



Karen Anderson

After my latest outdoor adventure, I'm ready to bed down at home for a while

Like most city dwellers living in the Northwest, Club Columnist Karen Anderson certainly understands the draw of the outdoors. But the opportunity to sleep in a comfortable bed at home can be even more enticing.

It's amazing how a night spent outdoors in the bracing fresh air gives you a whole new perspective on your home and neighborhood.

As I crawled out of my tent the next morning, I thought, yep, we need to replace those leaky gutters, remove that half-dead tree, and put in a new patio. I'm going to talk to the neighbors about that security light of theirs that appears to have been borrowed from Century Link Field. And I'm going to call the chiropractor.

All it took was one night of camping in my backyard.

Backyard camping is a growing trend in the U.S., and when my niece left her 12-year-old daughter with us for a few days, it seemed the perfect solution. We'd have a taste of Northwest outdoor adventure without any worries that little Talia would get eaten by a bear or lost in a ravine. Or that my out-of-shape legs would collapse on a five-mile hike with a 30-pound backpack.

"Have fun," said the Scholarly Gentleman as Talia and I traipsed down the back porch steps after dinner and began setting up the two-person tent I'd purchased.

We opened the box and pulled out a mile and a half of day-glo orange taffeta. Well, at least we'd be easy to spot if they had to send rescue helicopters. The yards of nylon were followed by short pieces of aluminum pole and, of course, the assembly directions: a flimsy sheet of paper with illegible printing and inscrutable diagrams. I squinted and sighed.

"Need to get a magnifying glass and some tools," I muttered. "Be right back."

I ran up the back stairs and into the kitchen. There I made myself a double-shot espresso while frantically Googling "tent assembly instructions."

"Back so soon?" the Scholarly Gentleman called from

the living room, where he was enjoying a movie with many explosions.

"I, er, forgot something," I responded.

There was a knock at the back door.

"You can look now, Aunt Karen," Talia said.

She'd put up the tent. It looked like an orange gumdrop.

"Great job," I said. I could see that the tent would fit two people perfectly – assuming that both of them were the size of a 12-year-old child.

"Our air mattresses are inside," Talia said sweetly.

"Thank you," I said, relieved that I had a fall-back plan: the patio chaise with its nice, thick padding.

As the sun set, we fired up the Weber grill, toasted marshmallows, and sat in our camp chairs telling ghost stories.

"Do you know the one about the homicidal maniac at the lake?" Talia asked eagerly.

"No," I lied. (When I was her age, I'd slept with the lights on for weeks after my cousin Ricky told me the classic.)

It being a summer evening in Seattle, the temperature was plummeting, the wind was soon rising, and a rainstorm was sweeping off the Sound. Talia and I scrambled into our tiny tent, zipped up the flap and zonked out on our air mattresses.

The next thing I knew, it was 5:00 a.m. and something was on top of our tent. The arched ceiling sagged ominously as a good-sized beast (Possum? Raccoon? Wolverine?) settled in for a snooze.

I frantically texted the Scholarly Gentleman, hoping he hadn't turned off the ringer on his phone.

"Huge animal in tent," I mis-typed and pressed Send.

"I mean ON TENT," I corrected.

There was no answer.

The beast atop the tent slumbered on. In her sleeping bag, Talia lay dreaming of the next big breakthrough in tent technology. Forty feet away, and one floor above us, the Scholarly Gentleman snored, warm and comfortable in a real bed. I lay contorted on my air mattress.

It would be morning soon. Our furry visitor would leave. There would be pancakes and bacon on the grill for Talia. And for me, assuming I could haul myself out of this tent, there would be hot coffee and plenty of ibuprofen.

