



## **Coast Range Chronicles 9: “Campground”**

by

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It started with a massive RV backing into the campsite next to mine. The rig beeped loudly as it reversed. Above it, tree branches crackled and split as the behemoth smashed through the oak canopy while negotiating its three-hundred-point turn, trying to shunt into the narrow space. It looked like a cruise ship drifting into port. The maneuver took perhaps an hour. When the beast finally parked, the occupants turned on their generator and it rumbled near my head, spewing noxious fumes. I could see people inside sitting on a couch, flipping through five hundred channels of popular culture on their giant television.

I was car camping. Not quite a wilderness experience.

As evening descended I sat in my folding chair, stared at my campfire, and grudgingly adjusted to the generator noise and odor. At least it was a steady drone. I

could vaguely hear the squawk of ravens and Steller's jays above the din. But more sporadic noises intruded.

In the distance a guy unloaded gear from a car, opening and slamming the door every few seconds. I wanted to enlighten him with an innovative tip: leave the door open until you're finished unloading.

A dog barked incessantly, scaring away the few critters willing to brave the campground. A kid wandered around clapping randomly, devoid of any logic or rhythm which might give the listener a chance to nod along or do *something* to mitigate the intrusion.

Darkness enveloped the campground. The RV people silenced their generator, but compensated by turning on a half dozen lanterns around their campsite. The harsh glow resembled stadium lighting. I felt like I was at game seven of the World Series.

The campground went quiet for ten minutes. Pleasant. But then the drunken college students behind me cranked their stereo to an unreasonable volume. And the music wasn't something relaxing or soothing, seamless with the outdoors, maybe a bit of reggae or bluegrass. It sounded like angry death-metal. Their voices rose in tandem to the music and before long they were almost shouting.

Their conversation turned uncomfortably intimate, egregious over-sharing induced by drink and darkness. Too much information, as they say. Due to the conversational volume I was the involuntary recipient of several personal revelations. I learned that poor Tammy had been cheated on by her boyfriend—the indiscretion occurring with her sister, no less—and said boyfriend was once again cavorting with prostitutes in Vegas. From there the details grew tawdrier and just plain weird.

Enough. I crawled inside my tent, wrapped a jacket around my head, and tried to ignore the noise.

The campground quieted down after midnight. I fell asleep but was jerked awake by a car pulling into a nearby site. Two guys rattled around, talking fast and loud. I peered from my tent: a pair of tweekers looking for a free night of camping. They were awake most of the night rambling and fidgeting and hacking up phlegm. Eventually they shut up and I drifted into slumber.

I dozed for an hour before the RV generator rumbled to life and woke me in the cold light of dawn.

I slid from my tent, packed up, and left the campground, headed for a downtown park or perhaps a freeway underpass where I could finally get some peace and quiet and a bit more wilderness.