

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina
(Chapter 1)

I am Larry. Katrina is my future girlfriend and potential wife. But there are obstacles. One obstacle is a guy named Ansel. In my mind, I often just refer to him as Asshole. But I try to keep that under wraps. Once in a while it slips out. Ansel is manly, handsome, athletic, robust, I could go on, but what is the point. I already hate him. Katrina still has not acknowledged that he is her boyfriend. So there is still hope for me. I am not all the things that Ansel is, but according to Katrina, I am cute. I will take what I can get. So in my pursuit of Katrina, I am always offering my services to help her out in any way possible. For example, she had three trees in her backyard that she wanted to chop down. I volunteered. I even bought a chain saw that I thought would make the job extremely easy. I am a former engineer. So I have all kinds of mathematical abilities, but mostly theoretical, not practical. Never-the-less, I have lots of enthusiasm. So Katrina let me try to cut down her trees. I am perched 15 feet off the ground with the chain saw in my grip. I calculated the angle of the cut and began the slice. Everything was going well until the branch split and fell straight down and hit my foot. This knocked me out of the tree. I fell down and landed on my back on the grass. Luckily, it only knocked the wind out of me. Katrina rushed to my side and lifted me up. Cradled in her arms, I considered this a winning result.

So fast forward to chore number two. She needed her roof re-roofed. This seemed like a hard job, but it was only manual labor. I was beginning to think that manual labor was only what I was good for. Still this was an opportunity to show off my engineering skills. I ordered enough roofing material for the job and had them delivered it to her driveway. It came on big pallets. Later I found out that they would have lifted the material up on the roof. Now I had to throw all the roofing material up on the roof by hand. This took me the rest of the day. I still counted this as a win because Katrina treated me to dinner that she cooked herself. On top of that, Asshole, I mean Ansel was not invited. The next day, my back was sore, but I was determined to complete the job. I needed to bring the tar paper roll up on top of the roof, but it was too heavy for me to lift it by hand. Don't worry, engineering is my specialty. I took a 2X8 plank and angled it up on the roof. Then I tied a rope

through the center of the tar paper roll. I got up on the roof and started to pull the roll up the plank. About 90% all the way up something unfortunate happened. The heavy roll slid off of the plank and with its momentum, it swung out an back and crashed through Katrina's living room window. I have enough money to compensate for my misdeeds. Katrina is sympathetic knowing that I was doing this for her. Maybe I am getting more points than Ansel. I did finish the roofing job and that earned me another dinner alone with Katrina.

Now chore #3. I am really racking up points. But sometimes I take one step forward and two steps back. Katrina had her back yard re-landscaped. Thankfully, I didn't have to participate in this. But it was her desire to put a fountain in the corner of her new backyard. The fountain pieces were delivered to her driveway. One of the parts was extremely heavy. It was the main water basin. A big circular piece. I was able to roll it from the driveway through the gate to the back yard. The only problem was the place where she wanted the fountain was in the corner of a planter that was 2 feet above the grass line. No problem for an elite engineer like me. She wanted to ask some neighbors for help, but I told her it was not necessary. Besides, if one of them got hurt they might sue her. I built a ramp with some plywood and I was sure it would be good enough to roll the circular cement piece up and over the brick retaining wall. I was $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to success when I slip in the dirt. The round cement piece came back down the ramp and I could not hold it. It rolled all the way across the patio deck and crashed through her sliding glass door. Ansel happened to come by at that moment, retrieved the errant fountain section, rolled it back out and lifted it up and over the retaining wall.

He was awarded a dinner with Katrina while I was relegated to contacting the glass repairman whom was started to think of me as his best friend.

The next weekend Katrina told me that Ansel had invited her to go fishing on his boat. Of course he has a boat. He is from a rich family. She said she was not comfortable going alone with him and was kind of leery of the ocean. No problem, I was a former Navy sailor and spent countless hours on the ocean. I didn't mention that my duty was always below decks. I figured that Ansel

was taking this opportunity to get her alone in her itty bitty teenie weenie yellow polka dot bikini.

Ansel was not happy to see me at the boat dock on that Saturday morning. Katrina had told him that I was there to help with running the boat. So he had no choice but to welcome me aboard. As we prepared to leave, “Captain Ansel” started barking orders to me. OK, boatswain (this is what they called the deck hands on board a ship) cast off. Aye aye Captain Ass eh, Ansel. I have expected him to hit the gas and leave me on the dock. I was told that we were headed out toward an unpopulated island where Ansel said the fishing was good. We both stumbled our way around the boat tripping over ourselves trying to impress Katrina who was impervious to us while sunning herself on the bow.

Sometimes I think God gave us guys the short end of the stick. Why did he make woman so beautiful and alluring making us look like fools drooling over her? Then I remember that when I wake up, I splash water on my face, run my fingers through my hair, brush my teeth and I am good to go. The ladies spend hours doing makeup, hair, primping so that they do look so alluring to us. Then I think of childbirth and am glad once again that I am a man.

We finally reach our destination. Captain Ansel says to me, “Anchors Ahoy” (which means raise the anchor). What he really meant to command was to drop the anchor. I point out his lack of nautical language and see a small smile cross Katrina's lips. So we are just off the shoreline of the island in about 10 feet of water. I am letting the anchor chain out and instead of paying attention to my chore, I am eyeing Katrina. No teenie weenie bikini, but sexy enough to get my blood boiling. I do not notice that the anchor chain is not secured to the hoist sprocket. The anchor keeps heading for the bottom. Ansel had shut off the engines and we were drifting toward the rocky shoreline. He tried to start the engines, but it was too late. The bow crashed into the rocks and the boat got stuck. We jumped off of the boat into the chilly water and waded to shore. I could see the venomous look that Ansel was giving me, but I stood my ground. What kind of Captain are you? Didn't you check all the safety items before we left?

