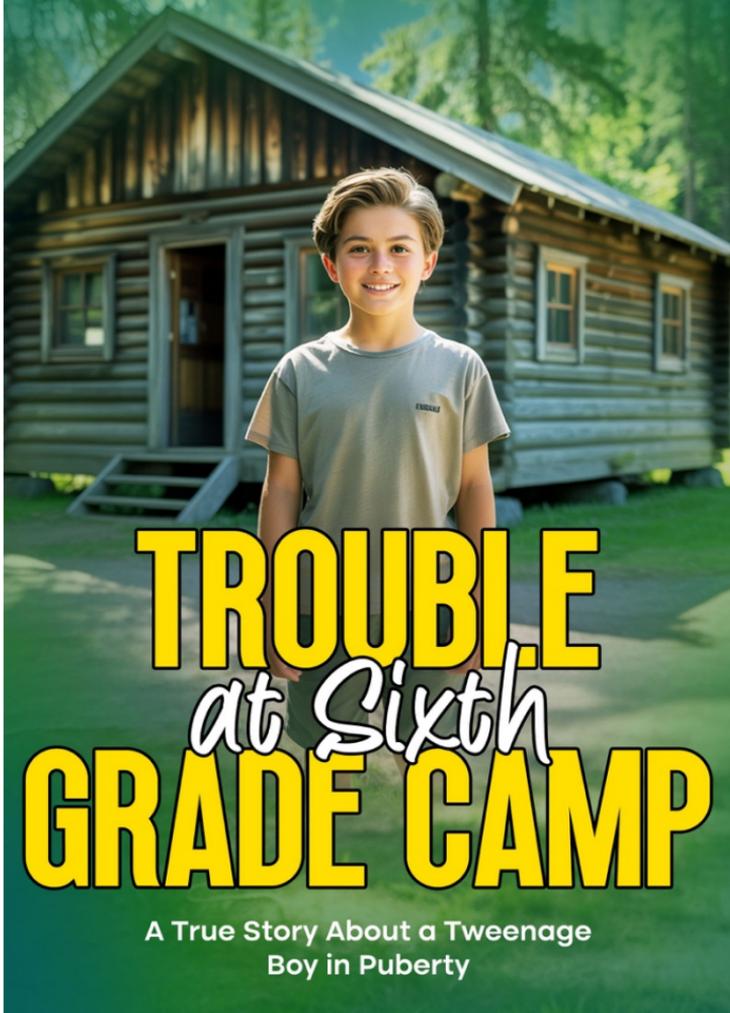


RICHARD CARLSON



TROUBLE
at Sixth
GRADE CAMP

A True Story About a Tweenage
Boy in Puberty

**Trouble at Sixth Grade Camp:
A True Story About a Tweenage
Boy in Puberty**

Richard Carlson

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It was April 1983, and I lived in Tucson, Arizona, USA. I attended Donaldson Elementary School. My name was Rich, and I was a twelve-year-old in sixth grade. Every year, the sixth-graders at Donaldson went to camp north of the city for five days. Before going, I didn't realize there were communal showers and nowhere private to change into my swimsuit at camp.

At camp, the cabins were each composed of one large room filled with bunkbeds. I let my friend, Bill, use the top bunk since he didn't sleep on a bunkbed at home, and I

did. For him, it was something new and special.

I went into the restroom and shower room, which was a separate building right outside the cabins. To my surprise, there were no dividers whatsoever in the shower, which made my stomach drop to the ground: a series of shower heads sat side-by-side along a long wall. I didn't like being seen naked, especially as a self-conscious-about-my-body and shy tweenager. I cringed, thinking about all the boys seeing me in my birthday suit. *Were we required to take showers?*

That evening, I changed into my pajamas quickly—it was bad enough for me to be seen in my underwear for several seconds. First, I took off my shirt. Then, put on my pajama top. Then I took off my pants and put on pajama pants. In the morning, I did the opposite. Thank goodness, no one said anything about us being expected to take showers.

However, some of the boys were showering when I went outside and walked by the shower room; I could hear the spraying water. I did not look inside. Some

boys came out wearing a towel around their waist. My friends and I hustled to breakfast. My buddies, Jason and Bill, hadn't showered, either.

The next day, I did the same, and the same the next day. We had fun at camp.

Then, on Thursday, I was scheduled for swimming after lunch. I had brought my swimsuit and a white t-shirt, because I was self-conscious and nervous about my body.

After lunch, I sat on my bed in the cabin; it was time to change into

my swimsuit for swimming. My strategy: to wait until most of the boys left and then change into my suit, and then to get back to the cabin early to change before most of the boys returned. I waited and waited. Bill changed into his suit, standing right next to me but facing away from me. His tush shone bright white like the moon on a full moon night.

Having me see him naked didn't bother him, I assumed.

"I'll be there in a minute," I said, sticking to my plan as I sat there, slouching. Bill left. Then,

most of the boys left. I didn't look at any other boys changing. Finally, only one boy remained, and he was diagonally across the room, changing. I undressed to my underwear, put on my T-shirt, and then quickly slid off my underwear and hurried to pull my suit up. But my suit got caught on my toes, and I couldn't get it on right away! Hopefully, no one saw me. After putting my shoes on, I headed to the pool.

The pool water was filled with leaves and debris from the plants in the vicinity. It also didn't appear to

have enough chlorine in the water. The cabin leader didn't seem sure about whether it was safe for us to swim. He spent some time talking to the camp staff about it and eventually told us that we couldn't swim because of the dirty water. Instead of swimming, we talked under a tall pine tree until it was time to go to our cabin to change back into our clothes. I left the pine tree as soon as the cabin leader told us to go to our cabin and change. I even left my friends behind in my hurry to get to our cabin. Once inside, I saw that there

were only two other boys changing. They were facing away from me, thank goodness; I stopped looking at them. I quickly removed my suit and slid on my underwear. This time I made sure my toes didn't get stuck. No one saw me naked that I knew of.

I didn't shower the entire five days of camp. When we got back to school after camp, Mom was there to drive me home. She was happy that camp had been a lot of fun.

I confessed to her, "I haven't taken a shower all week. That's the

first thing I want to do when we get home. I can't wait."

"Okay," she said.

At home, showering felt very refreshing. I savored finally having a clean body and hair.

In the fall, I'd be in seventh grade. Over the summer, I asked my friend, Seth, who was a grade higher than me, "Do the boys shower after P.E. at Cross?"

"Yes, everybody has to," he said.

I stood there, wide-eyed, and my stomach fell to the ground.

Then, he smirked. “Just kidding. No, they don’t. There are communal showers there, though,” he added.

What a relief!

About the story: Rich, a shy, sensitive, and imaginative twelve-year-old sixth-grader, feels embarrassed to be seen naked in communal showers at camp and changing into a swimsuit in the open in his cabin. Based on a true story that took place in Tucson, Arizona, USA, circa mid-April 1983.

About the author: Richard Carlson is an author of children's and coming-of-age books. He is a highly sensitive person, or HSP. You can learn more about him at www.richardcarlson.com.

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