

Chapter 1. California

1. OK, who checked the stick?

I rested my forehead against the airplane window and looked at the landscape 30,000 feet below. During the next months I would be walking over that land. The concept boggled my mind. No one would be waiting for me at the San Francisco airport. I knew none of the other hikers. My parents were not happy about me throwing away a career, and behind closed eyes I could see my Dad rubbing his hands over his balding head, and then shaking his head and heaving enormous sighs of exasperation.

"You are going to do what?"

"Walk. Across America with this group named HikaNation."

"Whatever for?"

It all started in the spring of 1978 with my receiving a packet from the Publisher's Clearinghouse, and the letter of opportunity to win a million dollars plus several sheets of stamps to order different magazines. Few of the titles looked very interesting, but there was something about the offer for *Backpacker Magazine* that was appealing. I thought, "Sure, reading about the outdoors might be fun." I carefully folded the perforations and tore out the stamp to order the magazine.

About six weeks later the first issue arrived. Several pages into the magazine there was a quarter page ad for volunteers to walk across America in 1989. Initiated by the American Hiking Society (AHS), its mission was to establish the first east-west transcontinental foot trail and promote wilderness and the development of more foot trails. It captured my imagination. Of course, it was impossible for me to actually do that, I thought, but perhaps I could meet the group when they were somewhere near Nashville. At the time I was working in the production department at Channel 5, running camera, technical directing the nightly news and directing a few local programs.

During the next year I was busy with my career at the television station and active in my church. When *Backpacker Magazine* appeared in my mailbox, the first thing I looked for was more news about planning the route and the organization. The quarter page request for hikers gradually turned into brief articles about the founder of AHS, Jim Kern, and the different people who had stepped forward to help with the project. After the start date for what was now coined "HikaNation" had moved from 1979 to 1980, I corresponded with Jim a few times.

One snowy midnight in January 1980 I walked into my attic apartment very discouraged. The 11 pm news hadn't gone very well. A union takeover bid for workers in the production department at the TV station had failed earlier that winter, and it seemed as though there was an undercurrent of anger among crew members as well as between the crew and management. The station itself had been purchased months ago by the owners of a television station in Houston, but plenty of work was being done with producing the regular music and talk show programs and new advertising spots. I stomped the snow off of my boots and then shook it off of the mail. The bright spot in my evening was the sight of another *Backpacker Magazine*.

I opened up the issue to the page about HikaNation and read through the latest information. Then, I did something I'd never done before. Magazine in hand, I went to my bedside and knelt down with the article about HikaNation open on the bed in front of me. Hands

folded, I closed my eyes and prayed, "Please God. Please find me a way to go on this trip."

The sensation was like the Parting of the Red Sea. I felt a sense of comfort and well being that was beyond description. Then, I promptly forgot about it.

The jangle of the phone ringing woke me the next morning. It was my supervisor calling me into the station on my day off for a general meeting with all of the staff. Later that afternoon, I walked into the production office where the morning and night crew were milling around asking each other if they knew what the meeting was about. No one had a clue.

Two hours later we were asked to move into a larger office where the station manager and production managers were waiting. One read a prepared statement announcing that the station was changing to a more local format, that syndicated programs would no longer going to be produced, and that one half of the production crew was laid off. I was shocked to my core. Those of us who were laid off had 30 minutes to clean out our lockers, hand in our headsets and keys, and get out of the building. If any of us stayed longer than one half hour, then a policeman would escort us off of the premises. Envelopes were passed out with letters and severance pay.

One of the news reporters followed me home that afternoon because he was afraid that I was crying so hard that I'd wreck my car. We sat in the kitchen and he patted my back, casting about for something positive to say. "Shellie, maybe it's because you're supposed to go on that hike thing that you've been talking about."

"Well, last week I calculated out how much it would cost to do it."

I wiped away tears and shuffled through some papers on the table. The hair stood up on the back of my neck when I saw the total estimated expenses and then opened the envelope to see the amount of severance pay. Slowly, I laid the papers down side-by-side. The amounts were identical. My severance pay would cover the estimated cost of the hike to the penny.

It was then that I remembered the night before. "Wow! I guess I have to be careful about what I pray for."

The next day I did two things: got a job with a temporary clerical agency and wrote a short letter to Jim Kern letting him know that I planned to join the hike.

