Fall 1-14-1982

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol1/iss1/20

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SURVEYING THE SURVEYORS
By Scott Tomkowiak

Several years ago, I stepped into a popular fast-food restaurant to get a bite to eat. While waiting in line, I was approached from the rear by a total stranger. She was a massive woman, standing about five foot nine and weighing approximately two hundred and fifty pounds. She looked like my Uncle Dwight in drag.

"Excuse me sir, may I ask you a few questions?" inquired the woman with a clipboard in her left arm.

"Yeah sure, go ahead," I retorted.

"I'm taking a survey for the McDonald's corporation and would like to know some of your thoughts and feelings about it."

"What do ya want to know?"

"Well, first of all, have you ever been in a McDonald's restaurant before?"

"Oh sure. I've been served over one thousand times. I keep an accurate count just like you guys, you know?"

"When was the last time you were here?"

"Never. I don't live in the neighborhood."

"I see. Maybe you can show me on that map over there."

She waddled over to a rather large street map that was mounted on an easel. A foldable pointer was in her right hand.

"Now then, where in this area are you located?"

"I live in the south part of the building. I love to live about eight hundred miles from here in Illinois!" I said.

"Oh," she slurped with a face redder than a tomato.

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Short Story

The Challenge
By Joan Rutkowski

Great splashes of dark, icy water flew against their three faces with a stinging force that felt like windblown sleet. The roaring, rushing river crashed against their canoe threatening to sweep it against the rocks in the center of the river.

Concentration with the physical effort of moving their arms in unison to keep the canoe upright had replaced the sickening sense of fear that had been with them the past hour.

Fear had not been a companion of the three young people during the first part of their trip. The trip began with a sense of excitement and exhilaration as the new challenge the usually calm river with occasional swift areas and bubbly rapids was about to present to them. The heavy rains of the past two days had brought the river to a state of fury at being controlled and it would soon spill its cloudy, churning froth over the banks and into the deep pine woods.

The rising waters had caused justified concern to the staff directors at the Backwaters Training Camp about the safety of the newly trained camp counselors. Communication with the two rangers from the nearby ranger station very nearly put a damper on the "graduation" celebration planned by the eighteenth graders at The Bridge, a rustic log tavern perched on a sandy ridge where the huge cement and steel bridge spanned the river. There were tense minutes for all of them while the decisions were being made.

Jeff and the two girls who were his friends and his crew waited in the sandy hollow eddy with tall, skinny pine trees where they were protected from the brisk, chill wind. They were near enough to the pier so they would be able to hear the announcement as soon as it came from the camp director who was talking with the rangers.

"Jeff, what'd you think they'd decide? That big ranger, the one with the wrap-around tinted glasses, keeps waving his arms at the river and looking at all the girls. My guess is he won't let us go. He's probably one of those guys who makes up his mind without asking anyone else's opinion."

"I sure don't blame him, Chrissey. At the rear of the camp he has one of the best jobs—auditing the financial records and checking day to day reports."

"That's what the others say. I just think it's a bad break for us all."

"Well, maybe you're right."

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Chrissey, the eternal optimist, was already adjusting her hair yet.

"They're going to let us go—I just know it! I read my Leo this morning and said 'A day to use your Lion's strength and get the Lion's share.' I know they've put a lot of pressure on you, Jeff, but don't worry. The boys are going to be fine."

"Chrissey grinnin,' how bout that, Jeff? You gonna buy the first round?"

"Jeff rolled his eyes in mock dismay and yanked out his wallet, opened it slowly and began flipping through his credit cards, one by one. "Think they'll take a VISA at the Bridge? Or maybe they don't take charge cards. Well girls, maybe they'd hold on to my fringy rangon for a few hours, he said, suddenly pretending to twist it from his finger.

Kelly threw up her arms. "Oooh, we have a big spender here! All three days we've worked together, stayed right here at camp with no place to spend money but at the pop and candy canteen, and he's telling us he's broke. Now the true nature of this beast, this captain of our crew who collected every ounce of our frail, feminine strength to make his canoe move faster than anyone else's, has emerged!!"

"Pretending he hadn't heard her, Jeff continued poking around in his wallet. "Ah, would you believe I see something green and crisp folded up behind the AMOCO card?" He slipped it out of his wallet and began unfolding it. "All is not lost, my lovely friends. Ole Jeffery comes through again—we have here a certain Mr. Andy Jackson, not once, but twice! Now that should buy all our beer and a little something solid to go with it!!"

The girls whooped and laughed and hugged, and for a second their eyes met one another's and the excitement of the outing was shining in all of their eyes.

Just then the camp director's voice came over the horn calling, "Attention! All crews down to the pier!"