I waited for him. I really abandoned a fellow climber. And you should never do that.

But we were all safe. We all got back. We took a couple of days to recover. And in fact, a week later, we paddled together at Burley Falls. So it all worked out. But I owe Dave a big thank you.

4

Photos

Here are some photos from our collection.



Peace Corp



High plains between Dira Dawa and Addis Ababa



Paddling with my sister Fran. Top a reverse gate, bottom going over a dam.



Us on Pikes Peak (top) and by a giant sequoia (below)



Us at the Grand Canyon (above) and Niagara Falls (below)

Part II

Tour Guide

5

Harriet



The moment in my life that things changed was on an education field trip on a beach in Savannah. I was sitting there innocently talking to fellow traveller, Harriet, and asked if we could move to a more isolated location because the light from a street light was in my eyes. She was reluctant as she thought I had something else in mind. When I understood, I said “No I mean it. I just want to get the light out of my eyes.” It was hard for her

to believe, but we stood up and moved. As we walked, she put her hand inside my elbow. I squeezed it tight and at that moment we connected.

First Meeting

Harriet telling of that story when they became a couple.

About 42 years ago, I was a very poor, single parent. I had not been on a trip in a couple of years. I was teaching fourth grade at an elementary school in Athens. I was also taking classes at UGA hoping to add a master's degree to my resume.

My principal suggested I take a class sponsored by GA Power. You would board a UGA bus and travel to different locations around our state to study the ways power is delivered to the communities. She then said... maybe you'll meet someone.

After seeing if my mom would help me with my daughter, I signed up for this class. It would be a way to go on a mini vacation...or so I thought. One day a list of names of those attending this class arrived. I panicked because I didn't know any of those listed. I saw our P.E. Coach walking down the hall. I said to him, "I'll have no one to talk to...and this will be an overnight trip!" He said, "Give me the list." As he read the names, he said, "Here's Sid Feldman's name. You won't have to worry about not talking...once he gets started, you won't get a word in edgewise!" I was very relieved.

So the first trip's date arrived. I got on the bus determined not to be a wallflower, and I was going to say hello and smile. UGA buses have two long seats behind

the driver facing each other. Then there are rows of two seats facing forward. I sat down at the end of the first long seat. There was a man sitting by the window in the seat facing me. I said, "Hello, my name is Harriet Horn (1st marriage/divorced) I teach at Barnett Shoals Elementary...who are you?" He looked at me and said, "My name is Sid Feldman. I'm the volleyball coach here at Georgia." He then turned his entire body toward the window and stared out that window. WOW! Talk about a person who did NOT want to continue the conversation... and that was the one our P.E. coach said loved talking! I quickly shut my mouth and looked away. So much for trying to be friendly.

So, here is some insight as to what Sid was experiencing on that first bus trip...He said that his interpretation of what was happening...he saw a bunch of middle aged women getting on that bus looking for a husband...and he wanted no part of it. But, there was a much bigger story to tell.

Sid was an "assistant administrator" for the professor that was to lead this class. Right before our first trip, the professor called Sid to inform him that the night before our first trip, he had food poisoning. He informed Sid that he was responsible for conducting the "bus class." He was beside himself with worry as to what to do. So maybe, the sudden turn toward the window wasn't all my

responsibility....? One could only hope...

The difficult part was that on the trip, we had to listen to one person after another discuss the climate, electricity needs, the environment and how GA Power was supporting the state.

It was a long trip, and we, mostly teachers, had had a long week and a long day.

We finally went into a warehouse where we were served small, blue shelled crabs. I don't think we had been given implements to open the shells...so I finally just bit off parts of the shell and chewed them carefully hoping to get some meat. It was a struggle and a long dinner!

Then, we got back on the bus hoping the day was over only to find ourselves stopping and walking into a big room filled with chairs. There we had to listen to another person lecture us on GA's power grid.

Finally, at about. 10 p.m., we went to a hotel to sleep. And...this was the "vacation" I was so looking forward to.

At the end of this excursion, we were informed that on our next trip, we could bring beer. Wow...maybe the vacation was evolving!

So, I went to buy my six pack...which was a bit more than I could afford. I was like a little kid being given a pail and a shovel at the beach! We were pulling out of the parking lot...and I wondered how soon I could open my first beer.

