

Where's the Tent?

by Sheila Murray Bethel, Ph.D.

Four friends of mine went fishing in a wild and beautiful national park. They found a perfect campsite in a pine grove next to a river that positively shimmered with fishing promise. As fast as they could, they set up their big four-person tent, stowed their belongings, and set off eagerly down the riverbank with their rods and reels.

When they returned to their campsite a few hours later, tired but happy, they stood openmouthed in disbelief. There was a big empty space where their tent had stood. It was gone! A quick search showed that everything else was still there -- their stove, tools, food, sleeping bags, and personal belongings.

Their first stunned confusion soon changed to anger and a storm of questions: Why did someone take the tent and nothing else? Was a tent all the thief needed? Did they interrupt him so he couldn't finish the job? Or would he soon return for more? And why did he, she (or perhaps "they") steal at all?

Fortunately, they still had their Coleman stove, frying pan, and eating utensils -- all the tools they needed to cook their fish and eat it. And they still had their sleeping bags against the chilly night air. Over dinner and late into the night, they sat around the campfire, debating the significance of the missing tent. Finally they all agreed on what it meant.

At peace at last, they climbed into their sleeping bags, gazing up at stars instead of canvas. Being city people, they rarely got to see stars up close and personal, "as if you could reach up and grab them," they told me. "And it didn't rain!" That night they slept more deeply than they had since they were babies.

And what was the conclusion they all had reached, the discovery that allowed this oneness with the universe? They had once again realized that life is inexplicable.

All of us have sudden changes in our life that are the equivalent of having the tent stolen from over our heads. We invest ourselves heavily in a project that fails. We lose a job, become ill or go through a life crisis. But as long as we still have the basics such as courage, faith, friendship, the ability to care and laugh and hope, we still have the tools we need for life. The thieves of life can't steal our enthusiasm and curiosity, our ability to care and love and be loved.

The moral: Someone will steal your tent every single time! Expect it, and be grateful that you still have the basics. Look up and enjoy the stars like the fishermen