

Another First

By Anne Frazier

From the August 2000 Flowstone

During the course of one's life, there are many "first events" that are unforgettable. Events such as your first day of school, first solo bike ride, a first kiss, even the first time to take the car out by yourself. July 29th has just been entered as another red-letter day as members of the Cullman Grotto introduced my daughter and I to the sport of repelling and the wonderful thrill of a tyrolean ride.

It began Saturday morning as Crissy and I met Patrick, Harold, Shane, David and his youngest daughter in front of the Cullman library. After loading the equipment in the "bat mobile", we headed for Desoto Falls. The weather was perfect with just enough sunshine to make beads of sweat pop out across your forehead, and a cool enough breeze to make you really appreciative. The line for the tyrolean was pretty long and we spent about forty minutes listening to the instructors repeat the same message to each rider. "Keep your hand behind the pulley. Do not touch the rope." His instructions were fully ingrained by the time we made it to the front of the line.

There was a moment when I thought we might be turned away because of our lack of experience. The question, "Have you ever repelled?" would require a little navigation so we wouldn't look like the rookies we truly were. Sure, Crissy had done some climbing in Brevard, N.C. and took a R.O.T.C. course at USA. I had wandered into a cave in Mexico and did some hiking and para gliding in Venezuela, but repelling. . . Crissy went first and obviously passed the test. A few tugs on her harness and she was hooked to the pulley. From the way she slid across the rope and landed with ease on the other side, she looked like anything but a rookie. Shane and Harold followed making the ride look incredible easy. Now it was my time to hook up. Again, the instructions, "Don't touch the rope." Sounds simple enough. I was concentrating so hard on those words that I actually don't remember leaving the bluff. My first recollection of being in flight was seeing the mountain sides whiz by at an incredible rate of speed and the river disappearing from view as I approached the other side. The entire ride probable took about five seconds total--but what an awesome five seconds it was! After Patrick finished his ride, we rode to a ledge with about a 90 foot drop. Crissy and I tried to stay out of the way as the men worked like clockwork to secure the rope and pads. It was obvious they were very thorough and serious about what they were doing. That is especially helpful for first-timers.

I had watched about 18 hours of videos from the Grotto's caving trips in hopes of being better prepared, but I found nothing can totally prepare you for that first step over the ledge until you do it in the flesh. The descent was fabulous and provided such a thrill! Walking back up was a little more challenging, though, requiring more coordination than the video let on. Tired, but not spent, we agreed to go further into Little River Canyon and try about a 185 foot drop.

Again, the men rigged as we watched. Again the precision was impressive. The second time over the lip seemed much easier and certainly more enjoyable. The rappel was smooth, even through the tree tops, and once on bottom, it was like being in a different world.

Crissy and Harold made the first ascent to the top and made it in twelve minutes. This is where running cross country really comes in handy. Unfortunately, not everyone (including me) runs cross country. My climb with David by my side was quite a bit slower. About mid way up, we encountered a thunderstorm and David said, "We're going to have to climb a little faster." Yeah--right! The way I see it, those frequent rest stops are put there by God to make sure you take in all the scenery--and I intended to take full advantage of it!

After finally making it to the top, the men quickly began derigging. They didn't seem to mind that the rain by now was really coming down hard. In fact, their patience and encouraging words made all the difference in our experience and whether or not we would attempt this again. Now, I can't imagine not doing this again and missing out on the adrenalin rush. Thanks Grotto members for making this a day we'll never forget.