Ansel asked, do you know when high tide is? At high tide, the boat will come free of the rocks. Yes I do know when the next high tide will be. I at least took the time to check this out. The next high tide is in 4 hours and then another one 12 hours later. What do you mean, is there more than one high tide a day? I thought the ocean water just followed the Moon around. I couldn't complain much about Ansel's lack of knowledge. I too didn't know this until later in life. The Moon is too far away to pull the ocean water away from the Earth's gravitation. It does pull the water from the edge of Earth on two sides. This produces a high tide on the Moon side and two low tides on the edges. The other high tide is on the other side of the Earth.

No use blaming each other, we need to make the best of our situation. The island didn't have much shelter and even though the breeze wasn't strong, we were in danger of hypothermia. Don't worry, I am a former boy scout and I know how to make a fire with just a couple of sticks. We scavenged the shoreline and found enough kindling for the makings of a fire. I found a suitable round stick and I started to roll it in my palm. This was another chance to impress Katrina with my survival knowledge. It wasn't long before I had a small fire going. We kept piling on more wood until we had what I would call a bonfire. Soon we were all warm and toasty. What we did not notice was that the boat had hit the rocks hard enough to rupture the gas tank. A stream of gas was leaking out into the water. Sparks from our bonfire found their way to the gas and ignited the stream. Ansel's boat exploded in a fiery ball. We all looked on in stunned silence.

In these situations you have to look for the silver lining. The explosion was big enough that the coast guard cutter that was cruising nearby saw it and rescued us.

Ansel did have insurance on his boat, so at least he could replace it. I don't think Katrina will be going on any more boat rides with him though. That is a relief to me.

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina
(Chapter 2) The Camp Out

Katrina informed me that Ansel invited her on a camp out hike. He also

invited me which was a total surprise. I was not sure what he was up to until the morning we met to set off. He had brought his cousin Jenna along. Now I see what he was up to. He set this up as a couples outing. Of course dating his cousin was not appropriate, so that would leave him free to pursue Katrina. I don't think he anticipated how things would turn out. I was not as upset as you might think. First of all, Jenna was really cute. If I played my cards right, this could backfire on Ansel. It might even make Katrina jealous. I don't know what kind of experience Ansel had with the outdoors, but I am in my element there. As I mentioned before, I was a boy scout. I had been camping and hiking my whole life. During my scouting days, I participated in many events involving survival techniques. My most outstanding moment was when I won the archery contest. I could hit a bullseye from 25 yards almost every time. So I had brought a big 6 person tent, lots of hiking utensils, and my compound bow. Ansel started in right away to make fun of me. Who do you think you are, Robin Hood? Actually, I am more like William Tell. How about you stand over in front of that tree and I will shoot an apple off of the top of your head. That removed the smirk from his face. So you can see that we were off to a happy start. The area where we were camping was right next to a boy scout troop. We set up our camp and settled down to cook our evening dinner. The fire pits were just open metal rings. After we got the fire going, we sat around and just relaxed. The smoke from the fire would wonder around and get into everyone's eyes. I suggested to Ansel that he should ask the scout troop for a smoke shiftier. I explained that this would direct the smoke away from our eyes. Why should I go ask for one? I could do it, but you are a much more imposing character with lots of charm. I am sure they would accommodate your request. This ego massaging worked on him. He left and approached the scout troop. At the first group, I couldn't hear what was said, but I saw the troop leader point in a different direction. Ansel headed off to the second group. This went on for nearly 15-20 minutes. Each time Ansel was directed to the next group. Finally he returned. He said no one had a smoke shiftier. Both Jenna and Katrina saw the smile on my lips and ascertained that I had tricked Ansel with an old boy scout ruse.

The same kinds of tricks are played on new sailor cadets. On board ship, I was asked to go down to the stock room and get some relative bearing grease.

I knew that relative bearing referred to the direction the ship's bow was pointing. The bow was North, the stern was South, starboard (right) was East and port (left) was West. This was just an expression never needing any grease. Another time, the chief asked me to go to the parts counter and get a Fallopian tube. At that time, our radios still used vacuum tubes. I wasn't naive enough to fall for that one either.

The evening worn on and it was time to turn in. There was plenty of room inside the tent, so no one felt claustrophobic and we all chose our sleeping bag spot separated enough from each other. The next morning, Ansel suggested we start off on a hike. My backpack contained water purification tablets, a flashlight, a space blanket, and a Garmin GPS. I never let on that I had that. I also had strapped on my compound bow and arrow quiver. Ansel took the lead and we set off. With him leading us, it only took 15 minutes for us to get turned around and lost. He said, I think camp is back this way, no maybe that way. You go over a couple hills and the forest looks the same in every direction. My GPS had been previously set to our camp location. All I really needed was to follow it in reverse as it had tracked our journey. I didn't want to spoil the fun, so I still let Ansel lead. He was taking us further and further in the wrong direction. I had brought two bottles of water. No one else had thought to bring any. We came upon a stream. Ansel walked down to the stream's edge and started to drink directly out of the fresh flowing water. I advised everyone not to do that. Why? Even though the water looks fresh and pure, it contains bacteria. Do you think the wild animals dig a latrine when they have to go? I took my canteen off of my belt, filled it up with stream water and put a purification tablet inside. When it dissolved, I offered it to Katrina and Jenna. I told Ansel when he got back home to go to the doctor and check for Giardia. This can really screw you up for months. I can see that both Jenna and Katrina were starting to appreciate my outdoors knowledge. Ansel continued to send us in the wrong direction. It was getting late in the day and I didn't want to get caught out here at night. I told Ansel that he was heading in the wrong direction. He says what makes you think you know what direction is right? I said if we were going in the right direction, we would have been back at camp hours ago. He said I think the camp is right over the next hill. He stomped off at a quick pace. I imagine he was getting frustrated and pissed off at the same time. We trudged behind

