

Humor Me

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“Some Psychological Traumas Run Deep”

On the way home from a church mission trip in Southwest Virginia, I reluctantly accompanied nineteen high school students on a tubing trip down the New River near Blacksburg (cue *Deliverance* music). If you haven't had the pleasure, tubing involves stuffing your hind quarters into the middle of a tractor tire tube while you glide peacefully down a river enjoying the calm current and the beautiful scenery. At least that's how it's supposed to be. As the students poured into the New River that day, I stayed onshore reliving a vivid flashback of *my* first tubing experience.

At the time, I was only thirteen and the bottom line was that I was terrified of snakes, snapping turtles and anything else that might lurk in the murky water under my *own* bottom line. In fact, I had offered to stay home to keep an eye on our valuables but my parents reminded me that we had no valuables so I was forced to go along for the ride. Thus began a psychological trauma of *Dueling Banjo* proportions.

Shortly after we “put in,” we encountered our first run of rapids. I quickly discovered that my body was not well suited for tubing. Not only did I continually slip through the tube, due to the simple fact that my slight yet chiseled physique didn't fill the hole, I had no natural padding to protect me from the four thousand or so river rocks scattered throughout the rapids. I *bottomed* out a dozen times causing bruises all over my back side – which could have been just the evidence I needed for Social Services to place me in a non-tubing family. I complained about the rocks but my brother just told me to “grow up” and “act like a man.” It occurs to me that I don't even act like a man today so I'm sure it was an unrealistic expectation at thirteen.

After barely surviving rapids, we hit a deep, slow section of the river. During the slow sections, you have a lot of time to think and when *I'm* in deep, slow water, I tend to think about what else might be in the deep, slow water. It was the *scaredest* I had ever been....that is until we floated around the next bend.

I could hear the others yelling about something in the river and warning us to steer clear. All I could see was what appeared to be a large balloon. In fact, it resembled that Porky Pig balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. As I got closer, however, I realized it was no balloon.

It was a *real* pig. A real *dead* pig.

And apparently, it had been there for a quite some time because it had grown, filled with dead pig gas, to the size of a small Southwest Virginia mobile home. And what was worse, the current was taking me right towards it.

Panic set in. My legs and arms began thrashing about as if my life and future psychological wellbeing depended on one simple outcome – get my bruised bottom line out of that river and onto the safety of the shore. Luckily, I had attended swim camp that year and was quite an effective thrasher. After an exhausting two minutes of Olympic-caliber helicopter strokes, I reached shallow water and dove for the bank.

My mother, bless her heart, was not so lucky.

You see, my mother had never learned to swim – or to thrash for that matter. And while her natural buoyancy would keep her afloat if she fell off her tube, she had no ability to coordinate her limbs in any one direction. The more she flailed the less effective she was. It was like watching a NASCAR accident in slow motion. She screamed her way right into the underbelly of that swollen swine.

As she made contact, a loud burst of gas exploded from some hidden opening on the pig. The elasticity from the tightened skin then propelled her back across the water and slammed her onto the shore right behind me. Frantically, she picked up her tube and declared that she'd meet us at the car four miles down the road. Of course, I went with her thus avoiding the chance of running into another one of Old MacDonald's missing friends further downstream.

Since that sunny afternoon in my thirteenth year, I have never tubed in a river again. And while it wasn't quite as intense as *Deliverance*, I sure do have a greater respect for Ned Beatty.

Until next time, just humor me.

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