# *Prologue*

Who could be more excited than a teenage girl heading off to spend two weeks away from home at a summer camp? My packed suitcase, tied up sleeping bag, and ticked off checklist all accomplished a month prior to departure date gave added meaning to the Girl Scout motto “Be Prepared.” Whether it was the scent of pine etched in my memory, the breathtaking altitude, or the longing for camaraderie that only a camp setting can instill in youth, my anticipation swelled like a hot-air balloon. Whatever the lure was, it kept calling me back year after year, and in 1966, when I was fourteen, it was no different.

*Mom and Dad were real troupers as they drove the two-hour distance, untiring and uncomplaining, from Bakersfield to Girl Scout Camp Mountain Meadows on Greenhorn Mountain in the Sequoia National Forest. I drank in the scenery with my eyes as we wound through the cool Kern River Canyon, my five-year-old sister sitting next to me trying not to barf into a paper bag. Eventually, we’d reach Alta Vista Summit before veering off onto the Forest Service road. From then on, at every bend in the road until we arrived, I was a broken needle on a record player: “Are We There Yet? Are We There Yet?”*

*Mom and Dad trudged down the dirt road from the parking area to Main Camp, lugging my gear, hiking skyward on the dusty switchback trail to my assigned unit in the tall pine trees. Looking back, I doubt I showed much appreciation for my parents’ sacrifice, as you know, parents are “just there.” Now, I ask myself silly questions such as, “Had Mom applied lipstick on that day?”*

*Perhaps my folks were re-experiencing the sense of adventure they had instilled in me. We went family camping many times when I was a pipsqueak. Even though a bear frightened me while in utero, I was not afraid of lurking dangers in the wilderness. The bear had given me just the right combination of curiosity and common sense to confront any issue except my shyness.*

*The four outdoor living quarters (units) of varying landscapes were Shady Pines, Chinkapin, Tenaya, and Shalom. They placed girls in the units according to age and/or experience. This was my fourth summer and second year in my beloved Shalom. Named for peace, it was a place I felt peaceful and completely at home. Designated for the oldest girls, it was the highest up and farthest from Main Camp.*

*I needed a nestmate, and as an experienced camper I could show her a few tricks. Having arrived in Shalom, my first tasks were to find a “nest,” lingo for a bed of earth to unfurl one’s bedroll, and somebody to share the nest. This was easy to accomplish after years of developing an instinct and a tough hide on the over 7,000-foot mountain.*

*Sometimes impressions of old nests were still in the ground waiting for occupants; other times we created new nests. No tents or cabins, not even air mattresses, in these woods for these girls: Sky-blue ceilings covered us during the day, and at night stars bright enough to identify the constellations and contemplate the meaning of life. As temperatures frequently dropped to below freezing during summer, we learned survival skills such as sleeping in warm wooly socks with flashlights against our thighs for emergency trips to the biffy, the Girl Scouts’ rendition of an outhouse.*

*In ten consecutive summers as a camper and a counselor, I do not recall rainy weather. Though, dew glistened on the meadow turning leaf blades into tiny silver swords, and sprinkles often added to our fun as we ran through the meadow playing Red Rover. Each unit had tents we called tarps, which they instructed us to put up on the first day. On the rare occasion if confined to the tarps, we sang songs, wrote letters, and planned menus. We were happy campers.*