



The Deep Hollow

A SENSATIONAL ODYSSEY
OF TWO TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOYS
IN SEARCH OF DINOSAUR FOSSILS.

William R. Wilson



A perfect storm of torrential downpours, gas well fracking and earthquakes created a massive sinkhole swallowing up two twelve-year-old boys who were searching for dinosaur fossils. They find themselves deep in the earth's underworld embarking on an unbelievable journey through a labyrinth of tunnels deep in the hollow of the earth. There, they discover a civilization that evolution forgot, which assists J.P. and Caleb through numerous life threatening encounters, guiding the boys to the surface.

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First Edition

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beautiful wife Suzan who was truly an inspiration to me. I would also like to dedicate it to Linda, my sister-in-law and Marie, my mother-in-law who without their help this book would not have been written.

Chapter 1

The sounds of machine gun bullets zinging rapidly and grenade launchers exploding were heard blaring from the two PlayStation Three controllers. The two twelve-year-old seventh graders had been playing Battlefield 4 nearly three hours now.

"Turn that damn thing down," said Linda Showalter the mother of J.P.

His christened name is John Paul. Some say he was named after a Pope, others say two of the Beatles. But everyone calls him J.P.

"Okay, I'll turn it down," said J.P., a tall, lanky, almost gangling eighth grader with long shaggy brown hair.

"Damn it. That's the fahth time you beat me this yeeah," said Caleb wearing a toothy smile similar to Andy Griffith with almost the same kind of light brown wavy hair.

He's a couple of inches shorter than J.P. and quite a few pounds lighter. Caleb has also been blessed, if you want to call it that, with the famous Boston accent.

People from Boston for some strange reason have an extremely difficult time pronouncing the letter 'r'. Instead of pronouncing it as (är), they can only partially complete the phonetics and pronounce it like 'ah'. It's hard to believe that this one city has its own, distinct dialect. A region yes, but a single city?

Since Caleb Cunningham transferred down to Texas with his family from Foxborough a couple of years ago, he and J.P. had become BFFs almost immediately. They both liked video games and each shared a passion for collecting fossils. They only lived a couple of blocks from

each other on the west side of town near the granite quarry in Weatherford, Texas.

Weatherford, Texas is a medium sized community of around twenty-six thousand people located thirty miles due west of Fort Worth. Its main claim to fame was being named the "Peach Capital of Texas" by the state legislature.

A Peach Festival is held annually attended by some thirty-five thousand who take delight feasting upon peach ice cream, peach cobbler, peach pie, and peach smoothies. Farms and cattle ranchers surround the town as this is considered cowboy country. They also take pride in having as one of their citizens Jimmy

Henson, a ten-year-old who won the best Heifer blue ribbon way back in 1982.

But recently things had not been quite so celebratory in Weatherford. A series of small earthquakes registering around 3.0 on the Richter scale had been plaguing some small communities such as Azle, Alvarado, and Keene on the perimeter of Weatherford. These seismic occurrences were difficult for the townspeople to understand, since there was no geological evidence that these cities are close to any fault lines or shifting tectonic plates.

The overwhelming evidence suggested that the real cause of all these reported earthquakes could be attributed to what is generally called fracking. In order for oil and gas developers to extract the oil or gas from the reserves, a procedure called hydraulic fracking is used to induce fractures in the rock. This allows for easier extraction of these highly sought after fossil fuels.

Weatherford lies directly above the Barnett Shale formation, which is rich in oil and gas reserves. Because

the shale has a substance similar to concrete, several smaller wells must be drilled in order to optimize the output.

"Hey mom," said J.P. "Can Caleb stay and have dinner with us tonight?"

"It's alright with me if he doesn't mind having Three Cheese Hamburger Helper," answered Linda. "We'll be eating at 5:00 pm. Don't forget, your father and I have to be at the courthouse by 7:00 pm for the Railroad Commission's report on fracking and earthquakes."

Just then, J.P.'s father, Thomas entered the family room. Thomas preferred to be referred to as Thomas instead of Tom, his father's name. He finally settled into his favorite recliner after a long week's worth of computer programming at his software company.

"It's bad enough that we have to look at these eyesores at a distance," said Thomas, referring to the red and white gas well derricks bourgeoning above the city's rooflines.

These obelisks resemble small Eiffel Towers spattered throughout the landscape.

"We've got to do something about all these gas wells going up around here along with that damn fracking," said Thomas.

"I just saw on TV," said J.P. "that a big earthquake struck Azle last night. And Azle's only eight miles from here."

"My bed was shaking last night too," said Hailey, J.P.'s eight-year-old sister as she briskly entered the family room.

"They showed the cracks from the earthquake in one of the kitchen floors. It looked pretty bad," replied J.P.

"Dinner's ready," said Linda. "Come on and eat."