him and he disappeared over the next rise. We heard him yell all of a sudden. As we reached the top of the hill, we saw that he had fallen down a ravine. That was not the only problem. On the next hill there appeared a mountain lion. Of course bears also lived in these woods. Bears can kill you, but they will not eat you. Mountain lions are different. To them, we just look like two legged deer. That is their prominent food source. Ansel had gotten his boot stuck in a crevice and could not move. The mountain lion was making is move toward him and it was not hard to gauge its intention. I took my bow out and nocked an arrow. As the mountain lion got ready to pounce, I fired. The arrow went right through its neck and the whole body landed on top of Ansel. We scrambled down the hill and lifted the carcass off of him. His face was white as a ghost, but otherwise he was unharmed. The girls asked me what are you going to do with the mountain lion? Are you going to report this incident to the rangers. My answer was nothing and no. The coyotes will take care of the mountain lion. If we reported it to the rangers they might put me in jail for having a lethal weapon. I asked, are you all ready to return to camp. I know the way. I received three yeses. I walked up to the top of the hill and fired off my GPS. Unseen by anyone else, I took stock of the right direction. As they reached my vantage point, I pointed my hand at the sun using Spock's Vulcan greeting sign. I spun around and aimed my hand 180 degrees away from the Sun. The camp direction is that way as I indicated where the GPS had shown me. We were about a mile from the camp. Twenty five minutes later we were back safe and sound. How did you know which way the camp was Jenna asked? I just have a sixth sense about these things. Being a man of mystery is very attractive for woman. I was starting to warm up toward Jenna.

This evening was suppose to be different. I could tell that my status as a man was elevated a few notches due to today's heroics. Even Ansel viewed me with more respect. That raise in status was going to be short lived. We were sitting around our campfire after another meal when three strangers approached out camp. They were junior scout leaders from the scout camp. Why were they trying to join our camp? It wasn't because of my pretty face I was sure. Nothing like accompanying two stunning beauties that would bring out lowlifes like these three into our midst. It didn't take long for their intentions to be revealed. After short introductions, they started making lude

remarks toward our ladies. Why not join us in our tents. I can see why you are with mister majestic here, but why hang around this poor excuse of a male. Come with us and we will show you what real men can do. I imagine that alcohol was involved at some point. I immediately told them that their presence was not longer wanted here. Oh, who is going to make us leave? There are three of us against one and a half of you. I don't see it that way. I see two against one. How's that? I expect that there is only one brain between the three of you. Now the fight was on. I may be small, but I have lots of vigor. Previously, I had taken a taekwondo class. It is true that I only reached the white belt level. (This is the lowest level and is even given to beginners.) I had participated for two months, but had to give it up because I pulled a groin muscle doing a snap kick in the air. So much for my martial arts expertise. Non-the-less, I brought all my knowledge to the fight. As one of the protagonists approached me, I pictured putting my foot six inches past his mid section. That would have resulted in breaking his ribs. As it turned out, I did perform my leg swing kick and I completely missed and fell on my ass. When trying to get up I was knocked out with one punch.

It only seemed like a minute before I woke up, I was cradled between Jenna and Katrina with Ansel looking down. As they lifted me to my feet, I asked what happened? Ansel said, I took care of all three. Besides being the local gym boxing champ, I also took a turn at MMA (Mixed Martial Arts). I was pretty good too. These chumps were no match for me.

So I returned to my former lowly macho status. Still, waking with both Jenna and Katrina holding me in their arms was a win for me. I also viewed Ansel with a little more respect. Maybe someday we will become friends. I had saved his life and he had saved our woman.

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina (Chapter 3)

In order to put things into perspective, I thought it necessary to clarify some facts. None of us are young teenagers. You already could have guessed that about me since I had mentioned my former military career. But we still considered ourselves relatively young. I was indeed the oldest at 33. Katrina

was 25, Jenna 24, and Ansel 27. Neither of us had a steady girlfriend or boyfriend. So it was still up in the air who was with who. We four started hanging out together all the time. Was Katrina with me or Ansel? Jenna was clearly leaning toward me, but I am sure there were other suitors out there. No one was making any commitment one way or the other. With Jenna in the picture, I felt that Katrina was aware that she had competition for my affections. Katrina and Ansel were the idea couple on the surface. Both heads above the rest in charm and beauty. Jenna and I were more closely matched physically wise, but there is more to relationship than looks. I figured time will tell. We needed more adventure to prove things out.

That adventure was just around the corner.

Mr. Adventurer suggested we do a white water rafting trip. I was up for that. We geared up at the start site with helmets, life jackets, gloves and two rafting boats. Of course Ansel grabbed Katrina to claim her as his paddle partner. Jenna's smile let me know that she was OK with that. So I came up with another dumb idea. Why not tie the two rafts together? That way we will not get separated. This seemed like a good idea in the beginning floating down the calm surface. As soon as we hit some rapids, the stupidity of the idea became all too apparent. Ansel's boat swayed out away from the shore. That left my boat aiming directly for the branches and weeds near the bank. We could not maneuver fast enough to avoid getting scrapped and scratched. At the next calm section, I cut the rope with my trusty knife that I always carry with me. None of us were experienced rafters. We all signed waivers releasing the rental company from any lawsuits. We didn't understand that level 5 white water was extremely traitorous.

