

# Rafting Adventures with Ash

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Carrie Burns

Rafting is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get. Yes, Bubba Gump was our river guide and what a guide he was. Shall I begin? After assembling our tent and experiencing a level of frustration that left my daughter Ashley and I both bitter and exhausted, we decided to settle in for the evening. Yes, I must admit that we were stressed from putting together the tent and trying to figure out where the poles go. Our sweaty bodies needed to be hydrated. Headaches from the sun's heat pounding on us encouraged our ever so pleasant disposition. We marveled at our neighbors effortlessly assembling their tent with a quick turn of the wrist. We still wonder how they did that so quickly. Ashley and I decided to have a relaxing moment at the campfire. Deserving the solitude of the fire as it had just taken us three hours to assemble our tent, we prepared hotdogs and S'mores. Stumbling to our haven, leaving the remnants on the picnic table, we prepared for bed. We awoke that night to the sound of rustling leaves off tree limbs.

"What was that, Mom?" Ashley questioned fearfully.

"I don't know, honey. You need your rest for your big rafting trip tomorrow." I replied nonchalantly. In a few hours where pale moonlight lingered, the sunshine danced. Morning had broken, and I needed desperately to attend the ladies' room. As I tugged at the zipper of the window of the tent, I noticed a very peculiar sight. It appeared that our campsite had become a dumping ground; our bags of buns, chips, and bottles of water had become shredded and pierced with unknown markings. Ashley began to stir from her sleeping bag.

"What happened?" Ashley very loudly exclaimed. When Ashley speaks everyone listens.

"Looks like the baby got hungry," an unfamiliar scruffy dreadlocked man replied.

"Name is Smash cuz I like to smash waves. Now you're going to want to lock all of your food in the car so you don't wake up Momma."

"Who's Momma?" Ashley pondered.

"Bear!" Smash merely stated. All of our food was immediately placed in the vehicle.

We went on with the lovely morning. An instructional video of the safety issues of rafting was shown. This was very helpful - the basic concept, listen or die. After a windy bus ride, we were taken to the beautiful and mysterious New River. We put on lifejackets and our safety helmets. Our raft guide, Perk, and his son, Li'l Perk, gave us some excellent advice.

"Don't let go of your t-grip or..." and a big smile came over his face. What a gorgeous toothless smile. A vision of my mother popped into my head, and I heard her ever-parenting voice, "Always take care of your teeth." Ashley and I, along with our crew, began our voyage. In the beginning, the trip was very scenic and immediately my love of nature began to surface. We rolled down the river. Suddenly, the river became a fickle friend.

What was the epitome of relaxation turned into a violent scene of raging white water that blurred all vision. A vision that left me thinking I'm going to lose all of my teeth, since the man before me had broken his glasses. We found a safe place to land our raft. We devoured a much needed lunch buffet. We ate Dagwood sandwiches, chips, pasta salad, and chocolate chip cookies. The melted chocolate from the cookie left Ashley with a mocha mustache. We went on with our voyage. More twists and turns came. We found ourselves backwards, sideways, and upside down. Ashley was feeling even more adventurous and went to the front. At the front of the raft, Ashley rode the bull, holding onto a rope. This is a skill only experienced rafters partake. Oh, what a scene in a play of wild adventures!

Finally, the calming storm showed her dramatic self. We made it, and the New River became my friend again. I glimpsed at Ashley whose pure enthusiasm exemplified her spirited youth and I answered my own question, yes I would do this again. What a great example of strangers working together! We completed a task that if proven unsuccessful could have been damaging. The moral of my story: just let life happen. I want to simply thank my daughter for giving me the ride of my life. We are leaving for ....yet another rafting excursion this Friday!