I waited as long as I could...but back I went. I sat on someone's cooler and popped that top. Hallelujah...my long day was rewarded.

After a bit, that rather unfriendly man walked to the back where a few of us had gathered. He looked at me and said, you're sitting on my cooler. I felt a bit big for my britches and said..."And?" He said well, I'd like to get a beer. I really don't recall what I sarcastically said next, but I looked at his eyes. I saw these two, very twinkly eyes looking back at me. I smiled and thought wow, maybe he isn't so bad after all.



Sid with Harriet

After that long weekend, this twinkly eyed guy was walking down the aisle asking people to write a thank you note to the different people/places we had visited. I

looked at him and said, “I’ll do one.” He said, “Really?” I said sure, I’m pretty good at that. He smiled...yes, he actually smiled.

The next trip was to the coast. GA Power has a nuclear power plant in southern GA. After visiting there, we would travel to the coast, where we stayed at a hotel on Tybee Island. We all went into Savannah for dinner. I think Sid and I had begun to notice each other. As we sat down, I was hoping we might sit next to each other, but a young, male student took the seat next to Sid. A bit disappointed, we looked at each other often and shared a few smiles. BTW, that young man became a friend of ours for many years to come.

When we returned to Tybee Island, somehow, I really don’t know how it happened, I think Sid said...would you like to take a walk on the beach. I said yes! Well, we were walking down the beach simply walking side by side. I really wanted to hold hands, but was so unsure. Finally, I drew in a deep breath, knowing I might be making a fool of myself...but I took my hand and slipped it into his elbow. He immediately pulled it in close to his side. My held breath released...and I said, oh, thank God...I did the right thing!

We were married seven months later.

Couch

Harriet and I had a meeting of the minds when we first got married. We bought a dining room set, and I turned to her and said, “well, is there anything else you want?” She said, “well, we really could use a couch.” I said, “okay, that's good.” So we decided we can get a couch. Harriet went over and grabbed her coat, and I asked, “where are you going?” And she said, “you said we can go and get a couch.”

And I said, “that's after we save up for three months. Then we'll have enough to buy a couch.” She said, “oh,” and began to realize you save before you spend. A new approach to buying and selling.

Our two cultures were moving closer together.

Buck Stove

When we first got married, I owned a house with a 15 by 15 foot converted garage that was turned into a playroom. However it wasn't heated. Instead it had a Swiss fireplace, which was a kind of triangular fireplace that didn't produce any heat. So Harriet went down to a buck stove place just south of Athens to find out about buying one.

A guy came out and said for \$200 we could buy a stove and for \$200 he'd put it in. Well I thought that was a really good deal. Next week he shows up with the buck stove and the tubing, wiring and lumber and he's going to use. His idea was to put aluminum tubing from one end of the house to the other so that any heat generated by the buck stove would heat the whole house.

But he couldn't do it right away because he didn't have any helpers. Harriet replied "well Sid can help you, he doesn't have a volleyball game on Tuesday." Great volunteerism. So I was going to help this guy. We started working at 8 in the morning and we were at it all day.

About three in the afternoon, I became really angry because I figured this guy gave us the wrong prices. We're gonna have to pay four or five times as much to get this job done. It really was a ton of work.

So I kept working and kept getting angrier. And I'm going outside and flipping the aluminum, making the tubing and getting it up to him, getting the stove, moving stuff, doing a lot of work. And the more work I did, the

angrier I got because I knew the price was going up.

Finally, about six o'clock, the job was done. And I said, how much is it? And he said \$300. \$300 !?

Astounded, I asked “are you sure that isn’t too low?” He said, “well, thanks for saying that.”

He continued, saying it was too low, but that was the price he quoted so he was sticking to it. I gave him \$600.

We started up the stove and fell asleep. It was warm as toast, it was beautiful and the whole house got heated by wood, of which we had plenty left over from the previous owners.

It was a perfect situation for a lot of months and the adventurer was settling into becoming a home body.

Harriet's First Canoe Race

Eventually I'd go from adventurer to tourist, but on our first date I moved Harriet the other way, from tourist to adventurer. We were entered in a white water canoe race. An adventure.

