



# Jeanne Robertson

## August Time to Think June?

**I**t's August. Still vacation time for many. And time for a piece of advice from yours truly. Husband Left Brain and I consider ourselves to be athletes. . . . for our age. We're not going to bungee jump off a high bridge or send Christmas cards of us skydiving in tandem, but in general when it comes to sports, we're "in."

Like many in our generation, we lean toward sports that involve a ball. Golf, basketball, tennis, baseball, pickleball, even table tennis (ping pong) to name a few sports that make sense to us. Also, we understand the concept that the team with the most points at the end, wins. We cheer when a receiver on one of our college teams catches a football in the end zone. Neither of us played football but in the South, when it comes to football, being a super, avid, rabid fan counts toward being an athlete. In some circles.

We also understand sports where the winner is the first one back or across a line, like track, cross-country, NASCAR. No subjective judging. I power walk and for thirty years, Left Brain was the North Carolina Seniors Badminton Champion for whatever age bracket he was in at each competition. I'm a Physical Education major. Left Brain played basketball in college for four years.

All that stated, however, we are not outdoor sports people. You can't turn us loose miles from civilization without rations and think we're going to make it back. Not a chance. Keep that in mind while I share this small piece of advice.

Several years ago I got a call from a speaker buddy in South Carolina named Al Walker. He was putting together an eight-day rafting trip down the Colorado River, through the Grand Canyon, to take place two years from the date of the call. These trips apparently take a lot of planning. Many of the rafters would be professional speakers. They would have to mark off the dates so they wouldn't book a speech during the trip time. That's why Al had to plan so far out. He wanted Left Brain and me to go on the trip. Left Brain wasn't as excited about it as I, but I finally talked him into it.

A decision I will hear about the rest of my life.

Cutting to the chase, two years later, in August, twenty-six of us, not counting our guides, went on an eight-day rafting trip down the Colorado River. Most of us met for the first time in Las Vegas the day before we "put in" to the River. Half were professional speakers and their spouses from all over the country. The other half were from Al Walker's Baptist Church in South Carolina. Most of them sang together in the church choir. Well, after hearing them sing all week it's a stretch to say they sang together. I'll give them this: they sang at the same time. And they practiced. From the time we left Vegas on a bus, we never knew when they would strike up "Shall we gather at the river."

We were all expecting a "clear, cool Colorado River." Why? Because that's what the rafting website declared. It showed pictures. It looked beautiful.

Not so. Oh, the Canyon was beautiful, of course, but the river was a shock. The rushing water looked like brown mud

with reddish, brown debris and bugs floating by on top of it.

When we arrived to "put in" we thought it was joke. The Baptist stopped singing mid-sentence. "Shall we gath... oh, my, my." Someone finally asked our guide, Sparky, "Are y'all being funny or is this really the Colorado?"

His answer was an introduction to the next eight days.

"This is it. You came in August. You should have come in June. The Colorado is clear in June."

Twenty-six people stared speechless, mouths dropping open, at the dark water rushing by as Sparky explained further. "August is Monsoon season. The water's always this muddy during Monsoon. It looks a little bit like chocolate milk, doesn't it? Next time, try to come in June."

Someone mumbled, "June is when they took the pictures for the website."

Hear me! You wouldn't have rinsed off in that water. You wouldn't have cooled off in that water. You wouldn't want your dog in that water and you couldn't have pushed your cat in there. A cat wouldn't have gotten off the bus.

Finally, I managed a question. "Sparky, will it be this muddy all eight days?"

"Well, Jeanne, I could lie to you." Left Brain was standing right behind me and mumbled, "if someone hadn't lied to me I wouldn't be on this trip."

It didn't take us long to discover that getting in the water really didn't matter. We didn't have to get in the river to get in the mud.

How can that be, you ask?

Let's say I have a bucket with a couple of inches of brown mud, debris, small sticks, and a few bugs in it. And I fill that bucket with cold water and start swirling it around while I creep up on you, sitting quietly on a raft minding your own business. When you least expect it, I throw that cold, muddy water smack dab in your face. Bam! Then, while you're reeling from the shock of it, I start swirling another bucket. I do this to you for eight hours a day for eight days.

That, my friends, is what happened to us the moment we got settled in our rafts and headed down the mighty Colorado River.

The river came to us.

Repeatedly.

Splashing us until we were drenched, head to toe. The first time we were slapped with this cold, muddy water we all flinched and turned our heads.

"Oh, my goodness."

"That was something, wasn't it?"

"I'm covered in mud. It messed up my outfit."

"Hand me that towel."

Within seconds, another splash soaked us. Bam again!

"Oh no. It's seeping through my slicker."

"Is it extra rough today, Sparky?"

"Look out! Turn your head!"

After half a day of constant assault, we stopped turning our heads and just paused mid-conversation. "So, you've got three" -- Splash! . . . gulp . . . open eyes -- "children?"

That first day we were taught that there is a spot at the front of each raft that is called the bucket. That space hits the swirling water first and generally

takes the brunt of the river's force. It is considered the most dangerous section on the raft. Three people are in the bucket seat at a time, and, Sparky, the guide, told us, we'd all get to take turns sitting there.

Get to?

Well, as luck would have it, the day we were approaching the biggest rapids we would encounter, Left Brain and I "got to" sit in the bucket seat -- along with one of our new friends from the Baptist choir. I was in the center of the threesome. Sparky stopped the raft at one point and came forward to shout directions to us above the loud sound of rushing water. He was speaking to all on the raft but the three of us in the bucket seat were listening most intently.

He boomed his serious instructions. "We are getting ready . . . to go over a rapid . . ." ("Pay attention, Left Brain.") "where we will drop twenty feet or so! (Twenty feet!) For several seconds or more, you will be completely submerged. (Submerged?) It is important to grasp the ropes at your sides. (I started grasping ropes, Left Brain saw me and grabbed his.) DO NOT LET GO! If you let go, you will be swept off the raft. If that happens, do not fight the water! Go with the flow. We will pick you up down river."

When Sparky went back to his perch at the rear of the raft, Left Brain, clutching the ropes at his sides, shouted to me, "Couldn't hear Sparky. What did he say?"

"He said, 'HOLD ON!'"

It transpired as Sparky had told us, but the impact of going completely under 45-degree water, dropping 20+ feet and completely submerging, left us shocked when we came up out of it. (Oh, and Sparky neglected to mention that the raft would be tossed around under the water like a toy boat!)

When we came up, LB was still on my right - that was good. He was spluttering and clinging to the ropes. When I got my breath, I managed to make eye contact with him and nod, "I'm alive." He nodded back, which I took to mean that he was alive too.

I turned to check on the woman on my left. I was honest. "I...I... don't believe I've been through anything like that."

She inhaled and exhaled deeply a couple of times and said kindly, "You're not a Baptist, are you?"

It's August! Stay home and vacation in North Carolina. If you want to raft down the Colorado River sometime, book it now for any ... June. Because there's a reason ...

June is when they take the pictures for the website.

See me in action on

