

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Forget the circus, whitewater rafting is The Greatest Show on Earth

by Aletha Stolar

Okay, so you won't see the big top tent, the elephants, the clowns or the trapeze acrobatics. Just imagine the big top tent as the mountains around you. The elephant can be found as a rock partially submerged below the surface of the water. The clown is the person sitting next to you in the raft, or you guide. If you've ever been to the circus, you get a feeling in your gut as the aerial acrobat maneuvers high above you. Sometime you hold your breath in anticipation.

That's what your first big rapid feels like, too. You get this funny feeling of anticipation as you hear the roar of the river water tumbling over rocks. Your pulse quickens, adrenaline flows. And you head into your first rapid, perhaps with some trepidation. The raft lurches forward as it picks up speed in the swift current, it careens back and forth and up and down as waves build and break around you. Water splashes in from every direction as you furiously paddle what seems to be like air at times. And then, you're through it and you let out a big laugh because it was so much fun! Looking upstream it's hard to believe that all that white in the water can be so full of energy.

Looking around you, you see the visible signs of pure joy, you hear the laughter and you may even sense some relief at having made it through that first rapid. After all, you really didn't know what this was going to be like. Even though there was great anticipation and even concern about venturing into the unknown, here you are. You did it. You're okay. And, by golly, you're having a good time.

Now that you've shared your first whitewater rapid with the others in your raft, you start sharing your version of the experience. How you felt like that wave was going to wash you right out of the boat. Or how it felt like you had to stand up in order not to get tossed into the river. Or how that splash of water smacked you right in the face and then trickled down the middle of your back sending a shiver down your spine. After drifting along and comparing notes about what just happened, you hear the roar downstream and instinctively know it's about to happen again.

But this time, it feels a little bit more familiar than that first one. Your pulse still quickens in anticipation of the known – not the unknown. You look forward to that feeling of dropping off the edge into a world of water. A sideways glance at the person sitting opposite of you results in eye contact and that unspoken understanding that you're in this together.

The scenario repeats itself. You become more comfortable in your new surroundings with each rapid you encounter. You pause to take in the scenery and marvel at Mother Nature's artwork. You see it in the reflection of the trees along the river's edge. It appears as a swirl of water coming from the unknown depths. Or the way the sun dances with the river. Deep breaths bring a greater awareness of how alive you are and the laughter is so real.

There's a beginning and there's an ending. Though you wish you could go upstream and do it all over again, it's time to go on to your next adventure. And on your way you get to take your new experiences. You've learned a little more about yourself

because you got out of your comfort zone and tried something new. And you had fun.

Did you see that rock elephant just a little bit left of center above Turtle Rock Rapid? It's there if you give it a good look.

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