

THE WATERFALL

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It was the middle of July when we drove way up into the mountains and backpacked up a creek. The banks were lined with poison oak. So we waded through the cold water - hip deep for my parents, chest deep for us -our backpacks balanced on our heads.

We set up camp on a sandy flat beside a pool in a ring of boulders. What a swimming hole! My brother and I swam, diving and tumbling in the diamond-clear water. We hiked upstream, against little rapids, picking our way among slippery boulders. Suddenly we heard a roaring sound, and

as we came around a bend, we saw what was causing it.

A huge waterfall! It rose high above us, higher than the tallest pines. Only a few wet ferns clung to the steep rock slope. A rainbow glowed in the roaring mist. "Wow!" I said. "Let's climb it!" "No way," said Dad. "End of the road." We turned back, and that night we had a cookout, and watched the sparks climb to the stars. I couldn't stop thinking about the waterfall- and how much I'd like to climb it. Later, snuggled in my bag, I heard a growl, and a rustle in the brush. . . then finally fell asleep, a little scared.

The sun was hot as a bonfire. We cut leaves of Indian rhubarb as wide as elephants' ears, and

tied them on our heads with vine to keep us cool. Then we waded against the little rapids deep into the canyon. I was the first one to the waterfall. "Let's go up," I said. My brother grinned. "If you go, I will," he said.

I scouted a way, alongside the falls, and then we climbed like mountain goats. Mom hollered, "Be careful!" as if we wouldn't. and we inched our way up and up - the tips of our toes gripping thin ledges, our fingers finding cracks. Sometimes rocks pulled out, but we clung like glue. We had to. The waterfall roared by our ears into a great rumbling, boiling cauldron far below. "I'm scared," said my brother. I said, "Just don't look down." Near the top, a scrawny river willow poked out of the rock. It was just the grip we needed to

When we stood at the top, we slapped five and shouted down, "HEY MOM, DAD! IT'S LIKE A WHOLE OTHER WORLD UP HERE! COME ON UP! YOU CAN DO IT!" And I did a little dance.

Mom looked at Dad, Dad looked at Mom. Then Mom started climbing, and Dad followed - I couldn't believe my eyes! I lay on my belly and shouted directions. "No, not that ledge - try the one up to your right!" I never felt more anxious - seeing my parents clinging to that sheer rock - or more proud, either. Then I heard a shout and my heart jumped into my mouth. But it was a shout of triumph! My folks pulled themselves up, up, and over the top. "We did it!" Mom beamed, breathing hard. "You did it!" I echoed. "Dad, I thought you

said it couldn't be done!" "It can 'f, " he said, grinning like a grizzly bear.

Then all together, we continued upstream. "Look!" I shouted. A big piece of driftwood was wedged between boulders. "It looks just like a dancer!" It was river-smooth, polished by water. It looked like a boy whirling around in joy. "Can we take it home?" I asked. "As a kind of souvenir?"

"If you can carry it," said Dad, "you can keep it." It was about the hardest thing I ever did, but I lugged that heavy driftwood back out.. And now it stands in our yard. Some people think it's a sculpture. We just call it "The Dancer." Whenever I look at it, it reminds me of the waterfall- and makes my heart feel big and wild.