

On our first trip to the Sierras in the late '80s, we awoke to a flurry of snow swirling over our Suzuki Samurai convertible and its all-weather tires.

“Are you sure we don’t need chains?” my husband, the realist, asked.

I, the hopeless optimist, replied “Four-wheel drive should be good enough.”

As the snow continued to fall in sheets against our vehicle, I marveled at the sound of the tires spinning helplessly on ice and at how quickly our windshield had become a wall of white. Sam braved the elements clad in his signature jeans, construction boots, and suave suede jacket with faux fur collar. Huge flakes of snow plopped on his hair like giant bird droppings and dripped down his bare neck while he quickly crammed his fingers into his gloves. With a hint of a scowl towards the passenger seat, he pushed us out of the deep trench that my spinning tires had just created.

The next chilly episode in our marriage occurred during a bed-and-breakfast getaway to Bear Valley the winter before Kyle was born.

Along the way we stopped to visit a friend and Sam asked me for the map to plan the remainder of our route. (He had not yet acquired his most treasured partner: Maggie, our GPS unit.)

“I forgot to bring the map for that area but I know how to get there,” I assured him, eager to reach the B&B on time for the free *hors-d’oeuvres*.

“Let’s buy a map at a gas station,” Sam urged.

“I’ll print up directions on MapQuest,” our friend piped up, ignoring the furrow in Sam’s brow.

MapQuest directions are a great help until you miss your first turn—which frequently happens within minutes of steering toward your destination. Important details like the distance between each major turn are easy for the attention-challenged navigator to miss. In this case, I also failed to note that the road had gradually veered towards the right, taking us up a different mountain altogether.

In most marriages, it is the man who resists asking for directions or looking at the map. In our case it's me. I hate interruptions when I am on a mission.

Isn't an occasional detour half the fun?

While I am correct a fair portion of the time, that time I clearly was not. Short of a military helicopter, there was no way to transport our vehicle to the other side of the mountain range where our charming B&B was nestled. My vision of a romantic getaway was fading almost as fast as the mercury was dropping. The moon beamed in the sky like a steady beacon, casting a lonely shadow in the middle of where we clearly did not want to be. At least we were better equipped than the ill-fated Donner party and did not have to resort to eating each other. Sam resisted the urge to chew me out and I ate my words about knowing the way.

I alerted the B&B. Our cocktail hour with wine and *hors d'oeuvres* would be cold cookies and milk at midnight. My little oversight would cost us over an hour of extra driving. I could almost taste the macadamia nuts and chocolate chips awaiting us. Graciously, the host upgraded us to a larger room when we finally arrived.

With this stroke of luck I was determined not to let anything ruin the rest of the weekend. Sam suggested we sign up for a snowboarding lesson the next day and I did not respond with my typical thrifty, "Let's just save our money; how hard can it be?"

I recalled my disastrous first skiing "lesson" from my twin's first boyfriend, and how much I had wanted to toss him off the cliff.

I smartly said to Sam, "What a great idea!" We would pay someone to watch us fall on our behinds every five minutes, and at least we would be shown how to do so gracefully.

Despite having a fellow snowboarding student slam into my knee with the force of a freight train, the lesson was a complete success. I know enough about the sport now to realize that I should pursue safer prospects like synchronized swimming.

Should I attempt to conquer the mountain again, I will be sure to have my safety-conscious spouse at my side. His responses to everything in life are “Have a margin for error” and “Put it under cold water!”

There are times, however, when even the widest buffer only gets us into more hot spots.

911 Bay Area Rescue—When the Husband Plays Hero

My face still warms at the memory of the stuck-in-the-muck-at-low-tide incident. Every woman loves a little action, but there are times when one wonders if inaction is the best course of all.

Having moved from the landlocked city of Dayton, Ohio where Sam worked between MIT and Stanford graduate degrees, we came to appreciate the water sports the San Francisco Bay area has to offer.

One late afternoon, about a decade into our marriage, I decided a quick jaunt on the Bay would be the perfect ending to a hectic day.

Sam was skeptical of the timing of our outing but, being the accommodating husband he is, loaded board and sails into the car and drove us to the rigging area.

Before rigging, I walked over to the shoreline and quizzed several returning windsurfers about the wind conditions.

“Awesome!” one replied, and the other nodded vigorously. That was all I needed to hear. The wind gusted at a steady twenty-five knots per-hour. With the perfect-size sail I would be neither overpowered nor underpowered. I imagined the magical sensation of riding the crest of the waves as the board propelled me over the water.

Where I saw opportunity, Sam saw potential problems.

“I wouldn’t go out if I were you,” he warned me.

“Oh, I’ll be fine” I assured him, watching the distant sails carving jibes on the sun-sparkled water. “All I need to do is stay in the channel until I get to the deep water.” I quickly donned my wetsuit and lifejacket, picked up my gear, and dropped it into the water.

