

May 27, 2007
Floyd Frank

Little Toy Pocketknife

Gary Horton used to have a Swiss Army knife that I enjoyed ridiculing. It had a dozen blades – all of them too small to do any useful work. A little stainless knife, a tiny pair of scissors, a miniscule saw, (I'm running out of synonyms for LITTLE). They folded into a streamlined red plastic and steel sheath that slid into your pants pocket. I suppose that if you are caught outdoors without a toothbrush, you could whittle yourself a toothpick! Gary carried it everywhere.



Anyway, Gary and I hiked to the top of the small mountain behind his Goldfield house. It was early summer and we both needed to get into the woods. An hour's hike through aspens got us to the summit, where pine trees predominated. We set up camp and I gathered squawwood to get a fire going. I kicked a branch from a dead pine, but, underestimating the toughness of the wood, I sprained my ankle. They say that a sprained ankle is more painful than a broken one. It's true. I spent all that night moaning a song of misery to Gary, who tried to ignore me.

The next morning was nice, except for the fact that I could not put any weight on my right foot. By the time I was out of the tent, Gary had sawn a three-inch aspen into a crutch. I tried it out for length. He sawed a couple inches off so it fit me comfortably. The saw blade on his pocket knife went through the small tree like a warm knife through butter. "Hmm", I said. "Not bad." We had no trouble getting back to his house.

Another adventure we shared saw us heading to the Crestone Needles. I drove my pickup truck. Gary's son and my son made four of us altogether. We drove the Hyde Park Road from Cripple Creek and finally approached the paved highway. That was when we saw a small rattlesnake sunning itself on the gravel road. I considered myself a fearless mountain man, so I stopped, pinned the snake down with a stick, and caught it. I held it tightly behind the head and went to show it to our kids. When I was halfway back to my side of the truck, I felt a sharp little sting on my index finger. I knew I had been bitten.

I stopped, threw the snake back into the sagebrush, and headed back to my truck. "Sorry, guys. We're not going to the mountains today. We're going to the hospital." I knew the way to the Canon City hospital, so I drove. It took twenty minutes to get there. I drove with the same philosophy that got me through college – "Pass Everything". I borrowed Gary's Swiss Army knife. With its knife blade I cut a gash or two around the fang hole. I then sucked poison-flavored blood and spat it out my window as I drove eighty.

At the hospital's emergency room I told the receiving nurse my problem and she got me started. By the time I was done, I had been hooked up to antivenin, painkiller and epinephrine. Even with the intravenous painkiller, the pain in my right hand made it feel like I was roasting it over a campfire. The swelling was enormous all the way to my shoulder. All this from an 18" rattler who only bit me with one fang! The poison that I sucked from the wound caused a tingling in my gums as it entered them through osmosis. Thank goodness for Gary and his sharp pocketknife!

Gary was always a good partner. Easygoing and well-prepared. I don't see him often but I think about him, especially when I am relaxed, sitting by the campfire and chewing on the toothpick I just whittled with my Swiss Army knife.