

Frank Mazer  
**Sierra sights**

What a sight. High mountain peaks of the Sierras to all sides close around us. A shimmering small lake sits next to us at our camp site. Screams echo around off the rock walls. Creatures scurry past us. This is bear country.

It was 1983. I still a young teacher. On a camping trip for three days with a former student and athlete who was now a successful worker in Alaska. He a weightlifter, 2 meters tall and 120 kilos. And the 70 kilo me, athletic, wiry and not lifter of weight heavier than a basketball. It is a rocky area where the campground is located. High in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California near Yosemite National Park. It is a few hundred meters away from the narrow mountain roadway which , clinging to a mountainside above the canyon dropping 1000 feet down to a narrow river, has made its tortured way here to 9,000 feet on the Eastern side of the mountain range. A spectacular setting in the Range of Light. Steep cliffs rise above the sparkling lake. Not many trees here in this campground. There are often gusts of wind. They send fascinating ripples moving across the water. There are little chipmunks running around inspecting the trash can areas which

have tops on them. Our chipmunk friends.

We have set up our little tent. We have our foam sleeping pads on some flat dirt area between rocks. We sit and read and enjoy the natural beauties around us. The sound of the wind and the sight of the water and the cliffs. The distant roar of small waterfalls. Stillness. The edge of the wilderness area. There are no other people here at this place. Another car pulls in and parks. It is two pretty college age women. They step from their car and stand looking about, they both are medium build and shapely. We mustn't notice. We are not here for chasing women. In fact, we are here to escape from recent past near destruction by women who dumped us like roadkill and backed up over us. We keep reading. Ten meters distant, the women make sure to ignore us like we are mountain rodents.

The two women, who look to be early twenties in age, set up their camp. They chatter back and forth a little like the chipmunks. We try not to look in their direction, in spite of unspoken desire to do so. They move confidently and happily at their chosen campsite.

We make something to eat. We jiggle the pot as the water combines with the packaged food inside of the pot. We sit down on our chosen round small boulders to

a relaxed moment in mid- afternoon. Scott and I do not discuss our neighbors. The sun remains high enough to bathe our campground. The steep mountain walls across the lake are aglow. We enjoy the scene. We breathe deep the fresh air. We are relaxed yet invigorated.

The women are now lying down on their bellies, their bodies stretched out flat on their foam mats. They have unfastened their bikini tops and lie there dozing in the sun. We will not be in the least distracted from our commune with nature. We turn away and talk of mountains and hikes to come and friends we know. We silently listen to the sound of the wind in the few trees. We listen to - "screaming"!!!! High pitched screaming. It comes from the women. Still seated, we turn our heads to look. I prepare to leap into heroic action. I begin to think of bears. We are in bear country. They are known to be aggressive as they visit campsites. Hand to hand combat with a bear does not interest me. I am no Davey Crockett to smile the bear into submission. Adrenalin begins to react in my body. I fear what I may see. My eyes focus on the women a few meters away. Several chipmunks are running across their backs. The women have now leaped up and are screaming and prancing on their tip-toes crazily while hopping up and down. Topless. We look. There is much hopping. Scott and I

enjoy the other sights to be found in the wild nature. We remain calm. What are we to do? We dare not lunge to the "rescue". It's too late anyway. The scene is natural splendor. Chipmunks, our momentary compatriots, to whom we are grateful, are scampering rapidly off on their toes in disarray and panic in various directions to their nest-holes. The women are dancing in place on their toes flailing their arms and shrieking. It all happens in a minute. We sit on our boulders slightly hunched over the plates we hold in our laps. We dare not stare. We dare not laugh. We glance. We look toward each other, our eyes meet, we look back to the dance performance.

We are not sure how to behave except to pretend nothing has happened. Now the women realize they have attracted an audience. They spin away. They make a huge effort to regain dignity and composure. They act indignant. We are now feeling guilty at having glanced, attracted by the squeals. We also try to stop from laughing. The women, they take their camp and move it farther from us. Shame on us for training those chipmunks is apparently their way of thinking.

We were too young and dumb then I suppose. Full of morals and correctness and other soot. Probably an uncertainty and looming fear of how to handle the

female creature also lurked deep within. We could have offered our nearness and protection from the dangerous wildlife in the evening?? We could have been of help to them. Started a conversation, make sure they are alright. Instead we went on pretending we saw nothing. But we were not fooling mother nature. Silly younger man I was. A missed opportunity to know the mountains in a new way. The chance to manifest brave American frontier spirit had swept through the mountain outpost. (The black swan had swept across our camp.) I failed to seize it although I sensed it. In the morning we awoke before the sun had the chance to climb out from behind the wall of stone which blocked its rays from us. There was a deep chill in the crisp, fresh air. The women were gone. The chipmunks, they remained. Our books were sorry company.