We were having fun and we did OK on the next few sections of rapids. Then we hit the level 5 section. This was way more than we had bargained for. Ansel and Katrina sped through ahead of us. At the next section there were large boulders causing the water to spray up in a raging torrent. Ansel and Katrina went flying out of their raft. We were lucky and did not flip like they did. As I looked ahead, I saw that Katrina had gotten trapped under some tree branches and was underwater. Ansel was above water in his life jacket. I abandoned Jenna and jumped into the rapids. She was still OK inside the

raft. I grabbed the tree branch where Katrina was trapped. I reached down and grabbed her hand. I tried to pull her free, but the branches prevented me from bringing her up. I grabbed my knife and went below the surface. With wild slashing I managed to cut the main branch that had her trapped. I pulled her free and used the other branches to drag both of us up and on the bank. She was not breathing. My long ago boy scout training kicked in. No panic, just perform what was required. Tilt the head back, look for blocked obstacles. Press down on the chest several times, pinch the nose and breath into her mouth. Repeat the procedure for as long as necessary. A couple minutes later, she came to and spit out the water she had swallowed.

Now my concern was for Ansel and Jenna. I was relieved to see both of them walking along the bank toward us.

When they got within range, I said, I am sorry Jenna for leaving you alone. I saw Katrina trapped under the tree branch and I didn't have time to think. She never said a word, just came up to me and hugged me. Ansel also shock my hand without a word then sat down next to Katrina and gave her a big hug. Something changed at that moment. Even though I had saved Katrina's life, I could see she was more attracted to Ansel. I saw the look in Jenna's eyes and recognized that she was mine from this day forward. Sounds like a wedding expression. I guess I was forgiven for leaving her, otherwise we would have been attending Katrina's funeral together. There was a road along side the river. We flagged down a ride and hitchhiked back to our car.

Now that our relationships were firmly established, all jealousies were removed and our next encounters were more relaxed.

You may have been wondering why it appeared that none of us had to work. That was true of me and Ansel. I had invested wisely in some good stocks and had enough money to retire. Ansel's family had set him up in an online company business that was raking in tons of cash. Katrina and Jenna were on summer break from college. So we all decided to do more travel before school resumed in the fall.

Before I get to that, Jenna and I did some one on one dating.

A Trilogy of Kayak Stories

(Should say a Tragedy of Kayak Stories)

Kayak Story #1

I told Jenna that I was fascinated with snorkeling. Even though our Pacific ocean area has relatively cold waters, with a wet suit, it can still be quite comfortable. I had bought a two person kayak and was anxious to try it out. I had read that down near Laguna Beach there was a popular diving place called Diver's Cove. I had convinced Jenna to join me. My plan was to take the kayak out past the surf and use it as a dive platform. I had tied a small anchor to one of the eyelets and using that I should be able to keep the kayak in one area while I explore around. When we arrived at Diver's cove, true to its name, a group of divers were making their way down the long winding stone stairs that led down to the beach head.

A real place in Laguna Beach, California



Jenna and I had to carry the 60 lb. kayak down those same steps. I watched the divers enter the water. They had scuba tanks on and were backing into the surf. The surf that morning was coming in fairly heavy with multiple sets. Jenna took one look at that and told me that she was not comfortable going in to the rough surf. It did look fairly imposing. Without her help I thought it would be difficult to get the kayak out beyond the waves. We had come all the way from the Inland Empire and I didn't want to give up just yet. Seeing how the divers had entered the water, I thought I could use the same technique. I wanted to go out past the breakers and just snorkel around to see what made this place a favorite dive spot. The water was indeed a little frigid. I had borrowed a wet suit from a buddy. The wet suit was a tad tight though. I started backing into the waves. Each time a wave rolled by, I ducked under it to keep from being knocked down. It seemed that there was

no break in the wave sets. The next wave caught me off guard and knocked off one of my fins. So here I am standing on one leg trying to put my fin back on. Each time I managed it, another wave would hit me and I would lose the fin again. After four of five times of this happening I was getting fatigued. The wet suit was very constricting and I started having trouble breathing. I looked up on the beach and I saw Jenna hysterically laughing at my antics. She was not aware that I had just turned from trying to put on my fin to trying to stay alive. Now the waves were occurring even faster than before. Or was that just my imagination because I was out of breath. Finally I got closer to shore with each wave smashing into my body. When I reached the sand I was totally exhausted. When Jenna saw my face she suddenly realized that I was not faking. I had just had a close call. Even though I was still in my mid 30's, it was not the same body as my former 17 year old self who could have swam straight out into the surf with out hesitation.

Kayak Story #2

I needed to get more experience paddling my kayak. I also wanted to use it as a fishing boat. The kayak's brand was called Ocean Kayak. So I was sure it would be safe to paddle around our local coastline. My plan was to paddle up and down the coast with my fishing pole stuck in a pole holder and use my Rapala lure to troll. This lure had a plastic plane on its nose and would simulate an anchovie swimming along the surface. I launched my kayak in Balboa harbor. They have a public boat ramp there making it convenient for kayakers. I headed out between the twin breakwaters that was the entrance to the harbor. Once on the open ocean, I set up my fishing pole rig. There was not an original place to stick the pole, so I had bought a pole holder kit. I had to drill a hole in my unsinkable kayak and insert the plastic pole holder into it. It had a gasket the should have kept water from leaking inside the kayak body. There was a plastic cap that was on the bottom, but when I installed the holder, the cap fell off inside the kayak. No big deal right? Why would I need that anyway? I forgot about it. Later this would come back to bite me in the ass. I spent an hour or so trolling back and forth along the coast and didn't get even one bite.