Quickly scarfing down their food, J.P. and Caleb started planning what to do on their first Friday night of summer vacation.

"Do you still want to go looking for fossils tonight?" asked Caleb. "I bet we'll be able to find some at the quahy near the pahk."

"I'm positive we'll find some," said J.P. "My fossil collection that I showed you earlier...I found most of them near the quarry."

"Jamie Millah told me that he was able to sell three of his fossils for \$75.00 on EBay," said Caleb. "I thought that was pretty awesome."

"That's nothing," said J.P. "Mr. Curtis from school told me that there's a good possibility that real dinosaur fossils could be dug up while excavating the quarry. Now that would be dope if we could actually find one. Let's go."

Stepping outside the back door you could still smell the ozone that was purged through the atmosphere after three days of much welcomed relentless rain.

The boys' Adidas walking shoes were heard squishing through the back lawn on the way to pick up their BMX bicycles they had gingerly laid down on the ground. They could go anywhere on their BMX's because they were designed to travel over extremely rough and hilly terrain. Most of the 1.7 mile journey would be on smooth pavement. But it would get to be a more undulating and rougher ride as they got closer to the quarry.

Even with the accompanying flash flooding conditions, the rain brought smiles to all the farmers and ranchers in the area. Weatherford had been in the midst of a severe drought for the last four years. As much as

fifteen to eighteen feet of water had been depleted from the reservoirs in the area.

"I hope you brought your phone with you," said J.P.

"Of cahse," replied Caleb. "I also brought along my trusty Swiss Ahmy Knife. I just can't go anywhaah without it."

"We'll have to hustle it up a little bit," said J.P. "It's already 6:15 pm. We only have about three hours of light left."

While the boys continued on to the quarry, Thomas and Linda were arriving at the Old City Hall in downtown Weatherford. They were there for the 6:30 pm council meeting with the Railroad Commission about the earthquakes.

Built in 1933 to provide jobs for those out of work during the depression, the Old City Hall still remains the cornerstone of the city.

Weatherford was founded in 1858 at the juncture of Highway 80 and Highway 180 in Parker County. For its first twenty-five years, Weatherford was a safe haven for the Parker County residents who sought sanctuary in the city from a series of Indian raids that were documented to last until the early 1870's.

After the cessation of the Indian attacks, the town began flourishing due to the new railroad service to accommodate Weatherford's surrounding agricultural economy of farmers and ranchers.

Oddly enough, unlike its name implies, the Railroad Commission has absolutely nothing to do with the railroad anymore. It was now the State's designated overseer of the oil and gas industries.

That was why they were at the Old City Hall tonight. They were petitioned by the citizens to attend a hearing

to address the inexplicable occurrences of earthquakes and tremors in the area. Everyone wanted to know if it was due to the deplorable fracking.

But there was something even more important that the townsfolk wanted to bring up to the Railroad Commissioner...it was the water reservoirs. There were a modicum of water reservoirs in North Texas that supplied all the water to the surrounding communities, farms, and ranches.

Each time a gas well was fracked, it used anywhere from two to eight million gallons of fresh water per well. With North Texas almost continually being in some kind of drought condition, it depleted the water levels of the reservoirs very quickly. It not only limited boating and other watercraft activities, but it also forced residents to abide by stricter lawn watering restrictions.

The Railroad Commission was in a difficult position.

Because the real reason they were created was to provide economic prosperity for the community through generating well royalties from the oil and gas companies.

So far the revenue generated from these royalties had exceeded even their most optimistic estimates. But they would have to weigh with it the enormous repercussions that were occurring from the hydraulic fracking.

It was now nearing 7:00 pm and the boys were taking a shortcut across the school baseball diamond. Standing up, they pedaled vigorously through the extra long grass spraying streams of rainwater as it channeled through the knobby BMX tires. The handlebars were swinging wildly from side to side. Their equilibrium was alternating thirty degrees side to side with each powerful leg thrust on the pedals.

"Hey J.P.," shouted Caleb. "See if you can jump over second base without hitting it."

"Easy," replied J.P. "I've done this a million times. The key is to pull back and lunge forward making sure the rear wheel hits first."

J.P. flawlessly demonstrated his technique. Caleb decided that he could do it too. After a couple of deep breaths he too propelled his BMX over the bag without fail.

"Look...over thah...a rainbow," said Caleb as he pointed upward and to his left.

"Wow," replied J.P. "That's epic. I haven't seen one that cool in a long time."

The boys continued on their sojourn to the quarry. They had to kind of zigzag around the standing water or puddles to keep dry.

As they approached the middle of the outfield they had to stop their bikes quickly as a large puddle, almost a small lake appeared out of nowhere. It was about the size of J.P.'s two thousand three hundred square foot house. No telling how deep it was.

"Wheah did this come from?" asked Caleb with a perplexed look on his face. "This wasn't here befah."

