

I very often see recipes and rules as mere suggestions to be explored and modified as I see fit. I apply this rule across many areas of life. Whenever I cook, for example, I first do a recipe as it says, and then I change it to add more or less ingredients to suit my palate. When I find that there are pretentious rules, (e.g., “Don’t smoke a cigar after it has been gone out for more than an hour”), I change this to something like, “After a cigar goes out, then it develops somewhat an off taste that some people find displeasing”, and if the taste doesn’t bother me then I don’t care about the rule. Most of the time, this policy simply allows me to find stuff I like and enhances my enjoyment.

There are times, however, when I discover the real purpose of a rule only after I mess up. For example, honey is not a substitute for Agave nectar in margaritas because honey doesn’t mix as well; one cooks onions before putting them in many dishes otherwise the dish is too oniony. Even here, the learning is rarely life-threatening.

In a more serious way, this weekend has made me aware of how lucky I have been as a hiker and camper, and how I may have already been given my two chances. In a previous backpack, I slept alone in a spot before checking the water supply and for dangerous animals. Although it was the most scared I have ever been, I survived with no damage other than a realization that I am not a solo backpacker. This weekend, I fell and injured my hand. At the time it happened, I closed it up and we even continued the hike and even camped that evening before going to a doctor to get nine stitches to close a gap on my thumb. Although this seems to be healing as well as expected, it’s made me realize an error of my ways.

While we had a good first aid kit (including fire starting material), we carried far too little food and water. Worse, other than myself, no one, including the people I was hiking with, knew the route we were taking. This wasn’t a standard hike, but rather a combination of hikes along fairly rocky and not-often traveled terrain. If I had been more injured, I would not have been able to tell people where to go to find aid or how to get back to find us.

Let me say that from now on, everyone hiking with me and someone not hiking with me will know my trail. Let’s just say age has taught me the value of a hiking buddy and letting people know where I’ll be. The younger and wilder me will just have to live with that.

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