So back to Jenna. I convinced her that I was now experienced in ocean kayaking and that it was safe. I wanted her to accompany me on another

fishing trip. We entered the harbor at the same place as before and managed to clear the breakwater without incident. I wanted to try to fish in a place called Little Corona. It was a kind of cove. We paddled the kayak so that we were about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile off shore. This looked like a good place to try. We had been fishing for about 20 minutes. I was trying to reach the bottom where sand bass hung out, but every time I put my hook in the water I got a mackerel. Mackerels are too fishy. I cut some of them up for bait. In the next cast I brought up an octopus. These are good eating, but I just wanted to let it go. In trying to lift it into the kayak, it stuck to the bottom with its suckers. It was a real battle to disconnect it. Finally, I got it up to the surface. I told Jenna to be careful as it has a beak. Luckily the hook fell out and it returned to the sea. Something was happening to my kayak. I thought that Jenna was moving around too much. What I did not notice was small swells had been hitting the back of the kayak and little by little water was running into the fishing pole holder that had the missing cap. Ten seconds later, the entire kayak flipped. Jenna and I found ourselves dumped into the ocean surrounded by lots of bait. Jenna, we have to get out of here. This is where sharks live and we just dumped a bunch of chum all around us. I spotted a life guard boat cruising not too far from where we were. I waved my arms back and forth hoping that they would come and rescue us. Instead, I saw them just wave back at us. I guess they thought that I was just being friendly. With me out of the kayak, it became more buoyant. Jenna was able to climb back in while I swam and pulled the bow toward the shore. She aided me by paddling. We finally made it to the beach. With the help of a robust woman bather, we pulled the heavy kayak out of the water. I tipped it over and drained all the water out. I found a tennis ball that had wound up on the beach and stuffed it into the fishing pole hole. Now the kayak was water proof again. Jenna, we have to get back in the kayak and paddle back around the breakwater. Our Jeep is still across the channel from where we are. She reluctantly got back in and we headed back out. It was getting late in the day and the wind had picked up considerably. As we headed for the entrance to the dual breakwaters, white caps appeared on the ocean surface. Six foot swells made paddling difficult. This made for a scary return trip as the now larger waves threatened to capsize up once more. I was so relieved when we rounded the breakwater's end and entered the calmer harbor waters.

Jenna said that she would never ride in my Kayak again. I don't blame her.

Kayak Story #3

After the near fatal event at Diver's cove and our unexpected swim in the shark infested waters, I still wanted to experience some kayaking. I talked to Jenna. I know you don't want to do any ocean kayaking. How about the Colorado river? No big waves, no sharks, what could go wrong, right! She reluctantly agreed.

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina (Chapter 4)

Kayak Story #3

I think I better come through for Jenna this time or I will have to get rid of the kayak. There is a cool campground 20 miles north of Yuma, AZ called Picacho Peak State Park. It is a funny name in that Picacho in Spanish means peak. So this is really called Peak Peak State Park. I loaded up the Jeep, strapped my Kayak on top and Jenna and I planned to spend a couple nights at the camp ground. I also brought my fishing pole. The Colorado river has several kinds of fish. Striped bass are the most desirable, but catfish is also a desirable second. I had prepared for both types. I even went to a sporting goods store and a guy recommended a sure fire catfish bait. I am not sure what catfish see in this stuff. It smells horrible. Other types of bait I have used include shrimp soaked in garlic and head guts fermenting in the hot sun. Still I was willing to give this stuff a try.

To get to the park you had to traverse 20 miles of dirt road. Should not be a problem in my four wheel Jeep. About half way to campground, I blew a tire. This should not have happened. These were near brand new Goodyear off road tires. What I surmised had happened was I hit a razor sharp rock that was sticking up high enough to slice into the side wall. No cell service at that junction. I changed the tire, but when I took out my tools, the ice chest that held all my cold beer fell out of the Jeep and all the ice spilled on the ground. Rats, just what I needed. After changing the tire, I cautiously drove the final 10 miles hoping to not repeat my bad fortune. There was not much traffic on the road, in fact we saw none. Never-the-less, we did reach our destination

without further troubles.

I set up the tent and the rest of the campsite. Stove, chairs, lantern, etc. Jenna is funny. She asked me if the tent was safe against caterpillars. I said caterpillars are the least of your worries. Out here there are rattlesnakes, lizards, scorpions, tarantellas, coyotes, and Gila monsters. She said I am not afraid of any of those, just caterpillars. Don't worry, I will defend you to the death against all caterpillars. I could see that she did not appreciate my humor. Lets move on, I said.

We spent a pleasant evening around the campfire. No mosquitoes bothered us due to the smoke from our campfire. I tried my luck fishing for catfish off of the bank of the Colorado. My jar of catfish bait fell over in my tackle box and got all over my hands trying to upright it. As the next couple of days progressed I figured that I would have to trash the tackle box. No amount of water removed that horrible smell. I had to use white gasoline to get the stink off of my hands. Speaking of white gasoline. This was a common fuel used with Coleman stoves before they switched to propane canisters. I almost blew both of us up when I lit our campfire. Some of the wood I had gathered was damp from a recent rain shower. To aid in getting the fire started, I tried to use the white gas can like I used charcoal lighter. The fire had a small flame so I just squirted a stream of gas from the can onto the open flames. You should have seen the expression on my face when the flames ran up the stream and hit the top of the gas can. I threw it down and took rapid steps backwards. Because the can was almost full, there was not any vapor in the top or it would have exploded.

We both had to get up in the middle of the night to relieve ourselves. It is so much easier for us guys. While she was hiding behind a bush, I kept watch. I spotted a couple wild donkeys and two coyotes run by. I didn't mention any of this to Jenna. Somethings are better left unsaid.

The next morning, after our bacon and egg breakfast, it was time to kayak again. This was going to be a pleasant ride. The river was only flowing at about 1.5 miles per hour. Very gentle. No stage 5 rapids here. We set off floating with the current. No need to even paddle. The water was extremely

clear and we could see down about 15 feet. Occasionally, I even spotted some striped bass swim by.

