

Camping with Bonnie

“Bonnie! You scared me half to death! What were you doing up there?”

“Well ... are you sure you want to know?”

Sometimes when Bonnie tells me things, I wish I hadn't asked. This might be one of those times.

It was late on a Saturday afternoon, and I'd given up on trying to get any work done. I'd been photocopying tests, and the machine kept getting jammed. There was no way I was going to try to fix it ... the last time I'd done that, I'd messed up something and gotten everyone mad at me when the photocopier started eating things.

So I'd decided to go into the gym for a while and shoot some baskets. As I was digging around in the equipment room for a basketball, Bonnie had appeared out of nowhere, descending the ladder that led down from the roof.

“I can't stop now. Sorry. Gotta go!”

Bonnie whizzed past me and out of the equipment room.

I was still looking for a fully inflated basketball and wondering what she'd been doing on the roof when she returned.

“You're going back up on the roof? What are you doing up there?” I really hoped she wasn't painting something. Or worse, looking for a place to practice her newest hobby.

Bonnie had been taking bagpipe lessons, and according to her, was actually getting quite good at it. But none of us could tell. In fact, the first time she'd practiced at school, we'd all thought the fire alarm was going off, and we were outside for half an hour before someone discovered Bonnie in the basement working her way painfully through 'Scotland the Brave'.

“Come on up and I'll show you!”

So I followed her up the ladder.

The school roof is a vast expanse of gravel, on two levels, broken up here and there by heating ducts, vents, and other assorted pipes and ducts whose function had always eluded me.

I followed Bonnie up another ladder to the highest point of the roof. It was completely flat. And there was a tent.

“What on earth ...”

Bonnie looked at me a little sheepishly. “We wanted to go camping this weekend, but I had so much work to do ...” She paused for a moment. “You aren’t upset, are you?”

“Who is ...” But Bonnie interrupted me.

“It’s just Paige, Jessie and me this weekend. We set up the tent on Friday night, and we’ll camp out here until Sunday evening. It’s so great ... I can go down into the school whenever I feel like it and do some work ...”

I looked around. There was a small barbecue in front of the tent, and a bunch of lawn chairs. A beach umbrella and a portable stereo were set up at the side.

“All we’re missing is the campfire. You don’t suppose ...”

I cringed. “Probably not a good idea, Bonnie. Are those marshmallow sticks ...?”

“Yeah. But roasting marshmallows over a barbecue just isn’t the same, you know?”

“Where do you ... uh ...”

“We go down into the school to use the washrooms. That was where I was going when I ran into you.”

“Well, that’s convenient, I guess ...”

“We tried to get a ‘port-a-potty’ up here, but it wouldn’t fit through the hatch.”

I looked around. Her setup did look pretty cozy. I noticed Jessie and Paige at the far end of the roof, stretched out on blankets and reading.

“I was wondering, Bill, if we could maybe, you know, paint the gravel? I was thinking green. Make it look more like a campsite, you know? And maybe add a few potted trees ...”

“Well, ...”

“And I had another great idea.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear it. The last time I’d heard her say that, we’d ended up ordering a two-year supply of ‘Worsley Wildcat’ toilet paper. As a fundraiser, it had fallen flat ... nobody really wanted to use it. Maybe we shouldn’t have had the team members’ names and pictures printed on alternating squares ...

“Bill ... you know that Darren’s always complaining that people are constantly interrupting him when he’s trying to think about things. Maybe ...”

Darren wasn't as good as I was at finding places to hide. I'd done that a lot last year.

"I was thinking ..." Bonnie continued. "Maybe I should just leave the campsite set up. Then when Darren needs a place to think, or work quietly with his laptop, he could come up here where no-one would bother him. I'm sure I could install a phone line ..."

"Well ..."

"And he could keep his eyes open for our Junior High students who like to wander around outside when they're supposed to be in class ..." That was a good point. They were pretty sneaky.

I told her: "I'll have to think about it, Bonnie. It's a little dangerous. There's a big drop off the edge of the roof ..."

"Oh, we solved that right away. It's only a problem at night. We have flashlights ..."

We were interrupted by a head appearing at the top of the ladder. Kate climbed up over the edge and joined us.

"Hi! I saw you guys from our place, and it looked like fun. I brought some food and stuff." Sure enough, there was a big shopping bag she was holding on to. "Darren will be up in a few minutes ... he's just getting the horseshoe equipment."

"Horseshoes? But how ... the spikes ..."

"Don't need them!" That was Bonnie. "We can use that pipe over there!" Sure enough, there was a pipe sticking out of the roof that looked strong enough to work.

Darren made his appearance a few minute later. He was followed by Kathleen, Mindy, Melissa and Adrien.

"Kate phoned us" Mindy said. She was out of breath. She was getting a little old to be climbing ladders. "It sounds like you guys found a great place for a party!"

Our last staff party the previous year had been held in the school's cafeteria. It had made us all feel like we were still in school. Not very exciting. The only thing that had saved it was the 'Chicken Dance' that Allison and Mindy had insisted we all do in the hallway.

Darren passed out the hot dogs, and we took turns around the barbecue. Paige came over and turned on the stereo. She'd brought one of Brooke's CDs.

"Who is that singing?" Kathleen asked. "He has a pretty good voice. Sort of like Alvin the Chipmunk ... but cuter."

“Justin Bieber. It’s Brooke’s favourite ...”

“I like it!” That was Melissa.

“Say, Bonnie ... is there any way we could get a TV up here? We could ...”