As we're driving up to the canoe race she's asking me questions about what to do. I told her about canoe strokes, drawing, prying, etc. I told her about supplying energy. I told her we would go up on Friday night and we'd practice and that I'd teach her all this stuff, but she still kept asking questions. Finally I said, "don't worry, you'll never be as good as my sister." Well, there wasn't another word said for 18 hours.

All I know is, when we got on the water, I was screaming out "draw! pry! draw!", and we zipped down the course and we not only beat out all the two person canoes, we beat the one man canoes and all but one kayaker.

We came in second overall, and got a first place in the two-man canoe. For the first time in her life, Harriet wore a T-shirt to school on Monday morning showing everybody that we won the race.

Shortly after that we go on a cruise and there's a dance contest, with the Merengue. I said "Let's enter it!" She said, "no way, I don't do that" and I told her we can do it, just step side to side. We won. She became a winner.

Out West with Harriet

I asked Harriet if she ever traveled, and she said yes. I said, where'd you go? Well, she said, we went up to Tennessee. That's about 30 miles north of where we live now.

It was time for me to start becoming a tour guide.

I decided it would be worth it to go with Harriet and her daughter Kara on a trip out West. Right after school ended for the summer, we got in the car and started driving towards our first destination, Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. By four o'clock in the morning we had reached a bleak gas station in the middle of the desert.

Harriet and Kara went into the bathroom and I, for a joke, drove the car around the back to make it look like I took off. Harriet came out, didn't see the car there and panicked.

Immediately she tried to figure out how to borrow a quarter so she could call her mother. When I came back around front I thought it was the funniest thing I'd ever done. 42 years later, and she still hasn't forgiven me for that little stunt.

In any case, the next day, we drove into the town of Carlsbad and set up camp in the public park. I told Harriet and Kara to go take showers. It was a concrete bunker with no shower curtain. Harriet and Kara weren't exactly pleased with the accommodations.

But I was taking on my new role as tour guide and so,

the next day, we set off to Carlsbad Caverns. On the way we drove through a weather front and experienced it as you only can in the desert with its long vistas. We were in pure sunshine and could see it in front of us, and then in an instant were in a solid downpour. Kara had never seen such a thing.

We got to the caverns. To start we went down a long, long slope going deeper and deeper into the cave. Eventually we made it to the bottom, and there we were, 750 feet below ground! Now this was tourism, not adventure, and there was a telephone there.

Kara, in this incredible spot, called her grandmother and shouted “grandma, guess what! we went through a front!” It’s not what I thought she should be excited about, but still I was glad she was learning and engaged.

We walked around the cave and got to see a lot of great formations. It was unlike anything Harriet or Kara had ever seen and a really good experience for them both. We then started the long hike back out, but this was tourism, not adventure, and after a little walking, took an elevator back up to the surface.

From there we headed to the Painted Desert. We stopped at a road side stand on the way, and Harriet bought some geodes. She was excited about them, so I took the opportunity to ask where she wanted to go next year on a vacation. She immediately said, well, this is all a desert.

And there are no trees and no lakes, no rivers, like back east. So more of this? Egypt. That actually was her answer. Egypt. That was going to be a difficult job for this tour guide.

We drove into the next town at about three o'clock in the afternoon. I had been here before and immediately took them over to a little park where there were about 100 Hispanic kids swimming in a brown river. Kara went swimming, Harriet set up to work on her tan, and I laid out a blanket and completely covered myself so flies wouldn't bother me.

This is the number two story that Harriet hasn't forgotten for 42 years. The way she talks about me covering up to fend off the flies is still a riot today.

From there we drove into Vegas and it was hot. It was so hot you couldn't turn on the car air conditioner as it burned up the engine. We stopped about an hour outside of Vegas and decided to camp rather than pay for a hotel. Harriet went and took a shower while I set up a tent. When Harriet came back from the shower I told her to go in the tent. A couple of minutes later I couldn't find her or Kara.

It turns out they were sleeping on the picnic table. I couldn't figure out what was going on so I went into the tent. It was about 200 degrees. Between the heat from the ground and the heat from the tent it was unbearable.

The next morning we went to one of the hotels in Vegas, but quickly found out that the room they gave us wasn't air conditioned. So we spent most of the day moving our clothes around from room to room trying to find a room that wasn't occupied and had working air conditioning.

