

Meeting Sasquatch

Before I met my husband, my concept of camping was a hotel without room service. But love does strange things to you, and when my husband proposed a camping trip that would take us cross-country on his motorcycle from Washington D.C. to Washington State, it sounded like the adventure of a lifetime and I jumped at the chance. I was convinced I could manage without room service...for a few weeks.

It was a sunny summer day when we took off, our tent and sleeping bags rolled up and strapped down on the back of the bike, and our gear stored into our saddlebags, mine bulging like an over-stuffed sausage. After passing through the West Virginia mountains, we crossed into Kentucky where we stopped for our first night of camping in a state park.

Motels and hotels are places where you scurry to your private cubicle, double-lock the door, and create an inner world out of the belongings you've carried inside. Camping on a motorcycle requires that you lay out on the ground all your possessions for the world to see, then build your own space out of something akin to modern-day Tinkertoys and stretchy synthetic fabric. If you want privacy, it comes either in the form of the privy, which always feels like it's in the next county, or your tent, where it comes at the expense of never being able to stand up straight.

Mid-week, there weren't many other campers to case our possessions, and it was surprising to me that the majority of them were bikers like us. Most were couples, but there was one solo traveler who caught my attention setting up his camp a half dozen sites away. Even from a distance, I could tell he had a striking resemblance to Sasquatch. He was *huge*. His body had the massiveness of a defensive football player and made his motorcycle looked like a kiddie bike. He was dressed in black, wore a dark red bandana on his head and cowboy boots that must

have been size 15. Every stereotype my brain had collected from movies and books about bikers passed through my mind, as well as everything my mother had taught me about steering clear of strange men. Even at a safe distance, he was intimidating, and though I couldn't see his face, I was certain he looked mean.

So I focused on my husband and watched as he assembled our tent, then set about puffing up the air mattress and laying out our sleeping bag. It was obvious there was little I could do to help, as he'd done this so many times by himself. Sensitive to my growing feeling of ineptitude, he fished out a piece of squashed plastic with a spigot at one end and handed it to me.

"How about you get some water while I cover up the bike?" he said, and pointed down the road to a water pump in the center of the campground. My heart clutched when I spotted it-- just beyond Sasquatch's campsite, where he stood, fiddling with his bike. I knew I couldn't argue that we didn't need water, so I took the plastic water tank and headed down the road. *Slowly*.

In hotels and motels, you rarely make more than one-second eye contact or give more than a polite nod to the strangers you pass in the halls. That's all I gave Sasquatch as I walked by. In that one second, I took in that he was not just large, he was burly. Thick muscles that looked like enthusiastic cumulus clouds bulged underneath a black T-shirt; his leather pants and boots were well-worn, antiqued by likely hundreds of thousands of miles of biking; sweat was what darkened his bandana; and his beard was raggedy. Clearly he had the potential of being an ax murderer. I picked up speed as I passed by and hurried to the pump.

Fortunately, I knew my way around spigots and it didn't take long to fill up. My highest hopes were that he would ignore me as I did him on my way back and our paths would never cross again. I made certain the cap was screwed on tight, then turned to go back. A massive,

black-covered, big-muscled body blocked my way. How could someone so huge possibly move so silently? He must have trained as a guerrilla. My Lord, could he be a terrorist?!

“Oops, I’m sorry!” I said, praying I hadn’t splashed him with errant water that could start a campground rumble. As much as I didn’t want to, I knew I had to make eye contact for it to appear a sincere apology.

I looked into the sweetest eyes I’d ever seen on a man. They were totally out of place on his scratchy-bearded, red-faced, sweaty bandana-covered head, the deepest blue I’d ever seen. I don’t think I’ve seen kinder eyes, even in a kitten.

“May I carry that for you, ma’am?” His voice had a low and sultry Southwestern twang, far more courteous than any I’d heard on the East Coast. There could only be one answer; I wasn’t about to argue with a man his size.

“Of course. Why, thank you!” I said. He gave me a silent nod, picked up the heavy tank as if it were a bucket of feathers, and we headed together down the road.

In the brief time we walked, I learned he was a man of few words and even shorter sentences. But by the end of our short walk, I would have been willing to stand up as a character witness to testify that this man could never be an ax murderer. Just as I was trying to figure out whether we had enough food to invite him to eat with us, we reached my site. He put the water bag on our table, gave a polite nod and left, just as my husband was emerging from the tent.

“Who’s that?” he asked.

I gave an affectionate look after the departing creature, lumbering along with a suspiciously prehistoric-looking gait.

“Him? Oh, that’s Sasquatch.”