

Happy camper

Roof and a loo spell luxury in the great outdoors

- Let me tell you about the Taj Mahal. I'm not talking about the world-renowned jewel of cultural and architectural heritage in Agra, India. I speak of the colossal and architecturally past-its-prime, purple-striped travel trailer adorning our driveway.

I've camped all my life. Growing up, we went to a remote river location on Vancouver Island. The water was icy cold but crystal clear. There were trails to hike and an old suspension bridge we mercilessly terrorized my mother with, running, jumping and fearlessly flinging ourselves from side to swinging side.

Mom spent days stocking our camper with life-saving provisions from antibiotic cream and bug spray to the most delectable junk food known to child-kind. There were chips, Cheezies, marshmallows and gasp—pop! But we kids celebrated the cereal most.

Greedily garnering the baby-sized boxes, my brother and I scoffed at token healthy selections like Rice Krispies and Raison Bran, ripping into the Fruit Loops, magically delicious Lucky Charms and any other candy-coated crunchiness that turned the milk pink. Such delicacies were not permitted in our pantry at home.

Is it any wonder I grew up to marry an avid outdoorsman? There's just one petite problem. My kind of camping includes a solid roof over my head and a door that locks. My husband's version? You pack in what you need—shelter and camping cereal included.

Say what?

I've laid my smoky head to rest in some remote places, but I'm no mountain mama. Despite my outdoor experience, I am a girl governed by two overriding fears: hungry bears and bad outhouses.

I can't sleep for fear of some grizzly kneading at my nylon tent. And don't even get me started on "the facilities." If it doesn't flush...

My husband says I fooled him with tales of catching crayfish clinging to river walls and plopping them into a boiling pot over a roaring fire (that may have been my brother). I say he tricked me with his fashion-forward shirt and fast car.

"You said your name was Paul," I like to remind him. "You left off the Bunyan part."

Imagine my joy, then, when he surprised my son, daughter and me with a very used, but well loved and meticulously cared for—

trailer. I excitedly outfitted it with matching plastic plates and cups and bowls and real wine glasses from the Dollar Store.

There's a little fridge with a little freezer and, best of all, a little loo. Complete with a single sink and a tiny toilet, there's even a small shower stall. Mind you, if you take the time to shave your legs, the water tank drains pretty fast.

On our maiden voyage we hit Dutch Lake, intent upon exploring the Wells Grey area with good friends. Confined to a tiny camper with two teens, Jillian, made her way across the double site to our spacious abode. Sitting across from one another at my kitchen table, chopping sweet peppers for salad, stirring a little tonic into gin, she waved her drink into the air. "Would you look at this place?" she said. "I'm in the (bleeping) Taj Mahal." It wasn't holy water, but the Taj was christened.

Five years later, the Taj has taken us places. We've traveled internationally, but some of the best trips have been exploring our backyard, in the veneer-walled, green shag carpeted, slightly musty, but entirely magical Taj.

A couple of years ago my husband met up with the man whose family owned, loved and then outgrew the Taj before us. He was very sick. A short time later, he left this life; travelling, I hope, someplace spectacular, leaving us to savour the sweet simplicity of togetherness in the purple-paneled Taj. **OL**