

DEAR READER,

3-24-19

HEY! I HOPE YOU ARE DOING WELL.  
 SUWANNEE RIVER TRIP....

TOWARDS THE END OF THE RIVER TRIP, AFTER SEEING HUNDREDS OF GAZERS & LOTS OF SNAKES & TURTLES & OTHER LIFE THAT LIVED ALONG THE SUWANNEE, WE MADE IT TO THE FINAL SPRING. MANATEE SPRINGS. IT WAS THE LARGEST OF THEM ALL THAT I HAD SEEN. THERE WERE FAMILIES ALREADY THERE, PLAYING IN THE WATER AND COOKING HAMBURGERS & HOT DOGS ON THE COMMUNITY GRILLS, KIDS RUNNING AROUND....

WE FLOAT IN AND PULL OUR CANOES UP TO THE SMALL WOODEN DOCK & GET THEM DOWN. WE WERE GIVEN THE GO BY OUR CHIEFS TO HOP IN AND SWIM. WE DO JUST THAT.

AS ONE POINT, I'M SWIMMING IN THE BRACKISH WATER. (BRACKISH WATER IS WHERE THE SALT WATER FROM THE OCEAN MEETS THE FRESH WATER OF THE RIVER) I THINK I WAS HAVING A SPLASHING WAR WITH THE OTHER KIDS WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN SOMETHING HUGE SWAM BETWEEN MY LEGS! IT DIDN'T JUST KNOCK MY LEG, NO, IT WAS SO BIG SO PUSHED MY LEGS APART. I GRABBED MY... PLUMBING AFRAID SOMETHING MIGHT TRY TO EAT IT... (KIDS THINKING HA! HA! HA!) AND I ROLLED, SPUN, FLAPPED ONE ARM (BECAUSE THE OTHER WAS PROTECTING MY PLUMBING) IN A FOCUS PAUSE AND MADE MY WAY BACK TO THE DOCKS. TERRIFIED A JURASSIC PARKS SIZE GAZOR WAS ABOUT TO MAKE A MEAL OF ME, I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE. A FEW

others from my tribe followed suit. But as we clamber onto the dock I notice all the regular heads were running and jumping off the dock into the water where the giant, Jurassic sea lizard that tried to eat my twins was lurking. I was just on the verge of yelling to those heads to get out when one of our chiefs head popped up from the water & said, "Relax guys, they're just manatees. They're harmless. Come on back in." The others went right back in. It took me a couple minutes to warm to the idea. My nuts were still heading somewhere up inside of me. I imagine one's twin being ripped off by large, sharp teeth can do that to a guy.

I eventually got in & got close. I swam with one for a few seconds. But while it was cool as all get out I was having a lot of fun, it was also sad. On the manatee I was swimming with, which had to weigh north of 500 lbs, I saw carvings on it. The one in particular I can remember was a heart with 2 initials at the top **AND** a name at the bottom. A. J. ♥ Beth. Manatees are slow, large, gentle creatures... I imagine being so slow that you couldn't fend off someone carving a blade into your back... to say so'd such would be an understatement.

Overall, the river trip was a whole lot of fun. I had never done this before and where I

GREW UP, NORTH CAROLINA, I SWAM IN RIVERS & LAKES & CREEKS. GATORS? WHAT GATORS?? IF WE HAD ANY GATORS THEY LIVED IN THE SEWERS... HA! HA!

A FEW YEARS AGO I LEARNED I WAS WRONG ABOUT NORTH CAROLINA HAVING NO GATORS. EVEN RECENTLY I READ SOMETHING ABOUT A DOG BEING ATTACKED BY A GATOR UP THERE.... ALL THOSE RIVERS & LAKES I SWAM IN... IF I'D HAVE ONLY KNOWN! HA! HA!

ON OUR WAY BACK WE STOPPED IN SAN FERNANDO BEACH & CAMPED FOR THE NIGHT. AS A SURPRISE THE CHIEFS BOUGHT US PIZZA AND SODAS! WE DESTROYED ALL OF IT! NOT EVEN THE CRUST WAS LEFT. NOW THAT I TALK ABOUT IT... I THINK WE ATE THE BOXES AS WELL... I'M JOKING... MAYBE.

BUT THERE'S A DOWNSIDE TO THAT. AFTER EATING DEHYDRATED FOOD FOR MORE THAN 2 WEEKS, OUR STOMACHS WEREN'T READY TO BE PACKED FULL OF GREASY, RICH FOOD. AND WE ALL ENDED UP WITH PAINFUL DIARRHEA. WE WERE ALL LINED UP AT THE "ONLY" OUTHOUSE FOR HOURS. SOME OF US COULDN'T WAIT & RAN FOR THE WOODS. THAT WAS A ROUGH NIGHT! HA!

I HOPE Y'ALL ENJOYED READING ABOUT MY RIVER TRIP! NEXT TIME I'M GOING TO SHARE THE TIME I ALMOST GOT HIT BY A BOLT OF LIGHTNING.

UNTILL THEN.

YOURS TRULY,  
DOUG