

## THE HILL

Sometimes you want to roll down a hill. At least, that's how Corrie saw it. It didn't matter, big or small, grass or dirt. Once deemed appropriate, Corrie's motto was Hill, Roll, Fun. Some hills were made for rolling down. When you encountered one, you honored the hill. It was your job as a child. Corrie discovered it was as much fun rolling in your Sunday's best as it was in a T-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops. It didn't matter, although Corrie didn't recommend rolling in flip-flops.

"They come off too easily," she told her friend. "Afterwards you have to run back looking for them," which wasn't as much fun as rolling down in her opinion. So number three on Corrie's top five tips for maximum rolling-down-hills pleasure was "take off your flip-flops."

"Where should I put them?" a friend asked.

"Throw them to the bottom, collect them when you get there, of course," Corrie replied, which was definitely more fun than carrying them or running up the hill to fetch them. Her friend threw her flip-flops from the top losing them in brush halfway down.

"Oh well," said Corrie "They were old."

"How should I roll?" another asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Should I roll with my arms stretched above my head, down by my side, or wrapped around me in a big rolling hug?"

This was too much for Corrie. She didn't know. You lie down on your side, give a little push, and roll. It was simple. Corrie never thought about hands. She rolled, squealed and rolled again.

"Well?" her friend said, waiting for an answer. When none came, she asked again. "Where do my hands go?" Corrie fell to the ground, pushed off and shouted, "*Down by your sidddeeee!*" as she rolled through the grass, hands by her side. Moments later her friend arrived, laughing and shouting.

"Hands by your side," Corrie repeated breathless. Her friend giggled, "That was so much fun." Then she noticed her feet, "Damn. I lost my flip-flops."

"Oops," said Corrie. "I forgot to tell you about that."

Corrie didn't have a favorite hill. She loved every hill. Her favorite hill was the hill she was rolling down at that very moment. Her mom's favorite hill was no hill. She disliked grass and dirt stains especially when the ground was damp. Damp ground equalled deep stains.

"*Corrie!*" she yelled. "Are you serious? Grass and mud stains! How did you manage that?"

"Two-hill morning, Mom," Corrie answered like she was saying the most obvious thing in the world. Two-hill mornings were the best.

Corrie didn't roll down hills every day. That was a spring-summertime activity. Wintertime was for puddle splashing. Maximum fun, same laundry result. On rainy days, Corrie

sat by the window, tracing raindrops with her fingers as they ran haphazardly down the window pane. She'd glance at her glittered rain boots and assure them,

“The rain will stop soon.” When the sun broke through, Corrie would climb into her boots, fastened her yellow jacket with the red spots, and call to her mother.

“I'm going outside, Mom.”

“Stay away from hills, Corrie. I don't want you covered in mud. We're going to Grandma's later.”

Corrie nodded agreement,

“No hills. Got it, Mom. See you soon.” Then she'd run to the puddles gathering beside the fire hydrant with the rusted base. Splash, crash, kersploh. Corrie never held back. Puddles, like hills, were for fun. The best puddles were empty when you finished playing in them.

“I splashed that puddle right out of existence,” she told her friend as they ate their school lunches. She stood up, stretched her arms out wide, and declared, “I am Corrie, the puddle killer!” Her friend laughed until she snorted milk down her nose which Corrie thought was cool. They spent the next ten minutes snorting milk until their cartons were empty.

“Did you drink your milk at lunchtime?” her mother asked on her return from school.

“Yes, I always drink my milk. What do you think I do with it? Snort it down my nose?” she said giggling.

“Don't be cheeky, young lady,” her mother replied, giving her a chocolate chip cookie straight from the oven.

“Yummy. I love warm cookies with chocolate that oozes everywhere. Thanks, Mom.”

Corrie ran to her bedroom to eat her cookie and get chocolate on her duvet.

Corrie loved foreign hills.

“What did you do on vacation?” her friend asked on her return. “Did you roll down any foreign hills?”

“Lots,” Corrie replied. “Foreign hills are the best.”

When Corrie went on vacation, she rolled down at least one hill every day. Each hill was unique, but foreign hills were especially special because you conquered them once in your lifetime. One and done, never to be experienced again, unless you returned to the same place the following year, which Corrie never did. This year Corrie’s family were vacationing in Santa Barbara, Disneyland, and Yosemite Park. Corrie was excited. She’d never been to California and was excited to see the Pacific Ocean with its perfectly groomed beaches.

“They look like they’re rolled out fresh every morning. How do they do that?” she asked her father looking at pictures of the beach beside their vacation rental. “Where are the sand dunes? If there were sand dunes, everyone would be happy. I could roll to my heart’s content and because sand doesn’t stain, Mum would enjoy a laundry free vacation,” she added as her mother passed with a laundry basket full of dirty clothes.

