



6/2/94

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

"Let's go canoeing again."

"Yea, what a great idea. We had such a great time last time, why not do it again?"

"Okay, we'll do it."

It seemed like such a great idea last year, too.

We would launch at the base of Hoover Dam and float 34 miles to Eldorado Canyon. Since the Colorado River flows at about 30 miles an hour, we could conceivably make it in under two hours. We planned to take three days so we'd have much time to explore, camp, laze around, and generally commune with Nature.

Yea, right!

Karl Kreder, Don Miller, Tom Springer, Erica Grong, Ben Wilson, Chris Rathjen, JoHn Hardin and I prepared for the trip for weeks. Maps were copied and distributed, menus were planed, packs were packed and everything was set, we thought.

Isn't there something written about the best laid plans of mice and men?

Anyway, we all rendezvoused at my house around 7:30 AM on the morning we were to start. ~~We~~, except JoHn (who worked all night and would meet us at the starting point) and Don (who was just late).

It's important to note that even though we would spend our three days in the Lake Mead National Park, the Bureau of Reclamation (a fancy, government-type name for "people who run the dams") controls the area just above and below Hoover Dam. Hoover Dam was/is considered to be a prime target for terrorists and other unsavory sorts. It is protected by machine gun bunkers and armed guards, and all of them mean business. The Bureau of Reclamation has a deal with the National Park Service. They allow people to launch canoes and other small, human powered boats from the base of the dam, but only if the party is registered in advance and then escorted to the river by a Federal Police Officer. Punctuality is essential. They don't like to wait.

JoHn was late.

After waiting twenty minutes for him to show, we decided to go without him. It was either that or not go at all.

Had we waited twenty-two minutes, JoHn would have been there.

He was just in time to see us go through the security gates without him.

Being JoHn, he walked the two miles down to the launch site. Technically he was trespassing on federal lands. Well protected federal lands.

While we were unloading the canoes and

equipment, he walked up and started helping. Great, there would be eight of us after all. The Federal Police Officer that escorted us must've been suffering from prostate problems or some other such ailment that day. After we had unloaded *everything*, packed it all into the canoes and were launching, the officer called down to JoHn Hardin, telling him he couldn't go since he had trespassed across federal lands to get here. Hard ass!

(The details of what ensued between the officer, JoHn, Aileen, Dandi, Becky Milford and William are best left to them to tell. I was in a canoe and not privy to the conversation. Suffice to say it wasn't pretty.)

Seven of us launched in four canoes. Seven of us without much canoeing experience set out on the mighty Colorado River.

Water temperature: 52°. Air temperature: 110°.

"Fools," you say?

Hah, we laugh at danger. We spit in the face of adventure. We challenge Nature to defeat us.

"Put your life jackets on," came a voice of command booming down the canyon.

An officer enforcing the law? No, just Aileen expressing concern for her husband. Strangely enough, seven of us scurried to don our personal floatation devices.

Fast forward to one mile later.

The canoes are tied together and also to the shore. The adventurers are relaxing, drinking, smoking and generally trying to get into the proper mood to float down the other thirty-three miles.

Ben decided the water looked inviting and the heat too oppressive.

"Watch me dive off these rocks," Ben bragged.

"The water is *really* cold, Ben. Are you sure you want to..." my warning was drowned out by the sound of Ben splashing into the river.

You know, it is really amazing how fast someone can get out of a river if they don't realize exactly how cold it is. I think Ben has been studying for his messiah merit badge. He didn't exactly *walk* on water, but he found a way to get in and back out of the river without actually touching anything else. It was kind of like watching a film of someone diving into a pool and then quickly reversing the film.

As usual, Don was messing with things. Packing, stowing, arranging, rearranging, etc. It's just the kind of thing Don likes to do. Tom cautioned him to be careful.

"These canoes are pretty tricky, you don't want to fall in."

I don't know why I felt the need to contradict him.

"You're crazy, Tom," I said as I stood up. "These things are remarkably steady."