"I never saw it here before either," said an astounded J.P. "Do you think maybe a water line or a sewer line pipe might have broke?"

"No tellin'," answered Caleb. "I know we got a lot of rain but I don't think we got quite that much to cause a small lake like this in the middle of a baseball diamond...do you?"

Something was just not quite right. The boys couldn't believe their eyes.

While staring at the standing water, they observed small pulsating waves spreading outward from the middle. Then almost as quickly, the waves seemed to be reverse back toward the center and collided with the first set of waves.

Out of nowhere, a low-pitched rumbling as in the sound of distant thunder could be heard.

Vibrations were felt tingling up the boys' legs. It was tantamount to standing too close to the railroad tracks when a freight train rumbles on by.

"What's going on?" shouted Caleb. "I can actually feel the ground move."

"I think we better get home," replied J.P. with a very perplexed look on his face. "This doesn't look good."

"Look," shrieked Caleb, as he pointed toward the center of the standing water.

In a matter of seconds the very center of the water began to bubble up as if it were a water fountain. Just as the boys were beginning to turn their bikes around, the ground began shaking vehemently. It shook so much that they couldn't hold onto their bikes as they were rattled out of their hands.

Then as they looked at the water bubbling and standing in awe, the boys just couldn't believe what they saw next. The nucleus of the bubbling water was growing larger and was beginning to assume the form of a vortex, an eddy, a twister, and a waterspout all in one.

As the vortex grew higher, the ground beneath the water along with the boys began shaking ever more violently. It instilled sheer terror into the boys. The boys were absolutely panic stricken. Their minds were racing rapidly with no time for them to focus on what to do next. They were like stunned deer looking at headlights.

The ground rumbling was getting extremely fierce and the accompanying profound low-pitched sound was ramping up quickly.

Without any more time for the boys to react, the water vortex collapsed. And at the same time, the whole affected area began some kind of upwelling of the earth's mantle. A huge bulge began to appear, similar to the beginning of a hydrogen bomb mushroom plume.

Within a second or two, although to the boys it seemed more like a lifetime, the entire bulge caved in.

The whole event was strikingly similar to what happens to a cheese soufflé when you slam the oven door...the sides remain intact, but the center turns into an inverted cone.

"Hit the dirt," shouted J.P., as he grabbed Caleb by the shoulder and shoved him and himself down to the ground.

"I'm scared," cried Caleb. "I don't want to die."

The boys tried feverishly to grab a hold of the grass as the ground beneath them was quickly dropping down away from them. They kept clawing at the grass to get some kind of grip, but gravity got the better of them. They now knew that the only thing left they could do was to wrap their arms around their heads for some kind of protection.

They began a wild, violent, and turbulent tumble together down toward the abyss. The whole area was imploding and the boys were falling right smack dab into the center of it. And just like that there was absolutely no trace of them. They simply seemed to vanish deep down into the bowels of the earth.

The whole cataclysmic event took a mere twelve seconds.

Although any catastrophic phenomenon seems to psychologically take a much longer time than it really does.

The neighbors on the periphery began to rush outside to see what all the commotion was about. The 911-Call-Board at police dispatch was lit up like a Christmas tree. People were taking pictures of the disaster with their cell phones. They were unaware of the fact that the two boys had plummeted to the bottom of the sinkhole.

There was no other possible way to describe this event. It was a natural depression in a land surface formed by the dissolution and collapse of a cavern roof. It was no small size sinkhole either. The diameter of the hole appeared to on the magnitude of one hundred and fifty feet at the minimum.

A few brave people tried to get a closer look. But as they slowly began to approach the edge, more ground began to give way creating precarious footing. So everyone quickly backpedaled away from the hole, making them unable to actually see what was down at the bottom.

"I read about one of these sinkholes on the internet," said Brian Murphy a neighbor. "It happened last year and I think it happened in Florida."

"Yeah, I saw it too," replied Joe Jenson another neighbor. "Some guy was actually sleeping in his bedroom and got sucked under by a sinkhole. They never could find him."

As nighttime approached 7:30 pm, an array of brilliant pulsating red lights shrouded the horizon. Both the fire department and the police department were responding to the 911 calls.

They partially surrounded the sunken area with their vehicles in the hope of restraining any gawkers. They speared rods into the perimeter of the hole about ten feet from the edge and ran yellow warning tape around them to cordon off the dangerous area.

The newly created cavity was about one hundred and fifty feet in diameter, about one half the size of a football field. All were astonished at what they were seeing. This was something most people don't even hear about in their lifetimes.

Fire Chief Carlo Hernandez quickly arrived on the scene. A strapping 6'2" and weighing 220 pounds, Chief Hernandez was originally from Mexico and worked his way up by demonstrating good leadership skills. Looking a lot like Cheech Marin of 'Cheech & Chong' fame, he had a gruff facade but was the nicest guy you'll ever want to meet.

