



Story and Photos by LAURA JENKINS

YOU'D BE

hard-pressed to categorically define a Get'away Gal. She's a school superintendent and a chef. She's a judge, a biologist and a zookeeper. She's even a former exotic dancer who was known in the 1960s by her stage name, "Pinky Dare."

A Get'away Gal is a "girly girl," but she also knows her way around a truck. She's 21 and 83 years old (though she's most often in her 50s and 60s). She typically lives in Texas, but also resides in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas. She's married, single, widowed and divorced. She has grown kids and grandkids, and is childless.

Most of all, a Get'away Gal—or "GG," as she is often called—is a member of an abiding sisterhood that convenes monthly to camp in customized trailers. It's become known as "glamping" (short for "glamour camping"). Glamping offers the thrill of adventure without sacrificing comforts like cozy beds, a bathroom or a functional kitchen.

In recent years, a number of all-female, trailer-toting glamping groups have emerged, including Sisters on the Fly, Florida Floozies, the Louisiana Belles and, of course, the Get'away Gals. To compare them, you could look at basic differences such as activities and locations, but the most discernible distinction lies on the inside. When I asked what sets the Get'away Gals apart, each member eventually landed on one essential factor: the group's founder and leader, Dixie Taylor.

After buying a trailer in 2010, Taylor—a Brownsboro native and retired dress shop owner—spent nearly a year trying various camping excursions. She learned that she wanted to camp more often and closer to home. She put the word out to her camping buddies, who told others, and the Get'away Gals were born. Taylor was 71 when she started the group. By the first campout in April 2011, she had recruited more than 300 members. Although camping was the initial reason for convening, Taylor says some peripheral activities have become almost as important as the getaways themselves.

"When I started my club, I wanted to have a theme with a costume party at each campout," says Taylor, a member of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative. "I grew up going to costume parties with my parents. It was so much fun. Of course, that's what the GGs are all about now. If I decided not to do it anymore, they would kill me!"

She's probably right. Over the last four years, the GGs have selected whimsical themes, including a Hippie Happening, Barbie Bash and Pirate Getaway. Another GG tradition that has emerged is a night of dancing in petticoats. By all accounts, the bright, ruffy skirts extinguish inhibitions and fuel merriment.

When the Get'away Gals set up camp, it's like a cross between a neighborhood block party and a parade of homes. These women are lavishly hospitable. Whether they know you or not, they're offering you a seat by the campfire, a beverage or a tour of their camper.

One evening, I approached Canyon Lake resident Karen Wigginton to ask if she'd mind my snapping some photos of her setup. Not only

The décor inside Get'away Gals' campers is the artistic reflection of each owner.



GET'AWAY GALS

A sisterhood of campers keeps the good times rolling



The Get'away Gals thrive on the group's companionship and fun activities, such as costume parties, which flourish under the leadership of founder Dixie Taylor, top right.

did she enthusiastically agree, she was just taking two baked chickens out of the oven and invited me to stay for dinner. I'd known her all of 10 minutes.

As I explored Wigginton's trailer and visited with her, I began to see deeper reasons why these women love the GGs. When I commented on how much I loved the pale aqua theme in her camper, she revealed that it was her late son's birthstone color. Wigginton, who lost her son in 2008, explained that surrounding herself with memories of him was a source of great joy and comfort. She's also incorporated the birthstone colors of her other two grown children in her décor to embrace and express what's important to her.

"For me, the common thread amongst us all is that we're trying to reground ourselves in our identities. You see the personalities come out in the trailers."

As I walked through trailer after trailer, I marveled not only at the broad diversity of décor but also at how delighted the ladies were when others visited their spaces. To the GGs, the trailers aren't just campers; they're artistic reflections of the owners.

Although the Get'away Gals has only been around for five years, the emotional bonds among members resemble those of childhood friends. The GGs all appear to be deeply devoted to one another. When a fire destroyed Susan Stinnett's Houston townhome and claimed the lives of her two beloved dogs, GGs drove to town and helped her sift through the rubble. When a brand-new member had unexpected lung surgery, many of the

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a vital part of her healing. "For the longest time, I'd felt guilty about having fun and enjoying life," says Wigginton, a member of Bluebonnet and Pedernales electric co-ops. "The GGs have taught me that it's OK to have fun, to be silly and to laugh again."

Even though their love and laughter is apparent, I wondered if these women always get along. Not to perpetuate stereotypes, but as a mother of three daughters, I found it difficult to believe that so many women could regularly convene without any squabbles. I asked several members about it and got pretty much the same answer: It's truly not a problem.

Wigginton attributes a lot of that to Taylor, whom she calls "Mama."

"She herds us all together," Wigginton says. "There's never any dissension in the GGs because she wants everyone to have fun. If you can get this many women together, and everybody just has the time of their lives and comes back for more, there's no need to fix what's not broken."

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GGs showed solidarity by wearing pearls in her honor and then posting selfies on the group's Facebook page so she could see them.

Wigginton didn't know any of the Get'away Gals when her son passed away, but she'll tell you unequivocally that the GGs have been

WEB EXTRAS at TexasCoopPower.com Learn more about the GGs.