

“A Father-Son Revelation”

From *Short Stories of an Outdoor Enthusiast: “Never say I wish I had”*.

by Stephen L. Priest

Introduction

Hiking in the mountains requires reliance upon your partner that breaks down parent/child barriers that develop from the routine of daily life. At home the parent sets an example and provides the child with an opportunity to learn. This pattern must be adjusted in the wilderness.

On the Appalachian Trail

Tim and I lumbered along the Appalachian Trail planning to spend the night at the Mizpah Spring hut. Just as we reached the peak of Mt. Franklin, as can happen in the White Mountains, the weather changed and it began to rain. The rain became heavy and the sky grew darker and a storm suddenly engulfed us. Driving rain pelted us, and thunder and lightning were roaring and crackling all around. It was a strange and awesome sensation, yet it was only three o'clock in the afternoon and was nearly pitch dark. The top of Mt Franklin is entirely ledge and rock, and we knew immediately we were in a dangerous position - on top of a mountain and without shelter. It was a strange and weird feeling as we stood there in our rain suits, rain pouring off our faces and our features illuminated sporadically by flashes of light.

An unbelievable sensation of excitement and strength came over me. I felt as if I was united with the earth and the elements and had all their power at my command. At the same time, I feared that this angry and violent deluge would overcome us, and that we might not survive

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this encounter. I suddenly knew that before Tim or I died - and it could have happened at any moment - I wanted Tim to know how much a part of me he was. I had an unbelievable urge to hug Tim, kiss him, and tell him how much I loved and admired him - and so I did! It was a moment I still remember today - hugging my son with all my strength and telling him how much he meant to me. All the while thunder crackled and lightening illuminated the darkness, filling the surrounding country with shadows and ghostly sensations. We were in the middle of an enormous storm, terrifying, yet beautiful at the same time.

Tim responded to my hug and kiss with the same embracing closeness and finality that I had. I could feel his strength and our oneness as he embraced me for what could be the last time.

Then, just as suddenly as the storm came, it was gone. The sun came out as if to say "together you have seen the light and felt your courage and unity." Wet and shivering, but thankful we were without injury, we continued to Mizpah Spring hut.

Tim often avoided my invitations to learn - or at least that's the way it had seemed to me. Our stay at Mizpah Spring showed I was wrong. The volunteer naturalist at the hut led an evening tour to learn about the birds, animals, shrubs and trees native to this high altitude habitat. Tim asked many questions of the naturalist with obvious interest.

Another tour was scheduled before sunrise for a different aspect of the habitat. Given the previous day's tiring adventures, I never expected to see Tim. We went to bed that night, exhausted.

At 4:45 AM my watch alarm went off and I quietly whispered to Tim I was getting up for the tour. I left the bunkroom pleased at Tim's delight with the previous evening. To my surprise and much pleasure, who should appear at the morning walk-about but Tim!

Tim and I experienced a bonding on that hike we still discuss today. We depended on each other in a death-defying situation. I saw that he is caring, self-reliant, and levelheaded under pressure. He has a thirst to learn. I have come to recognize these qualities and more as we have shared the joys, challenges and revelation provided by hiking trips along the Appalachian Trail.

If fact were known, the awaking and growth in maturity was solely mine.

Steve Priest resides in Bedford, New Hampshire. This is an excerpt from Steve's book, *Short Stories of an Outdoor Enthusiast: "Never say I wish I had."* Additional pieces from the manuscript can be found at www.outdoorsteve.com (click **Seeking a Publisher**).