Harriet and I decided to take in a show and found a daycare center for Kara. Harriet couldn't get used to that idea, but it was an excellent daycare center. It was set up for the kids of the dancers at the hotel shows and was well funded and well equipped. They really knew how to take care of the kids, but neither Kara nor Harriet had ever felt comfortable with them.

We jumped back in the car and we're going to drive through Death Valley. Once, on a previous occasion, I took a wrong left turn going to Death Valley and wound up driving away from it, rather than towards it, for six hours.

Well, I did it again. I rode into the same spot and got to the same stop sign and took that same wrong left turn. Had I taken a right, gone a hundred yards, I would have been able to then take the left through Death Valley.

But oh no, we drove six hours in the wrong direction, turned around, and then, in the heat of the day, drove through Death Valley. It was four o'clock in the morning when we got out of Death Valley and into Big Pine, a

small town on the western slopes of the Sierras.

We went into a diner and got a cup of coffee and started talking to the people about driving to Yosemite from there. They said we couldn't do it. The pass north to Yosemite was completely encased in snow.

I didn't believe them, so I called the United States Department of Interior to ask them. I got someone right away and they confirmed it. No way to get to Yosemite.

So we made a new plan and drove south and through Bakersfield. Gotta be the ugliest town in America. From there we drove up into the Sierra's national parks. It really was worth it though. The Sequoias and Redwoods were there and we got to see these gorgeous trees—huge, huge trees.

When we were in the park Harriet was scared of the bears and didn't want to stop, so we drove all the way through and then down into the valley to camp for the night.

Harriet was brave but always managed to create a safe environment for herself.

Elk

On another trip, we were in the Tetons in the fall and we had taken a short hike. It was a circular route and near the end we came around a corner and were about 200 yards down a road from the car.

The only trouble was, there was a giant elk standing in the woods by the side of the road with three of his harem right in front of us. Well, okay, we'll just go back around the trail. The problem was, there was a thunderstorm coming at our back, so we couldn't go back. There was literally a tornado at our back but if we went forward, we'd have to deal with a giant elk with the biggest antlers you've ever seen.

We decided to deal with the elk. We walked out into an open field on the other side of the road, at an angle to the elk. We kept looking back and luckily the elk stayed in the woods and Harriet and I were in the open field and we kept looking back and the elk kept looking at his harem and we kept looking back and Harriet kept looking at the harem and finally we reached the car, got in real fast and got out of there.

There was still some adventure, trepidation, in our tourism.

The Best Restaurant

Food was always an issue. Harriet loved to eat in a good environment and eat good food. So wherever we ate, we made sure it was a good restaurant. When we got to the Tetons, we'd go to the ranger station and I'd be looking up trails and she'd be looking at menus in restaurants in town.

We ate at some fine restaurants in Jackson Hole, such as Jenny Leigh's and the Gun Barrel, both serving wild game.

So one day we're driving up over a mountain and we're about three quarters the way up and she says stop. So I stop along the side of a road and she gets out a turkey sandwich and we sit on the guardrail and eat lunch.

I was stunned to this day that she thought that guardrail was the nicest restaurant she's ever eaten at. I'll never forget it.

The Golf Cart

I went to play golf and took Harriet with me, riding in the cart. She thought we'd need food and filled up an ice chest with food, filled it up. Now this is no small ice chest. This is the big ice chest you take to the beach.

It was so big we couldn't put it in the back of the golf cart. We had to put it by our feet. It was so filled with food, the top wouldn't close. We had more food than we needed for a week on an expedition.

There we were driving down the golf course, lots of food, and we get to the third hole and up drives the woman with a golf cart selling food. She says, we have sandwiches. Do you want anything?

I was thinking we had enough food for six people for a week, but Harriet says yes. And she buys a turkey sandwich. I also bought a turkey sandwich with all the food in the world right there by my feet. The golf company did not complain that we had food in the cart.

Cause we bought turkey sandwiches.

Cruise

One time, Harriet and I went on a cruise, and Harriet would order every single appetizer on the menu. The other people sitting at our table started to comment on how much she ate, but still, she ordered every single appetizer on the menu.

