An illustration of a man in a blue jacket and a dark cap with a green brim, looking out over a campsite at night. The scene is lit with a cool blue light, suggesting moonlight or a night light. In the background, there are dark silhouettes of trees and a tent. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the right. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

# *on* A TENT A ROCK

By Brian Robins

*I chose to pitch my tent on soft, low ground. But my dad's spot turned out to be the better choice.*



The summer I turned 12 our Scout troop undertook a 50-mile backpacking trip in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. For years I had heard about the exploits of my older brothers and their friends on previous outings, so I was excited to experience this great adventure for myself. And now I was finally old enough to go.

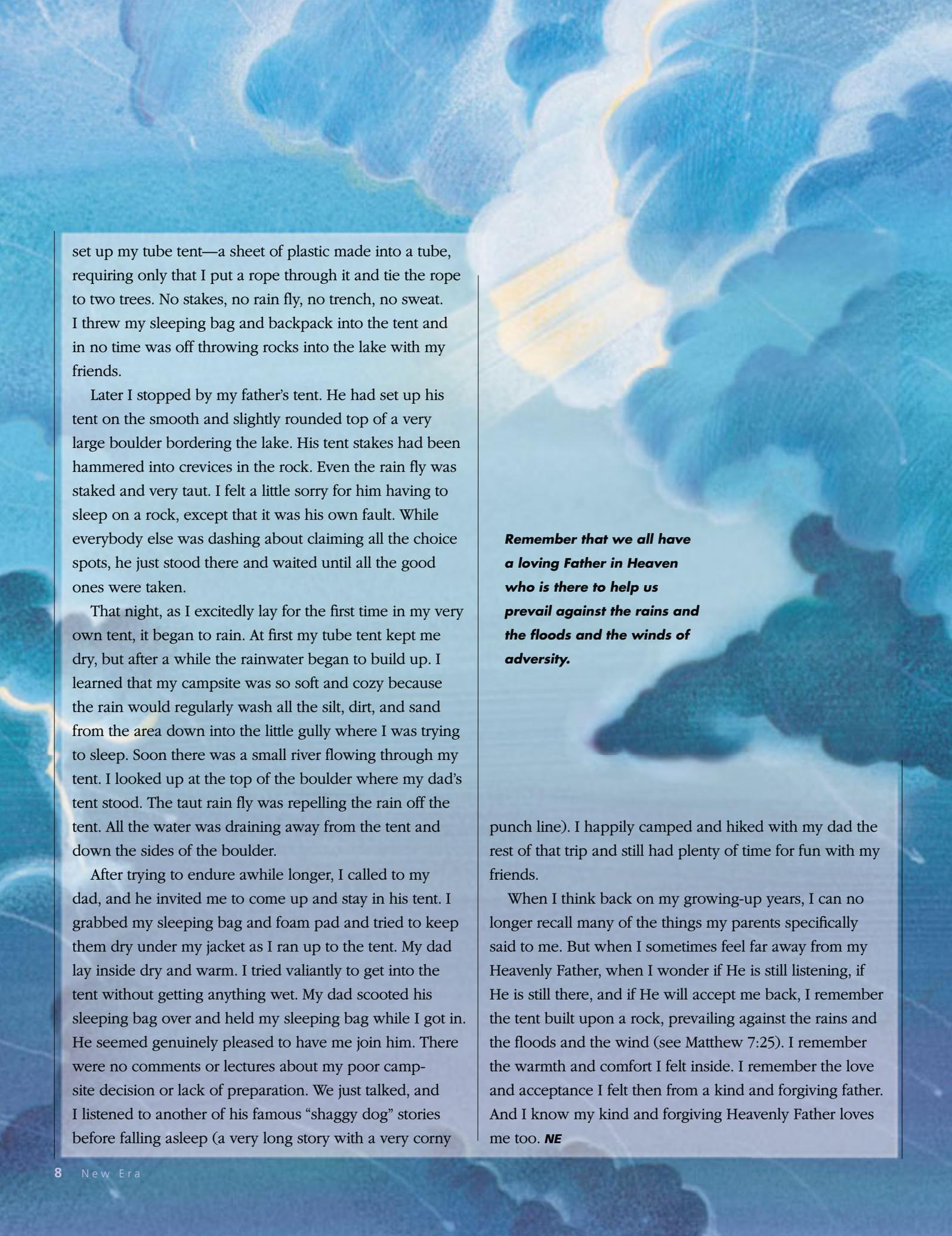
To my dismay, my father decided he hadn't been spending enough time with his middle child (me), so he announced he would join us on this trip. I had been looking forward to a sense of independence by being out in the wilderness without the usual parental oversight. These plans were now ruined, but I didn't let my dad know I was disappointed he was coming.