The airplane shuddered with the clank and whine of wheels coming down to prepare for the landing. Thirty minutes later I was waiting with the rest of the passengers in baggage claim as all types of luggage started rolling past on the conveyor belt. Only a few bags had gone by when around the corner came my underwear. The contents of my entire backpack seemed to have exploded, and gear and clothing were spilling out the top and from every pocket that had unzipped. I was so embarrassed.

I panicked. It had taken hours to carefully roll up all of my clothing and squash the gear in the different compartments of my new red Kelty backpack. What if something was missing? I busily retrieved a batch of goods and began cramming. Within moments no more bags came onto the conveyor belt and I was standing nearly alone in the area, but my walking staff was missing. Pop, my grandfather, had cut a branch of kalmia from my family's back yard the day before and had trimmed it into a special walking staff. I looked around for the office of missing baggage.

At that moment a man wearing an airline jumpsuit came out of a side door holding my staff up. "OK," he said disgustedly, "Who checked the stick?"

2: The night before: Who are these people?

The evening assembly of HikaNation hikers was held in the San Francisco YMCA. I walked into

a large room filled with excited people all chattering at once. All of the chairs were taken, so I wove my way through the crowd to the back of the room to lean against the wall. I felt overwhelmed. Soon afterwards, a man with dark hair waved his arms and asked for quiet. It was Jim Kern, the man in all of the photographs for the AHS in *Backpacker Magazine*.

It was a short meeting. Jim introduced himself to great applause, and looked rather harried, "We were expecting six young men to be hiking and there is a whole room full of people here ready to backpack across America." A head count found over 80 so-called thru-hikers, ones who planned to backpack the entire length of the country.

Jim introduced "Monty" Montgomery, a retired Air Force captain, who appeared unsmiling and quite intimidating as it was explained that he would be driving the support vehicle. He would be bringing us water in the desert and help ferry us to grocery stores when the hikers needed to be resupplied with food and gear. He also would be our lifeline to the outside world, updating a phone message where relatives and the public could call in and find out where we would be walking that week, and record the approximate dates of the nearest post office for general delivery mail. Other logistics would include visiting the local law enforcement offices to notify them we would be hiking through their area, and meeting with a variety of public officials and press to garner interest in the mission of HikaNation.

Jim pointed out a young couple who had a baby in a sturdy metal stroller. "Gail and Gomer Pyle will be taking their little girl, Jaime. At six months old, she's our youngest hiker."

They smiled and waved and the baby cooed. I wasn't the only one in the room who thought they must be nuts to take a baby on such a long journey. Jim asked for John Stout to stand up, and a small, white haired man waved from the middle of the crowd. At 69, he would be our oldest hiker.

Jim then provided some housekeeping details about when and where we would meet in the morning in Golden Gate Park for the opening ceremonies. It started sinking in that I was actually here in San Francisco and tomorrow was the first day of an incredible adventure with all of these people. After he closed the meeting, many people converged to the front of the room, introducing each other, laughing and talking. A huge crowd centered around Jim, and it took me awhile to make my way over to him. It seemed like he was talking with eight men at once, and during a lull in the conversation I stuck out my hand and introduced myself.

"Hi Jim, I'm Shellie."

He looked surprised and the next thing I knew, he lunged and I was enveloped in a bear hug. "I'm so glad to see you," he said. "I hadn't gotten a letter from you in so long that I thought you weren't coming."

We talked a little bit more before others claimed his attention. It was then that I believed everything would be all right. Little did I know that later that evening he and Monty had a private conversation and agreed that I wouldn't last the weekend.

I moved into the lounge area and tried to learn some names and a little background about a few individuals. On one sofa was a sweet-faced young woman, Linda XXX, from Connecticut, bespeckled Mike Collins from Bozeman, Montana, and the petite fireball, Toni Martinazzi, from Washington state. No one could miss a dark-haired young woman sporting a pony tail because of her Claxton voice. Eighteen-year-old, hourglass-figured Janet Parsons from Illinois was bouncing across the room, laughing loudly amidst a group of young men. Lots of people were milling around the room. A very tall, grizzled man wore a strange, taupe colored cap with a very long bill in the front that was matched by one as long in the back. Someone informed me that it was for

shading from the desert sun. Most of the hikers had booked rooms at the YMCA, and it looked as though many had already formed friendships.

