

RELAX! I've Got It

It has been repeatedly proven that there are few skills that exist outside of the HON's collective repertoire of finely honed talents. As a cohesive group of determined, proud women, we have demonstrated our numerous skills by overcoming the most difficult of life's challenges. Sometimes, too, we find ourselves confronted with unexpected physical challenges which can be conquered only with the wisdom that becomes women who know how to battle the inevitable Big "M". In addition, we have learned to be opportunists. We eagerly embrace new learning experiences (particularly the kind we once grounded our kids for) with enthusiasm and confidence. One such opportunity recently arose while horse camping in close proximity to the "Crookedest River in Wisconsin".

Exchanging our reins for paddles, and giving our horses a much needed rest, we opted to brave the Kickapoo River. Our combined bargain hunting skills lead, Sherri, Dee, Sandy and I to a variety of outfitters. Undoubtedly, we had a discriminating eye for high quality and professional service. Of the many canoe rental choices available, we were ultimately drawn to our final choice for two very important reasons: It might indeed be the one and only time we could ever write a check to a "Mr. Duck". Secondly, but most importantly, we deemed ourselves worthy of Mr. Duck's discount rate for groups like us. Nooo.... Don't even think it was because we flashed Mr. Duck an AARP card; we are far too much in denial for that.

Following some creative rationalization and slight shifts in words (that kept us just above the line of total deception) we became a group of "military-related" women. Perhaps we did look rather convincing considering I was wearing my authentic olive drab army shirt and Vietnam jungle boots. (As if any REAL military veteran would still wear this gear). Nevertheless, a substantial discount was awarded by Mr. Duck.

The weather was truly delightful. Fluffy cotton candy clouds were pushed across the deep blue sky by a gentle wind that held just a whisper of autumn air. The temperature was an ideal, humidity free 72

degrees. Our canoes were already awaiting us like two trail-weary horses tied at a hitching post. After briefly examining the soggy, bright orange life vest, we surmised that they would not be needed in what appeared to be sluggish, low energy vessels. I wonder if that is what The Skipper and Mary Ann thought as well.

It was not, however, that we were fearless of all potential danger. As Sergeant Sandy bared her feet to push her and The First Mate's canoe off the bank, her voice quivered with concern, "Are there leeches in here?" Mr. Duck acknowledged her inquiry with a smirk and only one word, "Yup." As I wobbled into the back end of my canoe, I convinced myself that after many years and layers of over-spray from fly repellent some chemical residue would likely have leech repellent properties.

Skillfully balancing a full, open beverage between her knees, my partner, General Dee, was already in position. Sergeant Sandy had ingenuously passed it over from her cooler by using her paddle as a long handled serving tray. Creating smooth, even ripples behind them, Sergeant Sandy and First Mate Sherri began to meander through magnificent sandstone outcroppings. This, unfortunately, was the last time we had sight of them for quite some time

From start to finish, General Dee and I experienced our 4 hour tour of duty in a manner much like the little silver balls in an old pinball machine with its player having endless quarters. We never had any rest. We constantly rikashayed off grassy banks, craggy bluffs, and, just once, an unlucky canoeist. On one occasion, we got so tightly wedged between tree limbs that we required the assistance of a muscular "rescuer" with brute strength who had to lift most of our canoe out of the water to free us up.

Our mishaps did not happen for lack of serious effort on our part. We really tried! In fact we did make incremental progress by experimenting with a variety of paddling techniques. As soon as we believed that we had indeed developed a trace of coordination, General Dee would say, "Relax. I've got it."

Invariably, we would then smack, head on, into some foreboding obstacle. Dee became quite adept at catapulting forward while keeping her beverage secure between her legs. When I was unable to ward off a collision by using my paddle like a sword, poking and jabbing our interceptor, I was saved by remembering the old “Duck and Cover” drill practiced regularly in my early elementary school days. By far, though, the biggest nuisance was from constantly hearing the same greeting from passing canoeist: “Hey. Nice Day. Don’t get impaled.” (Duh...like we wouldn’t know that an impaling would not be part of a nice day.)

Okay, admit it. By now you are suspecting that our navigational problems were induced strictly by alcohol. Some things are just obvious. Well, you **are** correct, and I completely blame alcohol for our near impalings, poor judgment, and shameful lack of coordination. We were not, however, **consuming** alcohol; we were quite simply **pursuing** alcohol. This resulted in the need to paddle harder, faster and stronger in attempt to catch up to the cooler held captive by our Sergeant and First Mate Sherri.

At one point, we actually did meet up with them. This feat was successfully accomplished by us asking every passing canoeist to give them a message to wait for us. Nevertheless, when we finally got within shouting distance of them, we learned that their cooler was empty. It was at this point that I realized that our fearless leader was not afraid of the leech classification, *Hirudo medicinalis*, which stick to you; she was leery of her “ill prepared” troops without their own cooler supplies.

Luckily, thanks to their keen sightseeing skills, Sherri and Sandy had already identified a couple of canoeists as being the “most likely to share.” At the next sandbar that looked like a tiny strip of Cancun during Spring Break, Sgt S. ordered me to make the official request. I was not in the least bit reluctant; at my age I have learned what makes the male juices flow. With a firm resolve, I approached them and hinted at this fair exchange... a few beers for an invitation to our delectable, home cooked dinner meal.

Just as I was assuring these young men that everyone in our horse club was WAY younger than us, Sergeant Sandy shouted, “Never mind. We got some!” There was no delicate way to escape this

awkward situation now, even though I was tempted to shout back, "I don't like beer and they have wine coolers." Anyway, I hope these men don't remember the Hags on Nags shirt Sandy was wearing. To protect our esteemed reputation, we really should be more discriminate about where we publically display our logo.

Even our shuttle back to our starting point was memorable. In an old reclaimed Head Start school bus, we careened down the hills with music blaring in our ears "...stop, shut your lips, do the Helen Keller and talk with your hips..." I believe the repeating lyrics and steady rhythm really got Sandy into the mood. She was obviously deep in thought about what she was going to do once she returned home. This year, she would open her middle school unit on Helen Keller with this most educational song, "...stop, shut your lips, do the Helen Keller and talk with your hips..."

And so, one more educational field trip, sponsored by the HONs, goes down in history.