

Mother Nature tests a tent

Written by Deb Egenberger

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Weekly camping trips used to fill my summers when I was a kid. Once the camper trailer was packed in the spring—everything from the stack of Melmac dishes to the red and yellow ketchup and mustard bottles—we traveled around western Nebraska nearly every weekend.

It hasn't been the same since I became a grown-up. Too many other activities have filled what are supposed to be the lazy days.

But a recent trip with friends and family took me back.

I couldn't help but smile when I packed the marshmallow forks and graham crackers. It wouldn't be a real camping trip without s'mores.

It also wouldn't be a complete adventure without a little adversity. We had our share: The lake water was icy, the outhouses were stinky and the flies were torturous.

Most people would add to that list the night I lay in the tent watching lightning dance outside during a thunderstorm.

I know lightning and a tent aren't a safe match. My father would have scolded me had he known I was taunting Mother Nature.

Still, I wanted the full effect of living in the moment.

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With nothing more than a couple layers of nylon tent separating me from the storm, I absorbed all I could.

The bone-rattling thunder felt a little like standing too close to the speakers at a ZZ Top concert in the early 1980s. And the lightning, though not warm on my face thank goodness, reminded me of the old-fashioned flash cubes that flared once and then turned on top of a camera ready to spark again.

It rained hard, battering the tent and challenging the stakes in the ground. Then as quickly as the storm had hit, it passed leaving behind a freshly-washed campground.

The drenched towels hanging on the line were a bit annoying, as was the puddle in my lounge chair. Neither irritated for long, though.

When the sky cleared and the stars appeared, we dug to the bottom of our wood pile for some dry logs and built a fire. Before long, the marshmallows were toasty brown and thoughts of the storm disappeared like ashes to the bottom of the pit.

I've watched a few thunderstorms since then from the comfort of my living room. It's simply not the same.

Marshmallows roasted over an electric stove don't give s'mores quite the same fire-cooked taste either but they'll work to tickle the taste buds until our next camping adventure.