God has a way of punishing the over confident. Just as I was saying "steady," I slipped and fell, ripping my arm open on the sharp rocks the canoes

were tied to. Boy was this going to be a great trip.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. That is if you don't consider Karl and Erica tipping over into the river eventful. Ben dislocated his shoulder trying to save them. Karl suffered from hypothermia. The details of that part are chronicled in an earlier Apa-V in Karl's **Encumbrance**.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. That is if you don't consider flying insects large enough to cause echoes with their wings eventful.

The rest of the trip was uneventful. That is if you don't consider a bunch of fools so drunk and out of it that they don't notice themselves trapped in an eddy and slowly circling in the same spot for twenty minutes eventful.

The rest of the trip was uneventful.

Just as a side note, anyone who wants to do some serious getting-away-from-it-all (no, not from fandom, but from city life), I strongly suggest the Beaver Dam State Park. It's about 40 miles outside of Caliente, Nevada (which is about 120 miles north of Las Vegas).

The park has perfect campsites, extremely clean facilities, no graffiti on anything. Each site has running water and nearby bathrooms. And such interesting fauna and flora that you'll never get tired of looking. Beaver, fox, orioles, hawks, red winged blackbirds, plovers, swallows, trout, dragonflies, bumble bees, swallowtail butterflies, frogs, wild oats, wild wheat, wild orchids, oak, bear grass, cattails, wild grape (just a side note, the grape vines were rampant, they grew everywhere), currants, blackberries, clover, flowering locusts, the list is much longer than this.

Canyons, gullies, beaver dams, trout streams. I felt like I was in an National Geographic. It's really worth it!

As always, Apa-tizer is brought to you by the sick and twisted mind of

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The Curse

The night before I got married, my future brother and father-in-law asked me what I'd like to do for a bachelor party. This being Iowa and both of them fairly religious, I said "Let's go fishing." Matt, Aileen's brother, lived on a small lake some 60 miles from Des Moines and I figured that doing some fishing from his dock would be fun.

On the way there, Matt said "We need some bait."

The sun was setting and much of small town Iowa rolls up their sidewalks at three in the afternoon so I wondered to my self "Where would we get bait?"

We pulled into a closed gas station in a small town on the way. Right up to a vending machine, the kind that usually dispenses Pepsi or Coke. This one was painted all white and displayed a sign that read "Vend-a-Bait."

What the hell? Vend-a-Bait?

The buttons were labeled "night-crawlers," "meal worms," and "red worms." Only two dollars. Iowa is a foreign country.

I caught a few catfish that night, and had a great time.

The next afternoon, I married Aileen and I haven't been able to catch a fish since.

For seven years I've tried.

Fishes, lures, Power Bait, everything. Nothing worked. It stopped being a joke and started becoming a challenge.

I accused Aileen of placing a curse on me. I never was a great fisherman, but I've fished since I was a little kid. I usually caught something, but no more.

I tried lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, everything. Nothing worked. I couldn't give up and admit defeat. It's embarrassing to be that bad.

It's not like there weren't any fish. Karl and Tom can attest to the times I've tried. There were fish, we could see them. I just couldn't catch them. I'd probably starve to death if I had to survive in the wild.

This last week, Aileen, Jazz and I went camping at a state park on the Nevada/Utah border. Beaver Dam State Park. I brought my fishing pole and tackle. Why stop trying now?

We arrived just as the Nevada Wildlife people were stocking the lake with rainbow trout. Aileen had never seen a lake stocked before so we stayed to watch.

Hundreds of seven inch long trout were poured from the truck into the lake. Some of them, confused by the new surroundings, swam up the shallow stream that fed the lake. The movement caught Jazz' attention so he started following them around.

The next thing I knew, my dog was standing there with a trout in his mouth.

"Put that down! Drop it!" I commanded him. He placed the fish, unharmed, back into the water.

Fuck, even my dog can catch fish.

Maybe I should give up.

Nah.