It didn't occur to me that I was being obnoxiously aggressive about asking personal questions about occupation and religion until one fellow said, "Who cares what anyone did before the hike? We're here now!"

He was right. It wasn't important. We would have a lot of time to get to know each other in the weeks and months ahead, and by that time we could not be defined by anything or anyone in our prior lives. Our past awards and achievements, how well we performed in school, what kind of jobs we had held, and our family and friend's social standings in our former communities were irrelevant. All those definitions would be stripped away until our life belongings fit into a backpack and only our individual character remained.

Of course, most people knew we were characters.

3. Over 7000 people walk across the Oakland Bay Bridge

There is a certain quality of diffused light and cool, moist air in early morning San Francisco. Everyone has a lovely complexion here, I mused while waiting on a street corner near the Embarcadero for the correct bus to Golden Gate Bridge Park. Women wearing business suits and tennis shoes dashed in to a nearby bread store for a muffin and back out to the street again on their way to an office. Some of the handsomest men I've ever seen walked by. Across the street, an elderly lady wearing layers of mismatched clothing and pushing a shopping cart overflowing with lumps of blanket-covered stuff cursed each person as they walked around her as she slowly made her way up the block.

A bus drove up and stopped. This has got to be the right one, I thought. There's a man wearing a kilt who is carrying a bagpipe and two people with backpacks on board.

Those of us with backpacks introduced ourselves and chatted excitedly as the bus drove up and down the hills of the city, making stops every other block. We all got off at the same bus stop as the bagpiper, and looked around the park area before someone pointed out the silver Airstream trailer. Tied to the side was a huge white banner reading: 1980 • Hike With Us • 1981 arched over an outline of a U.S. map with HikaNation in bold letters. Below the map were the words: San Francisco to Washington, D.C. Another banner advertised Postum as the official sponsor of HikaNation and the American Hiking Society.

We headed towards the ever-growing crowd of hikers and supporters, but by the time I unclipped my backpack I was sweating and grateful to set it down to lean against a rock. I was huffing and puffing after walking across a park with this heavy thing on my back and wondering how to make it through the day, much less across the country. This thought must have been on the minds of the organizers, because the offer was made for each of us to unload our tents and sleeping bags into white garbage bags labeled with our names. We would be able to pick up our gear at the end of the day for the next couple of days until the group got acclimated to the rigors of backpacking and had to become self-sufficient.

We hikers smiled for inaugural photographs, listened to speeches, and suddenly it was time. The Black Watch Bagpipers began marching in unison to their music like stately Pied Pipers, with a long line of backpackers and supporters behind them on the way to the Pacific Ocean. The first steps to establish our transcontinental west-east foot trail were headed west.

By the time I reached the edge of the beach near Seal Rock, it was a toss up to decide whether to walk into the Pacific Ocean or hustle to catch up with most of the other backpackers who were headed away. I chose to wade through the soft sand to the icy water and allow two waves to kiss my boots before starting the long walk to camp.

The day is a blur. It seemed as though the entire route was up. There were brief rest breaks, but as soon as I caught up, everyone else was putting on their packs and starting off again. We hiked past the gorgeous "painted lady" Victorian houses with their postage stamp-sized, immaculate gardens. Glimpses of the Golden Gate Bridge could be seen through the trees along the cliffs. We hiked through Fisherman's Wharf, a wonderful place with a thousand smells of different types of raw and cooking seafood. Several hikers were taking a break in a square where there was live band playing rock and roll, strolling jugglers and other street performers. Before I knew it, the lead group was off again. I struggled through the enormous crowd of people enjoying a warm spring day, keeping an eye peeled for swaying backpacks towering above the crowd ahead.

At that point I happened to look left and saw two hikers were headed in the wrong direction, nearly disappearing in the throngs of people. I started after them, yelling "Wait! Wait!" Finally, one of the men stopped to turn around. I waved them to come back and go the other way. They could see hikers with backpacks walking in the opposite direction while I stopped to catch my breath.

John Mills from Virginia and bass-voiced Keith XXX from Michigan were so grateful they hadn't gotten lost that they slowed down their pace and we walked the rest of the way together. Passing through Golden Gate Park was a wonder as all kinds of people were flying gorgeous designer kites, throwing Frisbees, or sunning themselves and enjoying the day. It was impossible to stop and enjoy the view because of the need to keep backpacks in sight. It was a very long day, with the last leg of the journey through older buildings and a warehouse district. We didn't make it to camp until well after dark, long after the majority of the group.