“Men can do laundry too,” her mom informed them and emptied the dirty clothes over her father’s head. Corrie collapsed on the floor laughing. Her father jumped up shouting that he was the smelly sock monster who liked to eat little girls. He walked towards her menacingly, arms outstretched. It would have been more convincing if her mom’s bra wasn’t stuck on the frame of his eye glasses.

“You’re the smelly bra monster!” Corrie yelled and ran outside. When she looked back her father was chasing her mother, both howling with laughter, her mother throwing socks and T-shirts as she ran.

“Man, I’m glad I don’t have to clean that up,” Corrie thought heading for the hill behind her house.

Santa Barbara was a mess of sun, fun, sand, and ice cream. At Disneyland, she met all of the princesses and most of the cooler characters. She enjoyed a long conversation with Minnie Mouse, who seemed to listen intently to everything Corrie was saying.

“What did Minnie say?” her father asked when Corrie returned to the lunch table.

“She’s not Minnie Mouse, Dad,” Corrie reminded him. “It’s just a girl dressed in a costume.”

“Then what did ‘just a girl dressed in a costume’ say?”

“Ok, just so you know, Dad, it’s a girl dressed in a costume. But she’s pretending to be Minnie Mouse, and I’m pretending I don’t know she’s not Minnie Mouse. Got it?” Corrie explained.

“Got it,” her dad answered. “So what did ‘a girl dressed in a Minnie Mouse costume pretending she is really Minnie Mouse, even though she is not, and you know she is not’ say?”

“Nothing,” Corrie answered digging her fork into her potato salad.

“Really?” he said. “She talked for five minutes about nothing. That’s a lot of nothing talk.”

Corrie smiled and took a deep breath. “She asked what I liked to do. I said I liked to roll down hills. She said she never tried that, and I said she should, although it might be hard with such a big head and sticky-out ears. She told me to be careful, or Mickey would chase me for being rude, and I said if he did, I would roll down a hill to get away because his head and ears were even bigger than hers. Then she said, ‘Go away.’ So I did.” Corrie put a fork full of potato salad in her mouth and made a yucky face. She removed the fork, allowing the remaining potato salad to slide from its prongs, then pushed it away from the rest of her lunch.

“What’s the matter?” her mother asked. “I thought you liked potato salad?”

“I do. I like your potato salad. I’m not even sure this was made with potatoes,” Corrie said lifting it up with her fork and looking underneath. Corrie’s mother said “tut-tut” and encouraged Corrie to take another bite, saying the potato salad was good, but she knew it wasn’t as good as hers, which made her happy.

Yosemite was brilliant, amazing, stupendous, and also very pretty according to the postcard Corrie sent to her best friend. The card included a picture of a waterfall cascading off a high granite cliff because Corrie couldn’t find any postcards with photographs of conquered hills. For all of its beauty, Corrie hadn’t seen one rollable hill. She was beginning to think California had no worthy hills, which was a shame for such a pretty state, except for Disneyland which wasn’t pretty, as she explained to her father. He told her not to worry. Tomorrow they were going on a long hike. He was sure they would find a rolling memory en route. That was how he said it “rolling memory.” Corrie’s father spoke like that sometimes. If you weren’t used to it, you mightn’t understand. But Corrie understood, so the next morning she set off on a hike with her

parents and a big backpack full of sandwiches, buns, apples, cookies, a chocolate bar, and an “if-you’re-good” packet of her favorite chips. Corrie’s mother carried the backpack, her father two large water bottles.

“What can I carry?” Corrie asked.

“A positive attitude,” her father replied.

“That doesn’t sound too heavy,” Corrie said, and found it wasn’t. The sun shone brightly in a deep blue sky. It was an easy day to carry a positive attitude on a hike with your parents.

After ninety minutes Corrie found her hill. Ok, Corrie didn’t find it. Her father did, but he was looking for her, so she said, “Yes, I think I’ve found it,” when he asked if this was the perfect hill. It was just high enough to roll from top to bottom without stopping. It had a good gradient. When you’re a hill roller, you learned words like gradient, and Corrie had, so she said, “This hill has a perfect gradient.” Her father agreed,

“I agree, the gradient is perfect.”

Corrie walked to the bottom to assess the landing area. Excellent. Soft, but not too soft, flattening out to a natural stop. She looked up the hill and waved to her father. She saw his smile from below, confirming it was a long distance to roll but not long enough to get dizzy when you stood up afterwards. Don’t misunderstand, Corrie liked to be a little dizzy, giddy dizzy as she called it, but she didn’t like stumbling-around-walking-sideways dizzy because that was scary even if it only lasted a few seconds. What a disaster if you walked sideways dizzy, tripped up and hurt your arm. It would be difficult to eat ice cream, do your homework, tie your shoelaces, or even pull up your shorts after a bathroom break. No, walking sideways dizzy wasn’t good, and this

hill wasn't steep enough to cause that, another positive. Corrie walked halfway up the hill and ran her fingers through the grass. It had been a wet winter. The grass was long. The sun had turned it a beautiful golden color. The grass was strong enough to stand tall, almost up to her waist in places, but not so strong it didn't sway in a slight breeze. Corrie pulled a piece and examined it.