The waiter got a little frustrated because he couldn't keep up with her and get everybody else eating at the same time. Harriet just said, bring it on. I'll eat it as fast as you bring it. And she did. Finally, one night, one of the guests said, "boy, you eat a lot."

And Harriet turned around and said, "yeah, because I'm a diabetic, and I can't have bread, and I can't have dessert. So I eat appetizers, lots of them, all of them." Showed them. You can attack Harriet about anything but food.

Killer Whales

We decided to take a trip to Alaska, driving most of the way, and taking an overnight ferry up through the Alaskan Panhandle. It would take some planning. Harriet was going to stay home and get on the phone and spend the day trying to make a reservation for the ferry so we could have a room.

I got home at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and she proudly said that she didn't make a room reservation because there were deck chairs to sleep in and the trip at night was interesting because of the blue lights that lit the way through the many channels of the ferry's route.

I still wanted a room. So I called back and got a reservation.

Upon boarding the boat the captain told us about the blue lights. I'd seen them before and didn't think they were worth it, but Harriet insisted we stay up and watch them.

Well, we stayed up until about 12 o'clock at night. And Harriet turned and said, I don't feel too good. She was really sick, so we went back down to the room. We never saw the blue lights and we went to sleep in the room.

The next day, the boat was pulling in to the harbor in Skagway, and we'd gone up on deck. The captain said, "look!" and pointed out killer whales with babies jumping over their backs. He said in all his years sailing these waters he had never seen such a thing. I was feeling so

proud that I'd brought Harriet on this trip.

Now, as this was happening, I had been arguing with a logger about logging in Alaska, and didn't realize Harriet had gone back into the cabin. Once the whales had left, the captain told us to get ready to pack up to disembark, so I went back down to the room.

I was in the cabin, taking stuff out of the drawers, when lo and behold, who walks out of the bathroom? Harriet! The entire time, she's been taking a shower. She wasn't on deck. She never saw the whales.

After telling her about them, all I had was a frustrated woman with wet hair bemoaning her fate: "I know they'd do that. They keep doing that. They take the birds away and they take the fish away. And I don't get to see anything."

I needed to get better at being a tour guide.

Fossils

Before we got to the ferry, we'd driven over the Canadian Rockies and through Smithers, British Columbia, which is the home of Driftwood Canyon Provincial Park. This is the home of one of the most diverse known beds of fossils.

Well it was raining and there were lots of mosquitos, so I thought Harriet wouldn't like it. Except, you could go up, find a rock and then easily split it open with the tools they gave you and find a fossil inside! She was fascinated and kept sending me up to get more of these rocks which she opened to get the fossils.

The rules were, you would take the fossils you found into the museum, and if they were ones they already had, you could take them home with you. We wound up with about forty we took home with us.

The whole point of driving to Alaska was not so much being in Alaska, but to experience all the fascinating places you got to stop at along the way.

Alaskan Salmon

The way the ferry worked was you could take your car off the ferry along the way, drive around and get back on later. The first night we were in Alaska, we went into a grocery store and bought some salmon. We took it back to the campsite and cooked it. It was delicious. We had that, a baked potato and a big salad.

A couple of days later, we wanted to recreate that meal. So we went to the grocery store again. Harriet stayed in the car and I went in to buy the salmon. Came back out and told Harriet, “there's a piece of salmon that's about a little less than half of what we bought the other night.”

We thought it would be enough. We go back to the campsite and cook up the salmon. Well, we don't eat the mashed potatoes. We don't eat the salad, and we don't finish the salmon. To this day, Harriet and I have no idea on how we ate that much salmon on the first night, literally twice as much food as we had on the second night.

St. Thomas

There was the time we went to St. Thomas, and there's a beautiful, beautiful beach right near the hotel, Megan's Bay. We went down there and walked out on the beach and laid out our blankets. Now, because my skin was so sensitive, I laid my blanket in the woods.

Harriet got really pissed. She was gonna put her blanket in the sun and she wanted to have a loving moment together. I stuck to my guns because I knew I'd get burnt and kept my blanket in a shady spot. Well, after an hour, Harriet said we ought to go in.

And when we went back to the hotel room there she was, a red lobster, red as could be, burned and fried and cooked.