The first HikaNation campsite was underneath the on ramp of the Oakland Bay Bridge. Every time a vehicle drove overhead the entire concrete structure seemed to shutter slightly. It stank of gasoline fumes and other unpleasant things. There was a Port-a-Potty at one end of the parking lot and a spigot for water. It would be the single worst campsite of the entire trail. I was thrilled.

After retrieving my gear from Monty, I saw Donna Lovely from Detroit, an experienced backpacker with her hair in a Gibson-girl styled bun. She laughed and agreed that pitching camp here was quite different from her imagination of being in the wilderness. After unpacking my space blanket, thin foam pad and sleeping bag on the asphalt a couple of feet away from her area, I sat down and thankfully took off my boots.

Despite my excitement of actually completing the first day, the din, the unfamiliar smells, and the thought of lying next to a hundred other people, I slept.

Early the next morning, we hikers gathered on the up ramp of the Oakland Bay Bridge, waiting for the signal to move forward. Behind us the streets were mobbed with people. The local police had already closed down two lanes of traffic on the Bridge in preparation for the day. It would be the first time the bridge was open to foot traffic since it was built in XXX.

Suddenly, the crowd surged forward and we were off! We backpackers stayed at the head of the line for less than a minute before runners, wheelchair racers, and folks who were there just to walk across the bridge passed us by. It didn't matter. It seemed as though everyone was

smiling. Towards the middle of the bridge some of us turned around to admire the San Francisco Bay and lovely panorama of the city. We were like rocks in a river as people flowed around us.

On the other side of the Bay, most of us stopped for awhile in a little park to take off boots and socks to allow our feet to cool off and repair blisters. Jerry XXX from Colorado had the best way of putting on his backpack and taking it off. Instead of heaving it up to a thigh and then shrugging into it like a jacket as most of us did, Jerry faced his pack on the ground towards him, slipped his hands through the straps to grab the frame, and then flipped the entire backpack over his head, controlling the speed of the flip with pulling his arms through the shoulder straps. A click and cinch of the waistband and the pack was tight to the back with very little effort. He demonstrated it to our group several times. In particular, blonde Sharon Chrostowski from Ohio was grateful for the tip. Her thigh was so purple and yellow with a bruise that it looked as though a horse had kicked her.

"It doesn't hurt," she said, "but it sure looks ugly."

"Well, I'm still going to use my way," said John Stout. His style was to prop up his pack on the ground, sit down in front of it and slip his arms through the shoulder straps. Then he rolled to the side, and twisted horizontally until he was on his hands and knees looking like a turtle, and slowly maneuvered himself into a standing position. It looked far more difficult than Jerry's method, but it worked.

We pulled ourselves together and started walking through Berkeley, past the edge of the University and into the hills. We passed by some enormously tall trees with shaggy bark and willow-like gray green leaves.

"What's that smell? It's so fragrant and somehow familiar," I asked.

Marce Guerin from Virginia knew. "It's eucalyptus. But you have to watch out for this hedge over here because it's poison oak. Don't brush up against it or you'll get an itchy rash similar to poison ivy. I've got some Fells Naptha soap in my pack if you start breaking out."

No one knew what Fells Naptha was, so she explained that a little bit of water on the brown cake soap would cause it foam up. If the soap was allowed to dry on the skin, it would dry out the rash bumps and ease the irritation as well as help the rash to not spread further. Our group was careful to avoid touching the shiny leaves of the 8 foot hedge as we hiked by.

What had been purported in the morning's gathering to be an 11 or 12 mile day turned out to be 16 miles, and there were more than a few grumbles at that night's camp in a highway rest area. It was then that one wag coined the phrase, "The Seaborg Mile" (defined as somewhere between 2715 and 47562 feet) after our state coordinator for California, Glenn Seaborg.

Most of us knew that he was a scientist and had something to do with the discovery of plutonium, but few realized that he was an internationally famous chemist. Dr. Seaborg was awarded the Nobel Laureate in chemistry, the National Medal of Science, and for a decade served as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. A lobbyist for nuclear arms control, he also advocated for international cooperation of scientists and conservation of natural resources. He is the only person who has an element on the Periodic Table named for him: element 106, seaborgium.