We had been floating for about an hour. Prior to making this trip, I had investigated the area. There was an interesting overflow section off of the Colorado called Island Lake. A break in the shoreline siphoned off a large amount of water that got trapped in a large basin. In side of the basin there was an actual island that was sticking out of the middle of the lake. Hence the name “Island Lake”. To get to the lake, you had to zigzag your way through a bunch of heavy tall reeds. This reminded me of Disneyland's riverboat adventure. The distance to the lake was far enough that you could get lost in the reeds. Fortunately, someone had hacked somewhat of a path. We came through the reeds and found ourselves in open waters with the island prominently positioned in the center. There was also an old faded sign that said Beware of ators. It was a mystery to me. Ators??

Island Lake (A real place in AZ)



Picacho Peak in the distance

We paddled over to the island and beached the kayak. I wanted to get a view of the whole area from atop the island hill. It wasn't a giant mountain, but did rise up to a considerable height. The view was spectacular. One really unusual sight was giant carp. Some at least 6 feet long glowing with a bright orange color. Another curious sight from the height was what looked like a bunch of logs. Wait a minute. Those logs were moving. This moment felt like deja vu. I had read a story about a shipwrecked character who had spied some large boulders down in a valley. Those boulders had started to move

and they turned out to be giant mutated crabs. These logs were moving and then the mystery of the sign hit me. One of the characters had faded away. Beware of Gators. Alligators to be specific. These were not babies either. From this distance they still looked large. Some estimated to be over 6 feet long. Jenna, we need to get out of here. The sky is darkening. We don't want to be caught on this island at night. I am afraid. I thought you were only afraid of caterpillars. Just think of these as being large lizards. We hurried down to our kayak and headed back toward the reeds. Several of these creatures started to follow us. Jenna, we need to paddle as if our life depended on it. Not too far off from the truth. We passed the sign and this time I could barely make out the faded G. Paddling as fast as we could, one of the gators was gaining on us. In fact it reached the back of the kayak where I was sitting. I spun around and smacked in right on the nose as it made a lunge. That seemed to slow him down.



I found out later that residents of Yuma Arizona had bought baby alligators as pets. When they got too large to handle, they just let them go into the Colorado River. Enough of them survived and made their way to the remote Island Lake where they flourished. Any that remained in the flowing river died or were killed.

At last we broke free to open river water. The light in the sky was still

darkening. No more threat of gators, but this is the time when mosquitoes are the most hungry and voracious. Now we were paddling against the current. I was paddling as hard as I could. Looking at the bank it seemed that we were just edging up river. I turned and noticed that Jenna was not paddling. I guess she had spent most of her energy escaping the jaws of death. This trip is not going over too well. First shark jaws, now alligator jaws. I think this will be the end of my kayaking with Jenna at least. We made it back to camp, built a fire without the help of white gas and settled down. I broke out my best bottle of wine. I had gotten bitten in a lot of places by mosquitoes, but Jenna didn't have one bite. I guess it is because I am such a sweet guy. At least my blood is. The wine was taking effect. I brought out my guitar and serenaded Jenna with my best impressions of country stars. This brought back the smile on her face that assured me I was still #1 in her heart. The rest of the evening turned out fantastic.

It was time to treat her to some luxury outings. We needed to hook up with Ansel and Katrina and plan something special.

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina
(Chapter 5)

The four of us sat around contemplating where we would like to spend the remaining weeks before school starts. I suggested we each chose a place that we would like to visit, with the following stipulations: #1 Somewhere none of us had gone before. #2 Someplace safe. #3 Luxurious accommodations.

Katrina was the first to suggest. Greece. Been there, done that, my reply. Ansel's suggestion, how about Egypt? I have always been interested in the Pyramids, but that place is no longer safe for Americans. Too many kidnappings. Jenna, suggested the Netherlands. Good choice, but too cold this time of year. All three at once, OK Larry! Just spit it out, what is your idea?

My idea is the Galapagos. They don't have any accommodations there. Actually they do have a town and some hotels on the Island. We spend some time in Equator prior to our trip to the islands. That is the country that claims

those islands. It is safe and has lots of culture. Isn't it too hot? Well, some places are very hot, but others are situated at a high elevation. Quito is 9000 feet and the climate is a perfectly mild 65 degrees F all year round. They only have two seasons, wet and dry. All three agreed that this is a good choice.

We had to express order our visas. A requirement to travel to Ecuador. A week later we were all set to leave.

Charles Darwin's most influential work – *the Origin of Species*, wherein he details his theory of evolution – was inspired by his voyage to the Galapagos Islands. Today, his name is inextricably linked with the archipelago. However, back in the 1800s, it was mere fate which brought him to these enchanted shores.

In 1831, the HMS Beagle was ready to set sail from England on a mission to survey the coasts of South America. At the time, captain Robert Fitzroy had invited botanist Stevens Henslow to accompany him on the two-year-long voyage. Wary of the long absence, Henslow declined the opportunity and recommended that his student, Charles Darwin, take his place instead. It was Darwin's first and only time on a ship – a voyage which ended up being a lot more eventful than he could ever have imagined.

The HMS Beagle sailed for over twice the duration that had been originally planned, only reaching the Galapagos Islands in September 1835. This hadn't been part of the ship's itinerary, but it was an expedition that Darwin was most looking forward to. In a letter to Henslow, he wrote about his excitement to discover the archipelago's unique landscapes and see active volcanoes up close.

Darwinism is a theory of biological evolution developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.

This makes perfect sense. For example: a snake that is colored a crimson red

would be highly visible to predatory birds. Whereas a snake colored close to the sand and dirt would be less visible. Over time, the crimson snake would disappear and not pass on its genetic traits to its offspring. Darwin found so many unique species on that Island. It was so isolated from other areas for millennia.

