

The Umbrella Tent June 20, 2012

Hi Samantha

Since we are setting up for our road trip I thought I would tell you a bit about my early road trips as a boy. This would be when I was about your age and younger - maybe when I was about 8 or 10 (1950's or so).

Dad was a machinist at *Vancouver Iron and Engineering Works* in Vancouver. In those days he would feel very lucky when he got a week summer vacation per year. It was nothing like the time off one gets these days!

All year he and Mom would spend planning the week's holiday and we would all look forward to packing up the car and heading out on the road to new adventures. Since we were quite poor, this meant putting our equipment in a large wooden box that Dad built for the top of our 1939 Chev and cramming the leftovers into the rather small trunk. We three boys would then begin the "negotiations" about who could get a window seat in the back - and who got to sit in the middle. Dad (and the rest of us) were very proud of that roof box, since Dad had designed it so that it could be used as our picnic table when it was removed for unloading. The top came off and legs swung down from the inside to support it on any reasonably level surface. This was often necessary since there weren't many organized campsites in those days and Dad preferred to travel the backroads anyway.

Our sleeping arrangements were greatly improved when Dad bought a canvas umbrella tent one memorable year. This was the year he had decided to go to one of our favourite spots: Penticton. I loved it since I remembered the joy of playing on the paddleboards in the warm water of Okanagon Lake and eating Dreamsicles to cool off when we were thoroughly heated. In those days we could only find Dreamsicles in the Okanagon region so they were a nice treat - and only 5¢ each.

When we arrived with our new tent we no longer had to rely on finding a motel to stay (a difficult challenge in the summer) but all we needed was a clear area to pitch our tent. As it turned out, this was still a bit of a challenge because we were there at the height of the season and we wanted a site that was an easy walk to the sandy beach.

In the end, we found a spot at the west end of the beachfront - not too far from the paddlewheeler that was moored as a heritage attraction (The S.S. Sicamous). It was built by the CPR. The photo is from about 1961 - when we were there. You can't see the big paddlewheel in the back, though.

It was late in the evening when we arrived since we had stopped off in Manning Park



on the way. In the end Dad and Pete had to set up the new tent in the dark as the rest of us prepared dinner and unloaded the car. We were also a bit rushed because the sky had darkened with clouds and the winds had risen in the way that makes that region famous (Okanagon is an aboriginal word meaning "sudden winds"). It was during the setup that we heard Dad exclaim that there was a part missing from the tent package received from the store.

Disaster was averted, however, by another of Dad's famous "make do" innovations - he got a piece of haywire to hold the tent frame together for the night.

As we finally crawled into our sleeping bags around the tent pole, the rain had already begun and the wind had picked up enough to keep the tent walls in constant motion.

I don't know how long I slept but I remember waking up in the middle of the night - with the wind howling, the lightning flashing, and the driving rain washing over the tent walls like we were under a waterfall. Dad was standing in the middle of the tent hanging on tightly to the frame where the piece was missing. His make-do repair was ok, but it had not been up to the force of the storm. As a result, it was Dad who had to serve as the pole - for most of the night. We just hoped that the lightning didn't strike it.

By morning the storm had passed so we were able to dry out our equipment, have some breakfast and search out the paddleboards for the day. Dad's job was find a hardware store to find a more robust replacement for his haywire. Luckily, he was successful – not that he found the exact piece, but he did find some hardware that would do a better job than his haywire.

The following night we were all prepared for another storm – but we didn't put his contraption to the test that trip. Instead, we were able to concentrate on the paddleboards, dreamsicles, and marshmallow roasts.

We did learn, however, that one must always test out new camping equipment before taking in to the road! I hope you have been testing our Westfalia.

Love,
Bill