I knew him as our pathfinder, a genial older gentleman with a six foot stride at the front of the line of backpacker who only carried a daypack. I hardly ever saw him because I was never in the lead bunch of hikers. Rumor was that his wife, Helen, drove by to meet him at midday to hand him a sack lunch. By the time I tottered into camp each evening, he had gone home for a shower. Little did most of us appreciate the year-long efforts of both he and his wife to scout

HikaNation's route through the width of California. Dr. Seaborg died in 1999. Thank you, Glenn, for living an exemplary life.

4. Rest day: Negro Bar State Park

XX days later, Marika Matyus from Half Moon Bay near San Francisco, Sharon and I were in a bathroom at Negro Bar campsite, located near the American River and the city of Folsom, trying to figure out how to shave our legs in the two sinks. We were talking about some of the country we had passed. Meadows carpeted with tiny orange poppies and other wildflowers were breathtaking that spring, and hiking through them were bright spots amidst passing many suburban neighborhoods and highway hiking.

We had passed an elementary school in the foothills of Walnut Creek where it seemed as though a hundred children surrounded us asking questions like magpies. One afternoon we walked right past a small Post Office, where it was suggested that experienced hikers help others divest themselves of some pack weight. Marika exclaimed about my carrying 5 tee shirts and 3 pairs of blue jeans plus a sweatshirt and pants. She dumped the contents of my pack onto the grass.

"This has to go. Put it in the box. You only need two shirts, one for the day and one to change into at night. What are you doing carrying a down jacket? It's not freezing here. No, you cannot keep the nightgown. What are you doing with ten pairs of underwear? At least you have a lightweight stove, but you don't need but one pot. Send the two smaller ones home; you can use the lid for a plate. There's no need for a fork or knife to match the spoon, just use that little jack knife and a spoon for everything. My God! You have so much stuff, there's not enough room for food!"

The first day of the hike I'd lived on gorp—a mixture of cereal grains, dried fruit and nuts—instant oatmeal, and tea because my pack was so crammed with stuff that there was only a fist-sized open cavity available for food. I had carefully researched equipment, and was pleased with my purchases of a great Sierra Designs Star Flight tent, a North Face sleeping bag, and two-pound Svea stove. My Kelty backpack was small compared with what other people were carrying, but stuff bags could be stacked on top and strapped. Since we would be walking through the city so much of the time, it hadn't occurred to me that a restaurant or grocery store wouldn't be nearby. It didn't take but a day of observing what other hikers ate at different meals to stop at the first supermarket and purchase more appropriate nourishment. Later, I learned to organize meals into three different-colored nylon stuff bags, so that at a rest stop there could be quicker access to whatever was wanted and easy return to its place in the backpack.

While I won the battle with Marika about the nightgown (with much whining) and down jacket because both were light weight and could be compacted, nearly 20 pounds of other things were shipped home. It was much more comfortable to flip on my backpack afterwards.

HikaNation surmounted our very first mountain, Mt. Diablo. It was my first experience of walking switchbacks, which are hairpin turns in a trail that zig zag across the face of steep hills or mountains to change elevation. At the summit, I dropped my pack and went over to the snack bar before it closed to look for post cards and a candy bar. I picked out a card and was still

writing when a young woman came in the door. She chose a postcard of a beautiful aerial view of Mt. Diablo at sunset for her parents and quickly scribbled, "Dear Mom and Dad. This was a bitch."

Not only was it a tough hot day, but at that night's gathering, Monty announced that he no longer would ferry any gear for the hikers. It was time for the group to become more self-sufficient. By that time names, faces and personalities were sorting out. Of the 80+ through-hikers in San Francisco, 55 remained.

In sharp contrast to the lush western side of the mountain, the eastern faces of Mt. Diablo were scarred from a series of wildfires that had occurred five and seven years earlier. Despite blackened tree trunks spiking the landscape, new shrubs and trees were crowded nearly waist high in places. It was an amazingly fast natural recovery.

The next days were rainy and windy, and as we hiked past green rows of so much growing produce it seemed as though we were crossing the great breadbasket of America. I remember sheltering against the weather in a ditch with five or six hikers for lunch. Witty "Uncle" Bill XXX from Arizona kept shaking his head as he talked about having to change his entire frame of reference about women. He pointed up to the road as 5' tall Toni walked by, smiling and waving as she leaned into the wind, her rain gear plastered to her body against downpour.

