

STORIES OF LODGES, CAMP SITES, & A CAMPFIRE SONG

By John F. Hall

In 1976, my son, John was nine years old. My wife, Paula and I drove to Yellowstone



National Park in Wyoming. I was pulling a Star Craft pop-up camper with a Ford truck. The truck had no air conditioning. We entered the National Park and stayed at the Madison Campground. It is located about 14 miles east of the town of West Yellowstone, and 16 miles north of the Old Faithful Inn. The campground provides a picnic table and a fire grate. It has no electricity, water, or sewer hook hookups at any of the campsites. It has public restrooms with flush toilets, and faucets with only cold running water. Pay showers are not available, so we drove down to the Old Faithful Inn.

The Inn is a national historic landmark, and the most requested lodging facility in the park. It was built, by and for the Northern Pacific Railroad, in 1904, from local logs and stones. It is considered to be the largest log-style structures in the world. The focal point of the Inn is a massive stone fireplace with a hand-crafted clock. The clock is mainly made of copper, wood and metal. A local blacksmith named George Colpitts built the clock in 1903. He also made the fireplace andirons. The Inn is owned by the Park Service, in which it contracts concessionaires to operate it as well as other facilities in the park. The Inn has 327 rooms. It is primitive in many respects. It has no air conditioning, no internet, no TV, no radio, no Wi-Fi, and no cellphone service. No pets are allowed, and no smoking/vaping is permitted in the Old Faithful Inn. Today, the cost to rent a room in the Old Faithful Inn, is \$440.00 a night.

In Comparison, the Lake Barkley State Resort lodge, which is located about four miles from my house, it has pet friendly rooms, for an additional fee of \$30 per stay. It has available smoking rooms. It has free High Speed Internet (Wi-Fi), air conditioning, flat screen TV, fitness center, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, golf course, riding stables, game room, and other amenities. It has 120 rooms that rent for \$130.00 a night. The lodge uses post-and-beam wood construction of Western Cedar, and Douglas fir. It has three and a half acres of glass. Its huge timbers and expansive, towering glass, is the reason that it is the flag ship of the Kentucky State Parks system. Its massive limestone fireplace in the dinning area is impressive. It has a nice RV campground about two miles from the lodge.

We drove to the Old Faithful Inn to use a shower facility. Today, they charge \$3.50 per person to take a shower, and \$1.50 towel rental, if you don't have your own towel. After taking a shower, I walked over to the Ranger Station by the Inn, but I did not see a Ranger on duty. After looking inside the Inn, I went outside and noticed some screened buildings. They have a roof, wood siding about four-feet high, and the rest is screen to keep out the mosquitoes. I walked over, and listened to the conversations, of some of the people inside one of those buildings. I soon realized that I had wandered into what I would call an employee compound.

The Yellowstone National Park Lodges have almost 3,000 employees during the summer season. Each lodge in the park feeds and houses these employees away from the tourist. John Wise wrote the poem, "A Yellowstone Poem." These are his words: "How fortunate we are to be here today, a day of a Yellowstone winter. While so many men and women are working so hard to secure their fortunes here on Earth. Give me not a brick mansion here on Earth, for they are always in need of repair - and an owner to repair them. Give me instead a large beautiful field such as this one, bounded by mountains and pines. Give me a river long and rising with trout. Give me a hot spring with its rainbows of steam and a geyser of fireworks so grand. Give me , if possible, a river otter, sliding with abandon on a frozen river bank. Give me these things, and my fortune I have. Because Yellowstone is my mansion on Earth."

I appreciate what John Wise wrote. I live in a very old wooden mansion, that has served the needs of so many families, these past 168 years. He is correct about a mansion always being in need of repairs. I've been making those repairs for the past 46 years. My son called Yellowstone, Jellystone. We brought his bicycle with us. Those were different times, and we stayed at Campgrounds of America (KOA). Campers are a different type of family».- Our son would tell us that he was going to find a friend. He would get on his bike, and go to other campers. In a few minutes, he would be back with a new friend, about his age. We enjoyed sitting around a small campfire, as we cooked our own food.

When my grandchildren, Andrea, Heather, and John-John were little, we drove to Holiday World and rented a cabin for the weekend. We also rented a golf cart. They would pile in, and we drove around the campground. We would call out: "Marco!" And listen to see if any of the other campers would respond: "Polo!" And many of them shouted that answer- back to us. On the patio, at the back of my house, I once had a small portable fire pit. It was just a metal bowl with three legs. I would fill it full with small broken tree branches. I would set the wood on fire, and we would roast marshmallows. We made roasting sticks from a nearby bush. My grandchildren would tell made up stories, as we sat in aluminum folding chairs. The years rolled on and the center of the fire pit rusted through.

One of my favorite campfire songs is, "How Great Thou Art." it was written by Carl Boberg in 1885. These are some of his lyrics: "Oh Lord, My God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made. I hear the rolling thunder. Thy power through the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, My Savior God to thee. How great Thou art, how great Thou art. And when I think God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled & died to take my sin away...When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart. Then I shall bow, in humble adoration, and then proclaim, my God how great Thou art..."

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:
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