Prior to going to the Caribbean, Harriet was really insistent that we were gonna go out every night and party after dinner. Well, we'd go to dinner at 5:30 because she had to eat early because of her diabetes and we'd get back to the hotel room at 6:30 and then I'd watch a little TV. When it was time to go out an party, I'd look over, and there she was, dead asleep, out cold, roasting in her red blanket, which was her skin.

A whole week, every night, it was the same story. No partying, just red skin. I enjoyed it because it saved me a fortune in entertainment costs! So much for tour guide advice.

Snorkel

Well, we're down at St. Thomas. We got on an afternoon diving trip. They gave us snorkels and fins and life jackets. We dove in and Harriet actually saw an eel. Swam around for a while and came out of the water. In a few minutes we were talking to some 80 year old gentleman.

Harriet told him she was embarrassed because she wasn't a good swimmer and had to wear a life jacket. And the 80 year old guy said, the only people that should be embarrassed are the ones back on the shore who aren't doing anything at all.

Made her feel real good. For a moment she felt like an adventurer.

Hawaii

We had one of those small, but special moments in Hawaii. We had driven across the main island and hiked through a national park, then drove back across the island and, at 8 o'clock, hungry and tired, started looking for a place to eat.

The restaurants were all filled, but we found one that might have some customers leaving. One of the tables was on a little peninsula they had built out over the ocean. The people at that table were just finishing eating.

And we got that table. Once you sat at it, you didn't see any other people. It was like you were alone in the middle of the ocean.

Our waitress got to talking with us and said she was pondering going to Thailand. I told her of my adventures in Africa and urged her to be an adventurer.

So, for her, our being there helped with her decision to travel, and, for us, we, on our last night in Hawaii, got to enjoy eating in a magical setting, overlooking the ocean and under a full moon.

All because we happened to arrive at just the right time.

Myrtle Beach

Harriet said she wanted to go on vacation to Myrtle Beach. And I thought that'd be fun. So we drove 6 hours to Myrtle Beach. And about a half hour before we got to the campsite, Harriet turned to Kara and said, now listen, Kara, I don't like any sand. So don't push any sand in my bed. Don't push any sand on me. I don't want to be touched by sand. Don't come anywhere near me with the sand. I want to enjoy this vacation. I looked at Harriet and said, “why did I drive 6 hours to a beach?”

Windy Tent

One summer we spent some time camping in Yellowstone. We'd taken a side trip but it had turned windy and rainy, so we returned to camp and found the tent had blown down. I thought I had done a pretty good job of setting the tent up with extra-long stakes, but I guess not.

The wind had blown the tent so high that it came out of the stakes, and it was raining. But I held my sense of humor, and I was surprised that Harriet did too. The clothes inside the tent were still dry, so all we had to do was get the tent back up and everything would be all right.

Well we got the tent back up, but then it blew down again. We got the tent back up again, and it blew down again. We got the tent up the fourth time, and it blew down again. Luckily, right next to our campsite was a motor home with some very nice people and Bloody Marys.

We just walked our way into that motor home, grabbed those Bloody Marys, and drank the afternoon away.

[Harriet interjects - Remember that they said they had such fun watching and laughing over us getting that tent back up. They couldn't believe it.]

Skiing

We decided to go on a winter vacation and try skiing. We borrowed some skis and also had a friend who had a cabin in the West Virginia mountains that he let us use. So off we went.

We got to the ski area and Harriet said, “we got to pay.” I said, “we don't have to pay, just go and put your skis on.” Harriet said, “we have to pay.” I said, “no, we don't have to pay, just put your skis on.” So she walked about 20 feet past where you put the skis on the racks.

We slipped the skis on her, and I said, okay, push. She pushed and immediately fell down. All you heard then was “get them off! get them off!” I said, “Harriet, I know how to stand up easily. Let me help you up.”

“No, get them off!” I said, “no, Harriet, listen, in one second I'll get them off.”

”Get them off! Get them off now!”

“Harriet, we can try this again.”

“We're not trying anything again. Get them off.”

So I got them off, and we went inside, and we had some drinks, and that was the extent of our snow skiing experience.

That became the line in the sand. Pain was an unacceptable experience. In my adventure days pain was something you sought, but now it was something to avoid.