My dad insisted on hiking with me and giving me pointers and advice along the way. We shared a tent together, and he taught me the proper way to set up a campsite. While the other boys were off enjoying themselves by throwing rocks in the creek or poking sticks in the fire, my dad was showing me how to clear an area of rocks and debris and how to level the ground. He showed me how to lay a tent out and stake it in place, how to tie a taut line

so we could properly put up a secure rain fly. And then, just when I was about to burst from the boredom of learning all these details, we had to dig a trench around the tent so if it rained, the water would flow away from the tent and not under it.

When it was my turn to cook the dinner, I was again paired with my dad. We, of course, had to make sure the camp stoves were working properly and were cleaned and serviced. We had to make sure to read, understand, and closely follow all the directions on the freeze-dried dinner packages. Again I watched my friends running out into the woods to play. However, this was the first meal I had on that trip that was properly mixed, prepared, and sufficiently cooked.

After a few days we arrived at Hamilton Lake, where we would spend an extra day to rest. I talked with my dad about how I wanted to try camping on my own at this campsite, and he agreed. I was very excited to finally do things my own way. Upon arriving at the campsite, each Scout quickly scrambled to find a prime location for his tent. I found a place with soft dirt among a few trees to



set up my tube tent—a sheet of plastic made into a tube, requiring only that I put a rope through it and tie the rope to two trees. No stakes, no rain fly, no trench, no sweat. I threw my sleeping bag and backpack into the tent and in no time was off throwing rocks into the lake with my friends.

Later I stopped by my father's tent. He had set up his tent on the smooth and slightly rounded top of a very large boulder bordering the lake. His tent stakes had been hammered into crevices in the rock. Even the rain fly was staked and very taut. I felt a little sorry for him having to sleep on a rock, except that it was his own fault. While everybody else was dashing about claiming all the choice spots, he just stood there and waited until all the good ones were taken.

That night, as I excitedly lay for the first time in my very own tent, it began to rain. At first my tube tent kept me dry, but after a while the rainwater began to build up. I learned that my campsite was so soft and cozy because the rain would regularly wash all the silt, dirt, and sand from the area down into the little gully where I was trying to sleep. Soon there was a small river flowing through my tent. I looked up at the top of the boulder where my dad's tent stood. The taut rain fly was repelling the rain off the tent. All the water was draining away from the tent and down the sides of the boulder.

After trying to endure awhile longer, I called to my dad, and he invited me to come up and stay in his tent. I grabbed my sleeping bag and foam pad and tried to keep them dry under my jacket as I ran up to the tent. My dad lay inside dry and warm. I tried valiantly to get into the tent without getting anything wet. My dad scooted his sleeping bag over and held my sleeping bag while I got in. He seemed genuinely pleased to have me join him. There were no comments or lectures about my poor campsite decision or lack of preparation. We just talked, and I listened to another of his famous “shaggy dog” stories before falling asleep (a very long story with a very corny

***Remember that we all have  
a loving Father in Heaven  
who is there to help us  
prevail against the rains and  
the floods and the winds of  
adversity.***

punch line). I happily camped and hiked with my dad the rest of that trip and still had plenty of time for fun with my friends.

When I think back on my growing-up years, I can no longer recall many of the things my parents specifically said to me. But when I sometimes feel far away from my Heavenly Father, when I wonder if He is still listening, if He is still there, and if He will accept me back, I remember the tent built upon a rock, prevailing against the rains and the floods and the wind (see Matthew 7:25). I remember the warmth and comfort I felt inside. I remember the love and acceptance I felt then from a kind and forgiving father. And I know my kind and forgiving Heavenly Father loves me too. **NE**