As the sail flirted with the wind, I pulled the sail towards me and angled it back towards the end of the board to pick up speed. What I failed to detect was the speed at which I was drifting downwind, from the deep part of the channel into the shallow low tide of the bay. Cruising confidently along, I felt the unmistakable pull of my fin catching in the muck. The fin dug deeper and deeper until it refused to budge altogether. A breeze toyed with the sail, which flapped for a moment and then collapsed in a lifeless heap.

By now the muck had spread a trail of putrid brown slime halfway up my legs. This was not the thunder-thigh workout I had envisioned. I was ready to trade my wetsuit for a pair of Lycra shorts and a T-shirt.

To lighten my load I detached the sail from the board and began to lug one piece at a time towards shore. The foot of my mast has remained in the mud ever since, providing a haven for the local marine life.

As I schlepped along with legs of lead and beads of sweat forming salty rivers down my brow, I speculated about what Sam was doing on shore.

“Why isn’t he doing anything to help?” I muttered, followed quickly by, “What could he possibly do to help me out here?”

I had launched myself into this predicament; now I had to dream up a plan to dig myself out. (Little did I know that Sam had responded to my dilemma by calling 911.)

Looking up, I noticed a fire truck poised for action in the parking lot.

Someone else must be in trouble, I guessed. Maybe if I get desperate enough, they can rescue me as well.

I continued lugging my equipment along through the quicksand muck. The bay slurped and bubbled beneath me with each laborious step. By this time the sun cast an orange glow in the sky. Most of the sailors were no doubt breaking into six-packs of beer and burritos by now. Then it dawned on me to furrow sideways towards the deeper sliver of the channel, instead of trudging in a hopeless diagonal towards the dock.

It was then that I heard a male voice beckon from the megaphone.

“Windsurfer out in the water: If you need help, RAISE YOUR ARMS!”

I had heard about the foolhardy exploits of fellow adventurers and the strapping bills that ensued. So I kept my arms firmly glued to my sides.

A row of figures lined the water’s edge with suspicious round lenses at their eyes, pointed in my direction. I could imagine the entertaining view coming into focus through the other end of their binoculars.

At last I came within fifty yards of the dock.

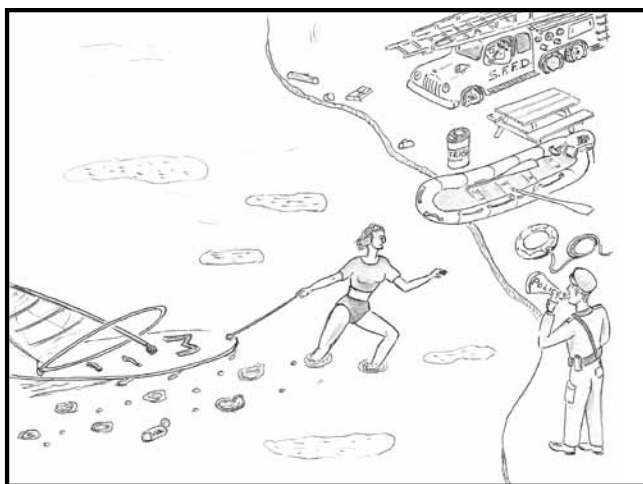
Again, the voice bellowed over the megaphone. A sweating fireman stood on the dock with a life ring in his other hand.

Did he really expect to haul me ashore?

The last remaining rescue vehicles had departed by the time I finally emerged. Sam claimed that seven trucks stood poised at one point, but I prayed that that was a gross exaggeration. It must have been a slow day at the local firehouses.

Did I mention the inflatable raft and hook and ladder? I never had anyone walk on water for me before, so I was sorry to have missed that.

I cannot envision how many ladders it would have taken to reach me, or how the boat would have scooted over the sludge. I wondered what page of the emergency training manual this fell under.



I avoided that sailing spot for several months. Imagine my horror when a fellow windsurfer approached me there later on in my career, saying, “Weren’t you the one who...?”

I am not sure how she recognized me since my face no longer matched the color of my red helmet.

Sometimes life leaves us wanting to throw up our arms in surrender. I was reminded that there is always a way out of the channel!

Later I read in the paper that the town is exploring a \$5 launch fee for that site—they are probably still trying to pay off the rescue bill.

Camping for Dummies—Tips for the Outdoor-Impaired

There are few experiences that make me appreciate domesticity more than spending extended time in nature.

My exposure started at the age of two when my twin and I used to swing on our play set, scale trees, and shake leaves into the neighbors’ swimming pool. This love affair with nature was tested by long camping trips with four siblings, a dog, and three weeks of supplies stuffed into the back of a station wagon. Along the way I have learned a few things to make camping more comfortable.

Lesson 1: Check Your Equipment

Even if you forget everything else, do not forget the flashlight to the potty on a cloudy night or you will have to holler for help to find your way back. Check beforehand that the batteries actually work since they undoubtedly drained long beforehand. Pump up the air mattress the night before to check for the slow leaks that leave you sucking dirt by morning.

There are those who truly camp and those who sleep in a tent. These are not the same types. The first group arrives with carefully packed coolers and a cupboard full of supplies. Breakfast is an all-morning affair with pancakes, eggs, and toast over the kerosene stove. For the rest of us it might be store-bought muffins from the 7-11