"He's demanding and commands respect. But he'll give you the shirt off his back in a heartbeat," as he was described by one of his men in a recent TV interview.

After some initial observations, the Chief decided to take a closer look in order to evaluate the safety concerns of this terrifying situation. He's the one that takes all the risks showing everyone how truly courageous he really was.

He tied one end of a safety tether to his waist and hands and the other end to one of his men.

"I want all four of you to grab hold of that end and hang on tight," said Chief Hernandez.

He gingerly stepped toward the sinkhole moving ever so carefully so as to not disturb any more loose ground. The footing was exceptionally precarious

because the ground was saturated with water. There was no way to tell where true solid ground really was.

As the Chief got within ten feet of the sinkhole and not wanting to take any unforeseen risks, he dropped down to his knees and skillfully crawled toward the depression. His knees were getting sopping wet from the sodden grass below. He was only inches from the opening when he felt a slight tremor beneath him. At the same time directly across from him, he saw a chunk of ground about the size of a refrigerator tumble into the pit below.

After letting his racing heart slow down, the Chief then slid up to the edge to catch a glimpse of what was down below.

"Do you see anybody down there Chief?" asked one of his men.

"I can't see anyone down there from here," answered the Chief. "Anybody down there?" he clamored without getting any response.

He then shouted the same question three more times.

Seconds later, another small piece of ground broke loose from the edge and tumbled down. This one however was only twenty feet away from him.

That embedded a genuine sense of terror into the normally fearless Chief. He had never come close to experiencing such daunting freakishness as in that event.

"Pull me back firmly," demanded the Chief.

"Don't worry Chief," answered back another firefighter. "We'll reel you in."

Rather than turn around and risk dislodging more loose ground into the sinkhole, the Chief reversed his crawl back to safer ground.

Once there he met up with the Police Chief Maunuel Rodriquez, or Manny, as he liked to be called. At 5'10" and 180 pounds, he too is Hispanic and very well respected in the community.

Between the two of them, they would have to determine the next best course of action to ensure the safety of the town's residents.

Since they weren't able to find anyone in the sinkhole, their new task at hand was to safeguard all of the citizens that were in close proximity to this disaster.

Going on 8:00 pm they knew that there was only one more hour of daylight to provide assuagement and solace to these citizens. They needed to quell all their immediate safety concerns soon.

By now the ogling crowd had swelled to about sixty people. They were standing around the periphery of the hole looking down in bewilderment. Each one of them had a thick veneer of consternation etched upon their faces.

"What are we supposed to do now?" shouted a man in the crowd rhetorically, knowing full well that no one had the answer to that question yet.

Will the sinkhole get bigger? Will it affect the structural integrity of their homes? Will their lives be threatened as a result of this hole from hell?

These were all questions requiring expeditious answers from both the police and fire departments.

Now arrived on the scene were the three major local television stations with their mobile units.

Channel 11 was the first to set up their equipment. Because of the extreme danger intrinsic to this calamity, they were told to stay back a considerable distance to ensure their safety.

After Chief Hernandez and Chief Rodriguez quickly assessed the situation they both concurred on a solution. A full sized barricade should be set up starting at least twenty feet from the edges of the sinkhole. About twenty-five police officers and firefighters then quickly set up a string of old style wooden roadblocks completely encompassing the sinkhole.

That whole area was extremely volatile. So it was of paramount importance that deterrents were set up to prohibit the citizens from doing their own investigating. Even getting close to the barricades could put them in peril.

As the dusk hour of 8:30 pm neared with the sun starting to show its orange tinted sunset veil, Chief Hernandez grabbed a bullhorn and put it to his lips.

"This is Fire Chief Hernandez speaking. We have just experienced a sinkhole. As far as we know nobody was hurt. But this is an extremely dangerous area where somebody could easily get hurt. So please go back to your homes and stay away. You will be safe in your homes. I repeat, please go to your homes, and stay away from here. Thank you."

With less than an hour of sunlight left, gradually some of the puzzled crowd dispersed back to their homes. They trickled home shaking their heads in bewilderment trying to get a handle on what they had just witnessed.

Many of the curious bystanders however still remained. Standing just behind the roadblocks they were

striving to grasp what had happened. Their minds were being flooded with thoughts of fear, awe, threats, and panic.

They were almost evolving into a zombie state. They really didn't know what to do next. All were fraught with angst and trepidation that intensified with every passing moment.

Scrambling as quickly as she could, Channel 11 field reporter Christina Chavez finally got her mobile camera unit functioning. Wanting to get the first scoop chronicling the story she knew would be the feature 10:00 pm news headliner, she deftly grabbed Chief Hernandez's arm to usher him in front of the camera. After the cameraman signaled he was ready, Christina commenced with her interview with microphone in hand.