"Just look at her," he said. "She's happy carrying a pack that's as tall as she is, even in the rain! I'm not used to being around you girls who are so strong."

Walking through the city of Sacramento was a pleasure. Broad bands of woods on either side of bike paths camouflaged views of all but the tallest buildings, and there were conveniently located outhouses along the way. But everyone was looking forward to having a rest day at Negro Bar State Park, where gold had been discovered in 1849.

Now clean and refreshed, Marika, Sharon and I were gathering our towels when we heard a muffled sound outside. Someone was crying. We left our gear and followed the sound until finding Susan "Butch" Henley, who was leaning against an outcrop of boulders suffused in tears of pain. She couldn't walk one step further.

Amid lots of hugs and carefully removing her boots, we saw the terrible ravages of so much road walking. Her feet were nearly covered with blisters, some of which were so awful they were bleeding. Walking must have been agony. By then, other hikers gathered around to assure her that she would not be sent home to recover. Two of the men clasped wrists to form a sling and she was carefully lifted and whisked away to Monty, who would drive her to a local podiatrist.

She wasn't the only hiker in the van. With the weight of backpacking on trail, there was a slight "give" to the dirt and rocks, and feet tended to hit land in different positions. However, on asphalt and concrete there was more stress on the feet from both the rigidity of the road and friction causing heat. Foot care had been a primary source of conversation from the first day of HikaNation. Most of the hikers were careful to remove their boots a couple of times during the day, and dry off and/or powder their feet before pulling their socks back on. Blisters were lanced with a sterilized needle, and antiseptic applied before wrapping the area in a band-aid, gauze or moleskin.

One of the few things I had done right was to start off wearing 9-year-old Vasque boots with deep lug soles. The two blisters from the first day had already healed and my feet were toughening up with the miles. Most people wore heavy hiking boots, believing in the ankle support, weatherproofing and protection against sharp rocks, but others insisted that tennis shoes

would do the trick because they were much lighter and cushioned the foot better.

That evening, Marika and I returned to camp at dusk. My tent site was at the very back of the area set off for HikaNation and as Marika veered off to find her tent, Janet called me over.

"I've decided that, since I am so young on this hike, I should create a family," she announced. "Joe Shute is going to be my dad and I'm calling him 'Pa' and Toni is my 'Ma' and Dave Bacchus is my 'Brother.' Randy Blymyre is going to be 'Tall Brother'"

"Gee, that sound's really nice, Janet," I smiled, not really knowing what to say.

"I want you to be my sister!"

"What? Me? You want me?" I said, absolutely floored.

"Yeah! Say yes! I want you for my sister," she exclaimed.

Tears sprung to my eyes. I could see Dave grinning from across the path and hear Toni's laugh behind me. I was incredibly moved. Here was this vibrant, beautiful young woman wanting me to be a special part of her life.

"Sure!" I said, laughing. "What do I have to do now?"

She hugged me and then we just grinned at one another. Little did I know how much those of us in "the family" would help each other down the trail.

"You don't have to do anything," she said. "Just be there when I need to talk with someone about girl stuff. Is that OK?"

I told her that was great, and felt so happy I floated on the way to my tent. It was pitched on a rise near a picnic table where Marce was sitting with her back towards me talking with a few other Virginia hikers. As I started walking up the path towards them, I could see that they had just finished dinner.

She lifted up her cup and said, "This is what I like best about camping. You just pour water into your cookpot and swish it around." Marce dramatically poured the water into her pan and scraped the edges with a spoon. "And then you just toss the dirty water over your shoulder. Presto! Clean pot!"

She then proceeded to toss the dirty water over her shoulder, right into the open door of my tent. Her grin faltered as she held up the now clean pot to a table of hikers who howled with laughter. It was one of the funniest things I've ever seen in my life.

As soon as she realized what she had done and turned to spot me behind her, she was horrified and very apologetic. Somehow, that made the situation even more hilarious as she fumbled to find a sponge and scrambled over to my tent to start quickly wiping the fly.

"I'm really sorry. I didn't realize that your tent was behind me."

Between giggles, I assessed the damage and gently pulled her away as she tried to sop up some dishwater. "Look, Marce, there's no harm done. Really! See, hardly any of the water got passed the screening. Isn't this funny?"

It took far longer for her to relax than it took me to shake out my sleeping bag and blot the screen dry, and was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

5. The Sierras and NWS ("New Woman Syndrome")