OK, enough of science. Lets get to the vacation. I had promised Jenna a vacation with luxury. She had endured all of my kayak miss-adventures. She was a totally good sport. I had booked a luxury suite at the JW Marriott in Quito. Quito was the capital of Ecuador and the most populous.



Ansel had done the same for him and Katrina. It is strange to think how jealous I would have been knowing that Ansel was with Katrina. Jenna fix that for me. I have never been so happy. We had booked a 7 day tour, that included 2 days in Quito and two days on the Galapagos. Then two more days back in Quito. The tour package cost \$2130 each. The Marriott rate was around \$250 per night. I had promised Jenna a luxury vacation and I had delivered.

Famous View of Quito



This guy looks like he is having a gay old time.
(If I dressed like that back in the states, I would be considered gay too!)



So what do we do in Quito? Our tour package included some traditional sites, but I wanted to experience the local flavor of Quito. What better way than to walk through the street food markets and sample the local favorites. Ansel said, why not just eat at the hotel? Boring! I will caution you though, walking alone without our tour guide could be risky. I have some suggestions to make it safer. Dress in some casual clothes. Ansel, leave that Rolex in the hotel safe. That goes the same for your Gucci handbag Katrina. Too bad that TV celerity “Travel Chef” had never gone to Ecuador. We could have gotten a culinary education ahead of time.

So we set out in the late morning aiming to try some specialties for lunch. At least Katrina and Ansel followed my advice and left their thief magnets back at the hotel.

Here are some typical food stalls and markets.





Here is one we tried. Encocado de Pescado
Translation (Fish soup)



These look like potato pancakes
(Couldn't translate the Spanish name)





This one we did not try. Looked like a squirrel or rat.
I am adventures, but I have my limits.

There were a dozen more unusual foods that we sampled. At least no one got food poisoning. We did run into trouble though.

In one of the souvenir shops, I bought a kind of cane/walking stick. One of my hobbies is collecting exotic wooden items like the one pictured. This came in handy later in the day.



I bought the second from the right.

Ansel took the lead on our walk. I should have objected due to his past history of getting lost. Non-the-less, we found ourselves down an alley where no tourist should venture. Three unsavory dudes came out of side doors and approached us in a menacing way. My Spanish was not up to par with the natives, but I could make out what they were saying. It was obvious that they wanted to rob us or worse. I did my best to warn them that it was they who should be afraid. I told them that Ansel was the equivalent of Rocky Balboa. Even in this far away land, everyone had seen the Rocky movies. They all just laughed, my warning went unheeded. I corralled the ladies off to one side out of the way. Ansel waved the first guy toward him. When he got within distance of Ansel's fists, a left hook sent him to the pavement.

The second assailant rushed him. Ansel made a move that would make any MMA fan proud. The guy was on the ground in no time yelling in pain from an arm bar that Ansel had applied. The third guy pulled out a knife. I am sure Ansel could have handled him, but I swung my new cane down across his wrist and the knife when clattering to the street. Without his weapon and seeing his partners rendered useless, he turned and ran. Ansel let the guy on the ground up and he helped his buddy retreat after the other. Nice move with the cane Ansel told me. I help when I can. I picked up the knife. Another of my hobbies. The knife was high quality and lethal.

I found out later that Ansel was an expert in **Krav Maga**. This is considered to be the deadliest martial arts in the world. Developed for use by the Israeli army, it is even more lethal than Brazilian jujitsu. Remind me to never piss him off.

Ansel, don't try to be the leader anymore. Your track record sucks. The next two days we stuck to our tourist schedule and with our travel guide. Quito definitely was rated one of the top tourist destinations. The people were very colorful and so were the and so were the buildings.



Tomorrow, Galapagos here we come!

The Adventures of Larry and Katrina
(Chapter 6)

The boat trip from Quito to Galapagos is three days. Of course we did not want to do that. The flight is only 2.5 hours. We elected for the flight. Upon arriving, we were given a lecture on the rules for and expectations of all the tourists. Stay on the marked paths. Don't stray off trying to take the perfect picture. There are dangers from animals living on the island. Also, there are poisonous fish in the surrounding waters. This area is an active volcano.

This indoctrination reminded me of another time I camped at San Onofre campground. I wanted to stay for two nights. San Clemente campground was full, so we ended up there. The park ranger gave us a brochure of the

place and the rules. You can only camp on the dirt road next to the train line. Be careful walking to the beach access. There are gofer holes throughout. Snakes and scorpions are abundant in the brush. The camp ground is on high cliffs with slippery steps down to the beach area. The beach area is underwater at high tide. The bottom of the brochure said, "Enjoy Your Stay!" Are you sure you want to stay two nights? No, make it one night. At 2:00 AM the Amtrak high Flier came rumbling by. When I looked out the tent window, it looked like we were right in its path. Scared the hell out of me. The noise was unbelievable as it passed by. So for the first day we did the tourist thing, followed all the rules and had a wonderful time. One view of the Galapagos Islands



Blue Footed Boobie



I couldn't help but wonder, what favorable genetic trait lead to this strange bird?

This guy looks so comfortable sunning himself



Bolder size Turtles



Overview of Galapagos Islands



Jenna walking among dinosaurs.



The second day was going to turn out completely different. The park ranger said we were free to explore on ourselves areas that we missed the previous day. Sounded like a fun thing. We started out on the same path as the guide took us, but we split off on another path that we hadn't gone before. A mile or so we hadn't seen anything unusual so Ansel says we should divert into the woods and see what there is to see. We were told to stay on the path. Where is your sense of adventure? It is being overridden by my common sense. Suite yourself. Katrina and I are going to experience our own adventure. We will tell you all about it back at the hotel. So they headed into the woods. Jenna and I continued down the charted path. We did see some things that we didn't see on the regular tour. You can see Jenna above walking along the beach with a companion.