"I'm here with Fire Chief Hernandez to find out more about this sinkhole that appeared out of nowhere here in Weatherford," reported Christina.

"Chief Hernandez," asked Christina. "What is this thing behind us and what caused it?"

"My best guess is that it is some kind of sinkhole," theorized the Chief. "We can only speculate as to what caused it. It might have been caused by some of these seismic tremors we have been experiencing. It could be from the gas well fracking. It could even be caused by the torrential amount of rain to hit the area in the last three days. No one knows for sure Christina."

"Are there any reports of people being hurt as a result of this?" asked Christina.

"Not to my knowledge," answered the Chief. "I was able to peer over the edge but thankfully I couldn't see anyone below."

"I understand that some little league games that were to be played here were cancelled because of the wet field," said Christina.

"That's right Christina," confirmed the Chief. "Had that not happened, we might of had a whole lotta' injured kids."

"Do you have anything planned yet Chief to rectify this situation?" asked Christina.

"We have calls in to Fort Worth for geologists, soil scientists and petroleum and gas engineers for them to help professionally evaluate the problem and provide practical resolutions. We're not equipped to handle this ourselves."

"What can you tell our viewers to do in order for them to feel safe?" asked Christina.

"If you suddenly start seeing cracks in the walls and floors," cautioned the Chief, "give us a call and we will investigate. The most important thing to stress is to stay away from this sinkhole. This whole area is capricious and can't be trusted, so please, stays as far away as you can."

"Thanks Chief, and good luck to you," said Christina.

"Thank you Christina," reciprocated the Chief.

"That was Fire Chief Hernandez on the latest regarding this 'freak of nature' sinkhole that just swallowed up one half of a little league baseball diamond. We will keep you updated as more information becomes available. Reporting live from Weatherford, Christina Chavez, Channel 11 News."

Onlookers continued to rubberneck at the sight of the sinkhole. Tiny flashes coming from their smartphone cameras were looking like clusters of fireflies or lightening bugs flecking the sky. The hour was now

nearing the darker part of twilight where seeing became slightly more laborious.

The Old City Hall meeting with the Railroad Commission had just adjourned.

Mr. and Mrs. Showalter were quickly heading back home to find out more about all of this commotion everyone was talking about. Linda Showalter had been getting text messages about the sinkhole all night from most of her friends.

She knew that the affected area was in very close proximity to where they lived. She also knew that this was the general area where J.P. and Caleb were going to hunt for fossils.

Linda Showalter had been furiously trying to text J.P. so she could find out when he and Caleb were planning on coming home. She had texted him a dozen times already and had yet to get a response. She knew that he sometimes turned his phone off, not to be devious, but rather courteous. He then also sometimes forgot to turn the phone back on.

Linda was trying to persuade herself that this was the case. J.P. just plumb forgot to turn on his cellphone and that was why she couldn't reach him.

But deep down inside, Linda's maternal instinct was telling her that something just wasn't quite right.

She was getting the exact same stomach retching queasiness that she had when she temporarily lost her daughter Hailey at the State Fair last year. Of course the first thing she did was to blame herself. She had trouble sleeping for weeks because of that bloodcurdling event.

After walking into the kitchen from the garage, Linda set her purse on the table and turned quickly toward Thomas.

"Where in the world is J.P.?" questioned Linda. "I've tried calling him and texting him several times. Where do you think he is because I'm starting to get really worried?"

"Where did he say he was going when you talked to him last?" asked Thomas.

"He and Caleb were going to the quarry to look for fossils," replied Linda. "He said he would be back by dark. But here it is after 9:00 pm, and not only is he not home, but I can't seem to get a hold of him at all and it's getting me very upset."

"Now just stay calm," said Thomas, trying his best to comfort an outwardly distraught Linda.

"I can't stay calm," insisted Linda showing signs of losing her composure. "J.P. has never ever done this kind of thing before. How do we find him? Where do we look? I don't know what to do next."

"Why don't you call Caleb's house to see if he's over there?" suggested Thomas knowing that he was the last person to be seen with him.

"Good idea," replied Linda. "I don't know Caleb's cellphone number so I'll have to call his house."

Linda dialed Caleb's house landline number to check on the boys. The phone only rang three times but it felt like thirty three times for Linda.

Carol Cunningham answered "Hello" rather tentatively on the other end.

"Hi Carol. This is Linda Showalter calling. How are you doing?" asked Linda offering the standard pleasantries.

"Oh, Hi Linda," responded Carol. "Actually Linda, I'm not really doing all that well right now. It's after dark and

I am having a very difficult time trying to locate my Caleb."

"Oddly enough Carol," said Linda. "That's the reason why I was calling you. Because I can't seem to locate J.P. either. I've been phoning him and texting him and I get no response. It's like he has his phone turned off and that's just not like him. The last thing that J.P. told me is that they were going to the quarry."

