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SURVEYING THE SURVEYORS

By Scott Tomkowiak

Kollmeyer: Untitled

Several months 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?"

"About right there," as I pointed due west, outside of the building. "I live about eight hundred miles from here in Illinois!" I said.

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

All my life I never had much use for survey takers, many of whom used to call up on the phone and ask me who I was going to vote for on election day, or if I'd be interested in purchasing a set of ten year old encyclopedias.

Such questions and sales pitches, I feel, are an invasion of privacy on their part, even though these innocent people I choose to pick on are only acting on behalf of a particular company that plays these individuals meager wages to invade the privacy of consumers such as myself. There is a sense of frustration here; the surveyee who may refuse to answer the simpleton interrogatives, and the surveyor who cannot get the job completed.

My utter distaste for survey takers brings out the unbounding sarcasm I have for them. For example, I have always had the idea taking a survey of survey takers. This idea probably doesn't seem to be as uproarious to some people as it does to me, however, it accomplishes the same effect as does a practical joke, which, by in large, it is!

Let us imagine that we are in a typical shopping mall where about a half dozen men and women are toiling for the Acme Survey Service. Suppose that a man, in a three piece suit carrying a clipboard and pencil, walked up to one of these surveyors and began to ask questions.

"Excuse me ma'am, I'm taking a survey on the various survey takers in this area and I'd like to know..."

One can only speculate on how the rest of the conversation would turn out.



Jeanne Kollmeyer

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 at the new challenge the usually clear river with its 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 eighteen grads 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 edged 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'll 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 thinks the girls should stay here and tend the camp fires."

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He's doing his job trying to be sure he doesn't allow us to do anything foolish. Seeing to the safety of this camp is a heavy load."

Chrissey, the eternal optimist, was already adjusting her life vest. "They're going to let us go — I just know it! I read my Leo this morning and it said 'A day to use your Lion's strength and get the Lion's share.' I know that means 'paddle hard and you'll get the brass ring!'"

Jeff laughed and grabbed her around the shoulders. "The brass ring comes with the merry-go-round! I'm not sure I want such a mixed up kid in my canoe!"

Kelly gave Jeff a playful push and said, "I think it meant 'Paddle hard and Jeff'll buy you the Lion's share of the beer!'"

Chrissey grinned. "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 taverns don't take charge cards. Well girls, maybe they'd hold my gold fraternity ring ransom for a few beers," he said, suddenly pretending to twist it from his finger.

Kelly threw up her arms, "Oooh, we have a big spender here! All three weeks 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 extracted 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. "Aha, 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 Jeffrey 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 him, and for a second their eyes met one another's and the excitement of the outing was shining in all their eyes.

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