Back at our hotel, we were waiting for Ansel and Katrina to ring us up for a dinner meet. No call. We went to their bungalow building and knocked on the door. No answer. Maybe they just wanted to spend a little more time exploring. By 9 PM, we were getting concerned. Jenna said we should ask the ranger what to do. I explained to the ranger that our friends did not return to their room. Is there something we can do to search for them? We don't have the resources to go hunting for lost tourists. The only option is to call for help on the mainland. How long will it take "Search and Rescue" to arrive? It is a three day trip by boat. No plane is sanctioned for that. That doesn't sound like normal search and rescue operations. It isn't really search and rescue. It is more like body retrieval. We have had 16 tourist disappear throughout our history. That is why we emphasize staying on the assigned paths.

Jenna was beside herself. What can we do? There is no way they can survive three days out there. I told them not to leave the path. Ansel has always been stubborn and pigheaded. We have to go find them ourselves. It is too dark to do anything tonight. First thing in the morning, we will go to the hardware store and buy somethings to aid us.

The next morning, I purchased a back pack, some rope, extra water containers and a machete type blade. We know where they entered the woods. That is where we will start.

We found the same spot where they split off from us. It wasn't too difficult to follow their trail. Ansel was a large heavy guy and besides the broken shrubs, he left sizable foot prints along with Katrina's smaller ones. It took us about an hour to get to them.

When we finally located Ansel and Katrina it was a sight to see. Ansel was up to his nose in stinky quicksand and Katrina was on his shoulders. I imagined that if she had not done that, she would have already suffocated in the mire or mush, whatever you want to call that stuff. She was at least a foot and a half shorter than Ansel. Not only that, but there was a monitor lizard on the edge hoping for a tasty meal. They are not the size of alligators, but they have a poisonous bite that renders their prey immobile while they feast away.

Ansel spotted me and yelled, Thank God! I don't know how much longer I could have held on. Before I can free you, I have to monitor the situation. I am sure my pun was lost on him. Non-the-less, I still had to deal with the lizard first.



I took my machete and cut a large bamboo pole from a nearby cropping. I didn't sharpen the tip. My plan was just to use this to discourage the lizard, letting him know that he was outmatched. I didn't want to kill it. I imaged

the penalty for killing an animal on Galapagos Island was a quick death without trial. My plan worked. I prodded him and he retreated back into the marshy swamp. I then used the rope I had purchased at the tool store and made a bowline knot. This is the same knot I use to tie my fish hooks to my fishing line. You make a lope, then a second loop. Pushing the second loop through the middle of the first, then place it around the tip of the first loop end. Pull tight. Fishing line is slippery and it slides down and makes a tight crimp that can not come loose. I never lost a fish hook in all the years I fished. A rope is not slippery like mono filament line and the loop stays tight. Putting this around a body, you can pull someone up and out of a ravine, or in this case quick sand. I first rescued Katrina. She was so thankful that she ran over and gave me a tight hug. Normally I would have welcomed such an event, but she stuck to high heaven. I don't even want to think how they handled bathroom breaks. Next, I rescued Ansel. He tried to hug Jenna, but she was much smarter than me and backed away waving her arms indicating, "Stay Away!".

We needed to sneak back to our rooms. If someone saw or smelled us, they might report to the park rangers. I had an idea to defuse the entire situation. After my own shower, I re-visited the park ranger headquarters. I told him this was all a false alarm. My friends were in their hotel rooms the entire time. They were tired from the previous day's tour plus lingering jet lag and just fell asleep. I could not rouse them until this morning.

Back at our respective hotel rooms, they all took showers and changed clothes. Even though their rescue was early morning, Katrina and Ansel did not emerge from their room until late evening. I imagined they were both exhausted from spending the entire night stuck in the quagmire.

We met in the hotel restaurant for dinner. I didn't want to rub it in by saying "I told you so!" or "I hope you have learned your lesson!" Still, I was thinking it. I think that they appreciated my silence on the matter. Ansel paid for our dinner. It was the least he should do. Also, we had missed our plane ride back to Quito and had to pay an extra night's lodging. Ansel picked up the tab for all as he should have.

As long as we are here for one more day, lets finish the rest of the touring. We will probably never be back here again. Stay on the paths, OK! OK!!! Enough said.

On our last day there we got to watch the swimming iguanas. They are vegetarians and feed on the kelp and grass in the rich ocean waters around the islands.



Back in Quito, I wanted to try some of the local specialties that we missed last time. When only had one day due to the extra day it took to rescue Ansel and Katrina. Here are some we tried.





With our Ecuador trip over, we were back in the states. A few weeks went by. The girls were preparing to return to class. Ansel and I were back doing what semi-retired types do. I got a call from Katrina. She asked me to stop by, if I had the time. She wanted to discuss something with me. I expected she had more home repairs needing done. In spite of my formal bungling, she was willing to give me another chance.

When I got to the door, she didn't invite me in. That was good because I was on an errand and couldn't stop long. She unexpectedly told me that her and Ansel had broken up. She said that she was perhaps too hasty choosing Ansel over me. This is not what I expected at all. Then she approached me, put her arms around me and gave me a passionate kiss. I am just giving you something to think about. Then she entered her house and closed the door.

Indeed, this was something to think about. I never considered myself a babe

magnet, but it is what it is. I really didn't have to think long. The truth was, I still considered Jenna my girlfriend and would not cheat on her. Besides, I lost all interest in Katrina. There is more to a person than good looks.

The End

I started this story with Larry being a klutz and Ansel a savior. Toward the end, the roles got reversed.

Truth vs. fiction:

There are no monitor lizards on Galapagos Island.

All the other animals pictured actually live there.

It is true that 16 people have disappeared on Galapagos Island.