"Yeah," said Carol. "I thought I heard Caleb talking about going to the quarry too."

There was an ever so slight pause in the conversation.

"You know, Linda," said Carol skittishly. "Sam and I were talking...isn't that sinkhole that we have been hearing about on the news located in the same pathway the boys would've taken from your house to the quarry?"

"You know it very well could be," concurred Linda. "But it said on the news that there were no injured people because of the sinkhole."

"I know," said Carol. "But what are the boys?"

Plunging deeper into a sense of powerlessness, the two women tried to decide what to do next.

"I think Thomas and I are going to take a walk over to the sinkhole to see if someone there might know something," proposed Linda as she groped for more ideas to find her son.

"I liked that idea," said Carol. "Sam and I will meet you there in a few minutes. See you then."

"Okay, goodbye," said Linda finalizing her phone call with Carol while hurriedly slamming down her landline phone onto its cradle.

A semblance of panic was beginning to manifest itself on Linda's face as she nervously began to pace

back and forth in the kitchen. She continually kept asking herself where J.P. could be while she slowly shook her head from side to side. Possible options as to his whereabouts were slowly dwindling.

Although it might have seemed feasible that he went to get a late night snack at McDonalds it was highly doubtful. It was quite some distance away. Besides that, J.P. knew enough to call one way or another even if he had to use a public phone in lieu of a broken smartphone. He had always called in when he was in these situations in the past.

The only other possibility would be that he could have gone to one of his other friends' houses. The probability of that was relatively remote as J.P. hangs with Caleb all of the time. Even though they've known each other for only a couple of years, they quickly became BFF's. They were always seen together.

Try as she might to think otherwise, Linda was now wondering to herself if maybe something tragic happened to J.P. at the sinkhole event. She tried to perish the thought but it continued to ring loudly in her mind that this might be the only logical explanation.

However, with the authorities mentioning earlier that there were no casualties that eased Linda's mind somewhat, if only for an instant. The only way to find out for certain was to visit the site and try to elicit some information from some of the authorities in the know.

"C'mon Thomas," screamed Linda sternly. "We have to get to the sinkhole pronto. I have to find my son. I just can't believe this is happening to me."

"Now relax Linda," said Thomas trying his best to comfort Linda in her time of emotional need. "I've already called all of the hospitals and none of them

reported any admissions of either J.P. or Caleb. So at least we know that they weren't hurt."

"How do you know they weren't hurt?" asked Linda with an exaggerated mask of puzzlement etched in her face.

Backing out of their driveway, they drove the half-mile to the location of the sinkhole. They hurriedly walked the next couple hundred yards toward the sinkhole.

The sound of rotor blades droning from a television news helicopter was heard. A brilliant searchlight beaming down from the chopper was carefully scrutinizing every square inch of the sinkhole from up above.

Still there was no new information from the news chopper.

Now all three major news networks had mobile units set up near the area. Their television lights were lighting up the sinkhole with roughly the same amount of lumens as an airport runway. You wouldn't even know it was nighttime.

Much to the dismay of Fire Chief Hernandez, the group of mesmerized onlookers gathered around the blockade had ballooned to twice the amount as there was earlier.

The seismic activity had stopped...for now.

The policemen were remaining very vigilant. They were trying to maintain what had been so far, good crowd control. Safety was always of paramount importance.

Linda somehow managed to locate Carol in the burgeoning crowd.

"Carol. Oh Carol," clamored Linda as she ran toward

her colleague in empathy. "Were you able to find out anything?"

Her sense of urgency was ratcheting up by the minute.

"Both Sam and I called a few of Caleb's acquaintances to see if they might know what they're at," replied Carol. "We even called the school to see if they might be using the gym or maybe getting something from their lockers. Nobody had seen them at all today. You don't think that they could have been trapped within the sinkhole, do you?"

"I don't want to think so," said Linda now obviously stricken with fear. "But I guess it could be a remote possibility. Maybe we should find the Fire Chief and see if he might be able to shed some light on this right now."

Linda and Carol were going to have to move more quickly as the Fire Chief was about to be interviewed by Channel 5, another of the local TV stations for the 10:00 pm news.

After finally pinpointing the Fire Chief in the crowd, Linda and Carol were running toward him frantically flailing their arms high in the air to capture his attention. Fire Chief Hernandez saw both women approaching and quickly determined that both were in some kind of obvious distress.

"Whoa, Whoa, Whoa there ladies," cautioned the Chief with the hope of tempering their anxiety. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Our sons, our sons, we can't find our sons," cried Linda in a wailing voice. "Where can they be?"

"As far as we know," answered the Chief, "there have been no reported casualties or injuries as a result of this sinkhole."