"Just the right size," she thought sticking it in her mouth, letting it dangle from the corner like a cowboy pretending to relax on the porch outside the town's tavern while he waited for the bad guys to come into town. Corrie returned to the top, running her hand through the tall grass as she went.

"How is it?" her father asked.

"I think it's going to work. We've found a good one. I need to find the best launching site, then we can go." Corrie walked across the hill, stopping several times to determine if, indeed, she was standing at the most appropriate point of take off. It had to afford the smoothest ride down without fear of veering off course or hitting rocks or stones. Once Corrie worked out her starting point, she walked down the hill looking for hidden obstacles. She returned, and told her father this was going to be "epic."

Standing at the launch point she tied her blond hair with a scrunchy not wanting it flying in all directions, and getting "super knotted" as she rolled through the grass. Her father ran to the bottom. He loved to lie beside her when she arrived and listen to the details of her "rolling adventure." Corrie didn't consider it an adventure. Hill rolls were typically too short to be considered an adventure. "Maybe a rolling voyage," she thought waiting for him to reach the



bottom. He waved and said “clear for takeoff.” Corrie’s mother stood to the side watching with a smile. She smiled with her entire face. Corrie found it amusing when people said she had a smile on her face. To Corrie’s mind, she had a face on her smile. That’s what she said in school when asked for an example of something completely joyful. Once Corrie was cleared for takeoff, she bent down and lay in the grass. A second later she popped her head above the grass line to confirm her direction. Counting to three she gave a little push with her right hand and started to move forward. After the first two or three rolls the slope kicked in and she sped up. The grass was so soft it felt like she was rolling on a gentle wave. Corrie started with her eyes closed. Once she gathered momentum, she opened them for two full rotations of grass, sky, grass, and sky again. After two rotations she once again closed them. Anything longer would make her dizzy, and as she explained, she didn’t like dizzy. Corrie continued to roll bending her knees just a little to absorb the slight bumps she could feel through the grass. Her father explained the concept of momentum to her, and whilst she didn’t fully understand his explanation, she knew the faster she rolled the harder the ground would feel. When you rolled, you kept your mouth shut so you didn’t eat grass or a twig or even a spider or a creepy crawly. Corrie kept her mouth tightly shut. She never had a nose problem. Maybe because it was “the daintiest nose ever,” according to her grandma and grass, twigs, spiders and creepy crawlies didn’t like dainty noses. Either way it worked for Corrie.

Suddenly Corrie hit a bump and was kicked off course. Her legs turned clockwise. She tried to correct her position, but was unable to recover. Soon she was diagonal to the slope and losing momentum. Opening her eyes Corrie confirmed her legs were slowing, but her head was

speeding up. A couple of seconds later, she stopped, her feet pointed towards the top of the hill. She lay there for a short while, enjoying the feeling of being surrounded by the tall grass as she listened to the sounds of the meadow below. She knew she was completely invisible and thought, “If I took a nap Dad would never find me.” Her slumber was interrupted by a shout from below.

“Corrie! Where are you?”

She waited a few moments before pushing onto her knees. Her head bobbed on the grass like a swimmer taking a rest before continuing their journey. Corrie’s father was looking in the wrong direction. Lifting her hand she shouted, “I’m over here! Just a little navigation problem. See you soon,” and then dropped back down and corrected her course.

“Let’s get it right this time, Corrie” she chided herself. Then she realized she was having a most brilliant moment, surrounded by soft golden grass underneath a perfectly clear California sky, doing the thing she loved most. So she took a few extra seconds to enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells of a moment in time.

“Corrie?” her father called. Corrie pushed. Sometimes sound can add to the experience. Ignoring the dangers she opened her mouth wide shouting, “*Wheeeeeeeeeee!*” Descending through the grass and into the flat clearing she came to a complete stop and waited, her eyes closed, enjoying the red of the sun behind her eyelids. She felt a darkening across her body and slowly opened one eye.

“Hi,” she said to her father who stood over her with a huge grin on his face. He held out his arm and gently pulled her upright.

“That looked awesome.” She said it was. They stood side by side looking up the hill. Her mother walked across to the launch site.

“How was that?” she shouted. Corrie gave a big thumbs up. Her father pulled a few strands of grass from her hair while she straightened her dress, which had trouble catching up with her rolling. Corrie looked at her dad, then up the hill to her mother, who was walking towards them through the grass.

“I think I want to do that again,” she said. “Want to join me?”

“Absolutely.” They walked up the hill, hand in hand, for some further rolling adventures.