Kate interrupted Darren with a wave of her hand. “No way! We’re camping! You can play your stupid video games some other time!” Apparently Kate had had a long week.

We set up for horseshoes, and Darren went first. He had a powerful arm ... the horseshoe went sailing right over the pipe. In fact, it went sailing right over the edge of the roof, and over the edge of the roof below.

“Oops!” Darren looked a little embarrassed. But his look of embarrassment turned to shock when he heard the loud crash from below. Bonnie scrambled down the ladder and over to the edge to look.

We all heard her wail of anguish. “My new car! You broke it!”

Bonnie had recently bought a new car. In fact, she had bought four of them. Tiny little Smart cars. Hers was bright red, and it was parked directly below, with a horseshoe-shaped hole in its roof. The roof wasn’t much bigger than the hole.

We all came over to the roof edge and looked down. “Bonnie, how did you get all your stuff and the three of you here, in that tiny little car?” Mindy was curious.

“We didn’t. It was just me, and a package of hot dogs. That’s all there was room for. Glen brought everything else and the girls over in his truck. He still has the truck. He didn’t want to give it up.”

“I’ll bet they’re fun to drive!”

“And easy too!” Bonnie continued: “I can finally parallel-park!”

Then she turned serious. “But I have a big hole in my roof. And a horseshoe buried in the front seat ...”

Sure enough, the horseshoe was firmly embedded in the upholstery.

“You should leave it there. It might bring you good luck ...” Darren was always trying to be helpful. But when he saw the look on Bonnie’s face, he added “I’ll pay to have it fixed. Don’t worry. In the meantime, a little duct tape ...”

We all went back up to the upper roof to commiserate with Bonnie.

Later that evening we were all sitting around the barbecue. Darren had brought up a few lengths of wood, and they were burning nicely. Dawn and Val had joined us.

“Why don’t we order some pizza from the restaurant? They deliver now!” That was Val. She’d arrived too late for the hot dogs. But the three bottles of wine she’d brought along had gone over well. Paige and Jessie had been banished to the gym.

“Good idea! What would everybody like?” Darren took the orders, and told the person on the phone to make the delivery to the front door of the school. “When you come in, bring them to the gym. Someone will direct you from there.”

Thirty minutes later, Miguel’s head appeared at the top of the ladder. He lifted up three large pizzas, placed them on the roof, and climbed up after them. “Hey, can I join this party?” He didn’t wait for a reply, but trotted over with the pizzas and sat down next to Kathleen.

“What did you do with Grace?” she asked him.

“I left her downstairs shooting baskets with Paige and Jessie. When I came up, she was ahead by eighteen points.”

The party progressed uneventfully for another half hour or so. Everyone seemed to be having a good time. Darren and Kate were singing campfire songs.

I think it must have been the noise. We were all a little loud. Or maybe it was the music ... Kathleen had just put on some AC/DC and had cranked the stereo up pretty loud. It was Darren who noticed the flashing red and blue lights reflected from the parking lot.

He went over to the edge of the roof and looked down. “It’s the police” he called over to us. He sounded panicked. “It looks like they’re already in the school.”

Sure enough, three minutes later a uniformed police officer appeared at the top of the ladder, followed a few seconds later by his partner. They looked around.

“What on earth ...?”

“Well, it’s like this ...” Darren started to explain. But the first officer cut him off.

“The caretaker called us”, he said. He wasn’t looking too pleased.

“Pam? She wouldn’t do that!” Mindy was indignant.

“She assumed it was a bunch of kids up here. She was quite concerned.” The officer looked back at Darren. “Who are you, exactly?”

“Uh ...” Darren wasn’t sure what to say. “I’m the school Principal. We’re sort of having our ... staff party?”

“On the roof??” The officer looked incredulous.

“Well ... it seemed like a good idea at the time ...”

The officer thought for a moment. He looked at his partner, who shrugged. “Well, I guess that’s all right, I suppose. But you probably should turn down that barbecue a little.”

We all looked at the barbecue. The flames were about a foot high. It really did make a great campfire.

“Uh ... yeah, sure!” Darren looked relieved.

The two officers each took a slice of pizza, but declined our offer of a glass of wine, before descending the ladder. As soon as they were out of sight, Paige and Jessie appeared.

“Hey, did you see that tall one? He was really hot!” Jessie seemed quite excited. “I asked him for his phone number!”

“You what??” Bonnie was indignant. “He’s way too old for you!. What are you doing asking strange men ... uh, strange police officers ... for their phone numbers!? Besides ...”

But Paige’s laughter gave it away. “Got you!”

Bonnie wasn’t amused.

People started leaving about midnight. Bonnie and the girls had already retired to their tent, and other than them, Darren was the last one down the hatch.

He didn’t know they’d stayed behind. He locked the hatch from the inside.

I got a frantic phone call from Bonnie at about 6 am on Sunday morning. “Bill, get over here as fast as you can. It’s an emergency. You’ll need the key. Someone locked the hatch. Hurry!”

I made it back to the school as fast as I could. I was worried. Had Paige fallen off the roof? Had the tent caught on fire? Did someone have food poisoning?

I scrambled up the ladder as quickly as I could, and fumbled with the padlock. After a few minutes I managed to get it open. There was pounding on the lid above my head as I pushed it upwards.

I was nearly knocked off the ladder as Paige, Jessie and Bonnie clambered down around me, elbowing me out of the way.

“Sorry, sorry ... gotta go!”

Apparently they should have found a way to get the ‘port-a-potty’ up to the roof.