"How can you be so sure?" Linda questioned the Chief with her eyes so wide all you could see was white.

The Chief, staring down at the ground for what seemed like hours, slowly lifted his head and looked Linda straight in the eye.

"I guess I can't rule out that possibility totally," said the Chief with a tone of disappointment readily noticeable in his voice. "We have a team of engineers and geologists coming in from Fort Worth later tonight to assess the damage and determine the next step. Until then, this is an extremely dangerous area, so please stay away."

Linda and Carol couldn't believe what they were hearing. Even if the boys were down in the sinkhole there was no guarantee that a rescue effort would even commence due to the extreme danger. Both husbands wrapped their arms around their wives trying desperately to assuage their wives in their frantic state.

Then shocking everyone, Linda pushed Thomas away as hard as she could. Almost immediately she began pounding her fists on Thomas' chest with reckless abandon...not actually trying to hurt him, but rather to display her true frustrations. Then Linda rested her head on his chest and wept uncontrollably.

"Where's my son, where's my son, wheeerree's my soooooonnn?" cried Linda until she couldn't cry anymore.

Her arms now devoid of energy dropped to her side as she buried her face into Thomas's chest.

Chapter 3

Indistinguishable chatter filled the air back on the surface near the sinkhole. Already fast approaching 11:00 pm, the lighted area surrounding the sinkhole had dimmed. All three mobile news crews had taken down their lighting after the broadcasts. Several police floodlights now generated the only light remaining. But they were way too weak to light up the very bottom.

Since there was really nothing they could do anyway, most of the crowd dispersed back to their homes. Only a paltry group of fifteen or so diehard rubbernecks remained.

But so did the tremors.

The frequency of the tremors was about once every seven to eight minutes. And almost every tremor shuddered off another section of ground into the depths of the sinkhole below.

Linda Showalter had now ultimately been plunged into genuine hysteria. Carol Cunningham was upset too, but nowhere near the intensity of Linda.

Linda's mind was wildly misfiring neurons. She couldn't put together any kind of cohesive thinking. All she kept thinking was 'where is my son?' And she just couldn't seem to come up with any kind of answer.

Linda and her husband had spent the last couple of tumultuous hours calling every person that might possibly know the whereabouts of J.P. and Caleb. They had called virtually every fast food restaurant in town. Then they called the video game arcades. And they even called the school, even though it had recessed for the summer.

They even had to ponder the unthinkable. The boys could have been abducted sometime during the evening. But they quickly dismissed that thought, as it would have been extremely difficult to kidnap two twelve-year-old boys simultaneously.

Linda and Thomas had exhausted all of what they perceived to be viable options. They kept thinking and thinking, but nothing enlightened them.

There was however, one ominous haunting thought that was portending. Try as they might, they couldn't seem to banish that troubling thought. It was nagging them. It was spooking them. It was making them panic-stricken.

The thought that is, of the boys actually being swallowed by the sinkhole.

But nobody actually witnessed that happening. Nobody could verify for sure that the boys were indeed sucked into the sinkhole.

"What are we gonna' do Thomas?" asked Linda in a melancholy tone. "We've searched everywhere. Where are they?"

Thomas looked down and slowly shook his head in a pendulum motion of anguish.

"I know that we're trying not to think it, but you know as well as I do," professed Thomas, "the reality is looming that the boys may have been casualties of the sinkhole catastrophe. It's the only other half way logical explanation I can come up with."

"No, no, it can't be," wailed Linda, with tears beginning to well in her eyes.

"But there is one more thing we can try," said Thomas, hinting of a small ray of hope. "We can go ask

Chief Rodriguez if he could issue an 'Amber Alert' for the boys."

The 'Amber Alert' program is a highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art search and rescue technology organization. Amber is actually an acronym that stands for "America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response.

The truth be told, the alert is actually named for Amber Hagerman, a nine-year-old girl who was raped and murdered in Arlington, Texas back in 1996. Ironically enough, Arlington, Texas is only forty miles away from Weatherford as the crow flies.

The Amber Alert network is equipped with an array of technological vehicles. The alert is distributed via radio, television, email, and electronic traffic signs. And now, the alert has teamed with Google and Facebook to provide even more coverage to utilize smartphones.

It is getting more and more difficult for criminals to abduct children these days because of this exceptional search and rescue technology. However, over eight hundred thousand children are reported missing each year.

Both Linda and Thomas proceeded to track down Police Chief Rodriguez. They found him checking out the integrity of some of the wooden blockades. One was not assembled correctly and actually fell apart. The Chief quickly reassembled it and ensured everyone that it was secure.

"Chief," summoned Thomas in a somewhat agitated state. "We need your help desperately. We can't find our son anywhere.

We've been searching relentlessly for the last two hours. We have no place else to look. Could you please

do us a favor and formally issue an 'Amber Alert' for our son?"

