

GABBY HISTORY AND THE LEGEND OF THE "FIREGUY"

From *The Casting Couch* by Byron "Andy" Anderson (Apr 3, 2002) Editor, S. Mueller

First were the Cro-Magnon years: gatherings of ill-equipped and ill-prepared souls who pitched camp in the pines, gathering fallen wood from the forest. Burning long, soggy logs in half to make shorter soggy logs to burn in half. Years of rainy nights that would drive us toward the great beer cave in the hill of the Cross Fork. Where the strange brews and smells created an atmosphere of rapture amongst us, and we moved freely through the crowded beer cave, speaking to the elders of the other streamside clans. We were young and our clan was not much known or understood, but in the beer cave, all were welcome.

A few years later we entered the Pathetic Age. The Gabbys, as we were now called, struggled to shelter ourselves beneath painter's plastic, beach umbrellas or an occasional 6x6 tarp. During this period, Gabby camp looked more like a gypsy encampment than anything else, but we were learning. The simple plastic shelters were teaching us to use the resources that surrounded us to our advantage. Wood was now being chopped and split with an axe, and we were bringing to camp our own local brews, making us less dependent on the clan of the beer cave. We brought in rookies and started to teach them our ways. Our numbers grew bigger, our tents grew bigger, our fires grew bigger, and our trout counts were getting bigger. All these things helped to lead us to the golden age of Gabby – The Empire Age.

One Opening Day the forest primeval saw spread beneath its green canopy a huge fluttering blue mass that was to be known as The Tarp, Colaianneville. It was not only our shelter but also our banner. It signified the Empire of Gabby. It gave shelter to its own security force, its own newspaper, Doctor, sanitary facilities, camp engineer and fire specialist. Wood was now purchased, already cut and split, then delivered to our camp by one of those from the clan of the beer cave, who now served us. All other nearby camps fell under our sway, and we began to dominate vast stretches of the Kettle. Nearby camps that tried to flex any independent muscle were brought under control in one of two ways. Either they were threatened strait forwardly by our security forces, commanded by Karl Wendel. Or Gabby founder and *raconteur speciale*, Dane Konop, would be dispatched to their camp to tell Gabby stories and drink large quantities of their beer until they would retreat to the safety of their tents for the night. These were heady days, when Colaianneville and its suburban addition, Davetown, dominated the landscape and Gabbys ruled the stream.

As with all things, however, we reached our middle ages, and the empire saw its first cracks. We were blessed with years of good weather and all seemed right with the world. But the numbers in camp each year began to fall. Some left, they said because things were changing, unable to see that all things change, always. Others left out of frustration over their own lack of competitiveness on the stream, not realizing that a shelter from the elements and the camaraderie that it promoted could come to symbolize Gabby camp far more than an armful of trophies; and that the legends of Gabby camp were remembered more for who they were, not necessarily for what they took home. And all this time Mother Nature put us to sleep with her bounty.

As the years of warmth went on, the Tarp went mostly unneeded, as there was little to shelter us from. Having conquered the forest, the stream, the surrounding clans and camps and now the weather, like Nimrod with his arrow, we sent a pillar of fire through the center of Colaianneville toward the heavens. The great Tarp was destroyed. Our borders came under attack, and the continuing drought dried up the Forest, forcing us to abandon our fire.

In the midst of all of this rose the next Gabby legend - the Legend of the Fireguy. He was a burly, strapping guy when he first strode into camp his rookie year. The type of a guy you would look at and say, that guy looks like a fisherman. I knew the Fireguy. He and I were rookies together. He looked like he stepped off the pages of *Field and Stream*. I looked like I'd been lost in the woods and had just wandered into camp. He won the Gabby his rookie year. I came in second in the fifty-yard dash to a rather nice-sized rainbow trout. Later that night at the camp meeting, however, things took an ugly turn. The fact that no one had actually seen him catch the fish, and the finding of what appeared to be a barcode on the fish's tail fin, threw the awards ceremony into chaos. The award was presented, but many in the crowd still cried foul. It became known as Gabscam.

He returned the next year, but was never again considered a serious fishing threat. One year he was spotted at the edge of camp holding a "Will Fish For Food" sign, and wound up as a hit man for a seedy group known as Team Gabby.

Every year rumors would circulate about who the big shadowy figure really was. No one knew, but everyone had an idea, from Zippy the Clown to Carlos the Jackal. Yet after he built his first fire, everyone in camp agreed, he must have been a fireman... or an arsonist. He was so good with a flame in fact, that he became the camp Fireguy. For whatever reason, he could build perfect fires every time. Like some kind of pyro-architect, the flames would rise, the ground would boil and all in Colaianneville would be warmed. He could pitch a log from twenty feet that landed perfectly on the pyre, sending thousands of small embers skyward, transfixing all those nearby. But as I said, all things change, and so once again, Gabby fate caught up with the Fireguy. The years of good weather had not only left Colaianneville facing the wrecking ball, but also forced a ban on all campfires. The Fireguy was out of a job.

Many a man would have folded under this weight, but the Fireguy reached deep inside and gathered himself together, and like the second coming of Richard Nixon, picked up his fishing rod and strode toward the stream. Though at that moment we couldn't have guessed, a legend was about to be born. Proof was to be laid before us that Gabby redemption is possible. That one fisherman can make a difference. He went to the stream and came back with the camp's longest trout, a magnificent 18" rainbow. The Fireguy had, once again, won the Gabby.

That night almost as a sign of rebirth, the rains returned to Gabby camp. A new Tarp went up (Colaianneville II), a fire was built and around it old mysteries came to an end. As we all listened around the campfire that night, the Fireguy told us that his real name was Steve Mueller and that he really wasn't an arsonist at all, but started out in television. First as a stunt double for Dan Haggerty and Kenny Rogers, and as Harry in *Harry and the Hendersons*. His current project being a series of driving safety videos for the Maryland Department of Transportation.

So as the evening came to an end, everyone went back to his tent a little happier, a little more hopeful and a little warmer. The Gabby would survive and grow. Thanks to the Fireguy.

There are at least fifty stories in Colaianneville, and this was just one of them.