



Jeanne Robertson

Family Fun? Good memories, regardless ...

It's Family Fun Month. (I'd never heard of it either.) My advice on that piece of information is simple. When planning Family Fun remember that what's fun for some may not be fun for all. It's nice to be a good sport and try new experiences but doing so doesn't automatically guarantee fun for everyone.

Thirty years ago friends invited my husband "Left Brain" and me to join other families for a weekend in the beautiful North Carolina mountains. The trip included a three-hour whitewater rafting excursion down the Nantahala River if we chose to go. I was "all in." Left Brain wanted to spend the weekend in the mountains and eat the good food we heard about but wasn't keen on the whitewater rafting part. I talked him into it. We had never rafted but a couple of the guys in the group knew all about it, having been in the Boy Scouts. They would be our leaders. We felt safe enough and in good hands. What were we thinking? The Nantahala is a Class Three river and at spots goes up to a Class Five. Simply put, these numbers mean people should know what they're doing before hopping onto a raft, paddle in hand. The Nantahala can be tough. Especially if you've never rafted before in your life.

In hindsight, a little training might have been a good idea, but the die was cast when we accepted the invitation and I talked Left Brain into the rafting part. We headed west on I-40 excited to be with each other and friends on a new adventure that would lead to fun memories. We dropped by the Nantahala the afternoon we arrived, "scouting" it for the next morning. We even checked out one of the rapids from a distance. At that point, Left Brain almost backed out but I convinced him it was "a piece of cake." He tossed and turned and worried about it all night.

The next morning six of us including Left Brain and I were on the last raft in our group, paddling down the Nantahala as though we had good sense. One of the Boy Scout guys was seated in the

front of our raft, paddling, maneuvering and shouting directions as our little party brought up the rear of our entire "expedition." Our leader wanted to be in the last raft in case anyone in the larger group ahead of us needed assistance. Four of us were in the middle of our raft and Left Brain was sitting on the back. He still wasn't sure about the whole rafting part but he's always a good sport and on this trip, didn't want to be the one who backed out. We were in our orange life preservers, paddling away and watching the water carefully. Rocks were around us and rapids were up ahead. Whee?

Looking back on it, I guess the Nantahala's terrain was typical. The river swirled along its path between steep embankments on either side. The water crashed against low rocks that made it noisy, causing us to point or shout at the top of our lungs if we needed to communicate with others on our raft. A high embankment was on our right with trees lining the water. There was a two-lane road at the top of the embankment on our left side as we faced down river. Drivers on the road slowed to look at the rafters below, probably saying, "Look! Rafters! They must know what they're doing. Take their picture."

We were engrossed in our paddling - eyes on the water - when one of the women in the middle of our raft, shouted over the roar of the water. "When y'all get a chance, look up at the road on the left! There's a wild man in a life preserver - running down the road - waving a paddle over his head!" There was no "When you get a chance" to it. We all immediately looked up toward the road. Seconds later we practically said in unison, "It's Left Brain!"

Stunned, the five of us turned to look at the back of our raft. Sure 'nuff. Left Brain was gone! Way back up the river, he had been bumped from the back of the raft into the swirling water. Later he said he had shouted at us when he was bumped off and shouted even louder as we paddled away from him but with the noise of the rushing water, we hadn't

heard him. He somehow made his way to the side of the river, climbed up the muddy embankment by pulling on roots and had been running to get in front of us, waving his paddle above his head the entire time. Cars had pulled off the road to get out of his way. Who could blame them?

When we realized he had spotted us below him in the water, we started shouting and pointing to a spot ahead of us, at the base of the embankment where we thought we could connect. "OVER THERE!" "Slide down the bank!" "We'll pick you up!"

We paddled over ASAP like a family of beavers to the appointed place to wait for Left Brain to come down through the weeds and mud. He could see we were in position but he wasn't moving. Instead, he stood on the edge of the road, dripping wet from the river and perspiration, mud all over him, staring down at us. Finally he wanted to make sure we knew what he had been through, I guess, and shouted in our direction at the top of his lungs, "I've been running for over a mile to get in front of the raft!"

"Well, you made it. Come on! We've got to catch up!"

To which Left Brain shouted back slowly, enunciating each word, "CAN EVERYONE HEAR ME?"

The five of us shouted in unison. "YES!"

"GOOD. HEAR THIS! I'M NOT GETTING BACK ON THAT RAFT!"

Seconds later we watched as Left Brain got in a car with kind hearted tourists and rode away, waving his paddle at us out the window as they departed.

Have loads of family fun as we wind down summer this month but do remember. What's fun for some is not always fun for others. The good thing, though, is that even when events don't go our way during "Family Fun," they make great family memories and stories that will be told and told and told. Trust me.

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