Cabin

Eventually, it was time to stop going on these excursions. Harriet always had a dream of buying a cabin. I had never wanted one, but things were different now. So she looked up cabins in the nearby mountains. We got in the car that weekend and drove up to those mountains, but the cheapest cabin was three million dollars. I thought, yay, we don't have to buy a cabin.

Well we came home and I didn't know this, but Harriet was looking on Google at mountain cabins further away. Sure enough, she finds two. We drive up to the mountains the next weekend and right away we find a little A-frame set back in the woods, an absolutely adorable little cabin priced at \$148,000. Harriet sat quietly because she knew this was going to be the cabin.

But there was another cabin for \$79,000.

What? Yes, okay, we'll look at it.

So we drove over there and started up a paved road. The paved road became a dirt road. The dirt road became a one-lane dirt road. Finally, the road stopped and we couldn't figure out where this cabin was. We drove back to the first cabin, called up the real estate agent, and met her at the A-frame, which Harriet, in her mind, had already bought.

The real estate agent came in, and we asked about the other cabin that was listed. Where was it? She said, "oh, that one. It burned down this weekend." So yeah, this one

was Harriet's cabin, and we bought it for a good price.

We were now the proud owners of the ultimate adorable mountain cabin.

Somebody asked Harriet what needs to be fixed up, and she said first thing was the light fixtures had to go. They were a fake brass. “They're terrible. They look ugly, okay?”

The next day, Harriet's daughter comes to see the cabin. She takes one look at the light fixtures, and says, “those have got to go.” Like mother like daughter.

They went.

Another transition was now complete. The tour guide was now the cabin maintenance man.

Harriet's Telling of the Story

For as long as I can remember, I had silently wished for a small, mountain cabin. Once, I mentioned this to Sid. He was absolutely opposed to the idea, because he was an adventurer and thought a cabin would mean giving up on travels. At that time, he was correct...but things changed. We had a very disappointing cruise through the Panama Canal followed by a difficult excursion to Puerto Rico.

Suddenly even Sid was considering looking for a cabin!

I went downstairs to Sid's computer and researched cabins near Helen, GA. Well, two popped up. Reasonably priced and both looked interesting. When I finally

broached that news with Sid, he actually said we'll drive up and take a look. My heart started beating very fast... wow, he was willing to look!

We drove to the first address. I looked down this ski sloped driveway and saw the sweetest, little cabin. Thankfully, I didn't say it out loud, but in my mind I said...that's mine. Sid seemed interested and we decided to call the realtor to see if she would show us the inside. She needed to wait for an hour or two, so Sid suggested we go to the other cabin. Inside, I thought there is no reason to do that, but for once, I didn't say anything. We got to the correct road and began driving down this extremely narrow dirt road. I said...I sure hope another car doesn't come down this road because we will have to back all the way out.

We got to where the cabin should be and there was no cabin. We drove back and forth trying to see where the cabin might be when, for some reason, I looked up. The trees were all scorched. I said to Sid, look at those trees. They've been burned. We realized the cabin had burned. Later, the realtor told us it had burned to the ground on July 4th! So guess where we went? Yes! Back to the cabin I really wanted...even though I had not seen the inside!

The cabin door opened...and there was my adored cabin. I fell in love all over again. One very large, open room that had a small kitchen, a place for a table, the

futon/ couch, a big, comfortable chair, and a beautiful fireplace. We walked down a short hall...and on the right was a lovely bed perfect for a cabin. Next to that a small bathroom and on the left a washer and dryer with shelving opposite that. I was in love!

There was an upstairs loft with a tiny bathroom that only an elf could use, but it was great! Then we went downstairs. Those stairs are like a jungle gym after a tornado, but I'm so short I just popped down in seconds. There was a bunk bed set and a pool table on the other side. Another bathroom was there...with a sink and a toilet and plenty of unused space. I was really surprised no one had added a shower or a tub in that space...we did later!

The back had a huge porch overlooking a tree that had to be well over a hundred years old. So big, so beautiful. And...on the other side...a hot tub!

Every step I took confirmed my first thought on seeing the cabin from the road...that's mine! And Sid's too, of course. I could only be happy with him there.



Our Cabin



Our Cabin