

An Interesting Place to Visit

by Gayle Haarr

This Summer we gathered about 35 friends and friends of those friends to go white water rafting together. We all headed up to Watertown, NY to conquer the Black River. Arriving at 9pm on a Friday night, we drive into this campground to discover we have entered The Retirees Haven (no offense to you retirees out there). There were campers that must have been parked there for about 20 years. You could tell by how far they were sunk down into the ground. No need for the steps up to the door anymore. Most of them were already at ground level. Also, these people had more lawn ornaments, teaki torches (I don't know how to spell it, I just know they keep the bugs away), and patio lights than I have ever seen in my entire life. Every camper was decorated, including a lawn name tag. And if they didn't have enough in their 3 x 5 yards, there was a fellow camper who made and sold lawn ornaments on the premises.

Friday evening we watched these folks wander from one camper to another with beer in hand. It was like an older folks' college campus. Instead of wandering around from room to room to have a social drink, they wandered from camper to camper and at each stop they'd have another drink. Once completing the entire loop, they would stumble off to find their camper. I guess that is where the name tags and the lawn ornaments come in handy. "Yep, those 10 pink flamingos are mine."

The next day the old folks were up bright and early eating breakfast outside on their mini patio set-ups. Everybody would wave and say hello to their neighbor on their way to the bathrooms, the showers, the campground store, or when starting the power walk around the campground. These people were definitely at their home away from home here. It was a mini-community and we were the outsiders (there goes the neighborhood.) We were placed way in the back of the campground on the open field. The only reason we even had to come close to their trailers would be to use the bathrooms.

When we were leaving for our rafting trip, the place started hoppin'. Grandchildren were running around everywhere playing in the mini-yards. Old men were off to the river's edge to fish together and old ladies were sitting around gossiping about what was going on in other peoples lives while watching the grandchildren run around. Joy.

Our rafting trip was a lot of fun. I would tell you more about it, but it would take way too long and I'd probably bore you if I haven't already. We had so many good times and funny stories on

the trip. I suggest that if you like water and don't mind being scared to death, go for it!

Saturday evening, when we returned from rafting, the rafting company cooked us all a barbecue dinner (it was part of the package). We were back to our beloved campground to dry off, change, and walk over to the campground pavilion for our tasty dinner. Well, at 5 pm, tons of interesting things are going on at this place. They were setting up the karaoke machine for the evening's festivities. There were three old ladies and three little yappy dogs testing out the equipment. The three old ladies would sing to see if it was working properly, and then the three little yappy dogs would start barking along with them. Where else can you get dinner entertainment this good?

On the other side of the campground, the old men had the grandchildren bowling in the road. They set up 15 cans (empty spaghetti sauce, peaches, apple sauce, and just about every other kind of food that came in a can) in a pyramid shape. The kids would roll a bouncy ball down the road to try and hit the cans. They were bowling for sugar!!! By sugar I mean candy bars, licorice, lollipops, and gum. If you could buy it at the local campground store, they had it out there. Little kids from all over the county were coming out to bowl for candy. These kids were addicted to this game or more likely the prizes.

Then, to top off the evening, all of the old people showed up with Christmas presents in hand. We found out they were celebrating Christmas in July, we felt so left out. Nobody told us about this ahead of time about the exciting festivities. They did it all, including lighting up this huge tree after everybody added a few home made ornaments for decoration. The evening was filled with the opening of gifts, Christmas music, and then karaoke. We (the 20 somethings) were not allowed to play (in the reindeer games, sorry flashback) with them. The karaoke master, actually she was more like a Nazi, said she feared we might break the equipment with our loud rock and roll. However, she was kind enough to play a single rock tune to make us all happy. A Beatles tune, no less. She did, of course, sing along with her three little yappy dog back-up group, lucky us.

So that's where lawn ornaments go when they die...