"Yeah," chimed in Carol. "Fah our son too."

Both boys' parents now fell into a semicircle alignment all facing the Chief. Their feverishness was painfully being exuded on their faces. They needed more help.

Police Chief Rodriguez recognized both sets of parents as they all belong to the same Catholic Church and exchange pleasantries every Sunday at Mass. He also knew that the sheer horror emanating from their crazed eyes was real. They were definitely in dire straights.

Since both boys were twelve years old, they fell within the guidelines of having to be under seventeen years old for an Amber Alert to be issued. The Chief knew that both families would not be asking for this kind of help from the general public if they did not genuinely need it.

"Okay," agreed Chief Hernandez. "I'll call my secretary and have her initiate the process. But I'll need some kind of description. What where the boys wearing? Any other details you can provide to aid in the search description?"

"Both boys where wearing blue jeans," remembered Linda. "J.P. had on a blue polo shirt and I think Caleb's shirt was blue also."

"The boys were riding twenty inch 'road style' BMX bikes," said Thomas offering more details. "One bike was candy apple red, while the other I think was canary yellow."

"Thanks," responded the Chief. "This is all very good

information. I'll forward it to my secretary so she can incorporate it into the alert. We should have the alert hitting the air waves within the next few minutes."

Chief Rodriguez empathized with the parents.

Two years ago his brother Javier lost track of his nine-year old son Luis, only to find him three days later face down in the Trinity River. Somehow he had slipped while fording the river and hit his head on a rock, probably killing him almost instantly.

The whole community had been lamenting ever since. Every citizen in the town was sharing a somber veil of tribulation. It's always difficult to fathom the death of a child.

The town could not afford to mourn the demise of two more children. This would be devastating to the community. Losing three boys within two years. This was almost incomprehensible.

Hopefully, the impending Amber Alert would generate some leads or clues as to the whereabouts of the boys. But the parents were far from being sanguine. They knew that they must continue their pursuit of the boys.

As much as both sets of parents hated to admit it, they couldn't get that harrowing notion out of their heads of both boys being in the sinkhole. They knew that nobody actually witnessed them being pulled into the sinkhole. But that didn't mean it couldn't have happened.

Why couldn't it have happened anyway? The sinkhole was in the precise path the boys would have taken to go to the quarry.

The timing also seemed to have gelled. They couldn't be found anywhere in town. There were just too many coincidences. Both parents agreed that further

investigation of the sinkhole was warranted.

"I'm gonna' go talk to the Fire Chief." said Linda with striated tears tracks road mapping her face. "I'm gonna' ask him point blank if there is anything he could possibly do."

"I'm with you Linda," replied Carol, her face also revealing consternation.

Linda, Carol, and their husbands walked over to talk with Fire Chief Hernandez who was standing only a few yards away.

"Chief Hernandez, Chief Hernandez," barked Linda near the top of her lungs. "You gotta' help us."

"Now slow down Linda," said a consoling Chief Hernandez with his arms outstretched forward, as if he were giving a blessing. "What exactly, do you want me to do?"

"Can't you send someone down there to find our boys?" implored Linda.

"First of all," replied the Chief, "It's an extremely dangerous area. Parts of it are still breaking off and tumbling down. Secondly, it's extremely dark outside. Thirdly, and most importantly, we don't have anyone trained in mountain climbing."

"Isn't there anything at all you can do?" pleaded Linda in a last ditch effort.

Seeing the horror and terror prominently manifested in Linda's eyes, the Chief conjured up an idea that he thought might just work.

"I'm going to radio a dispatch of the county's Care Flight Search and Rescue Helicopter to assist in the search," said Chief Hernandez. "They've never been involved in this dangerous of a rescue, but it's the only chance we have."

A smattering of relief marginally suppressed the parents' trepidation. It was a glimmer of hope that wasn't present before. That might be the means by which they were able to locate the boys.

The proposed rescue effort with the Care Flight Helicopter would be precarious at best.

First of all, the rescuers are trained in EMT medical rescues, not dangerous tether like suspension rescues.

Secondly, after the high-pressure system forced the three-day rain front to the east, it also ushered in extremely high winds. These winds are in the neighborhood of twenty to thirty miles an hour.

And last but not least, it's nighttime with very little artificial lighting.

"Care Flight just radioed and said they would be here in ten minutes," relayed the Chief.

"Do you really think they can help us Chief Hernandez?" asked Linda, mired in confusion.

"They are an award winning rescue team," assured the Chief. "They've been doing this together now for twelve years."

The 'slapping' sound of the helicopter rotors up above was getting louder and louder.

"Here comes the chopper now," said the Chief, while pointing his index finger at what would be eleven o'clock in the sky.

As everyone followed the Chief's finger to the sky, the lights from the helicopter became more visible. It became readily apparent that the pilot of the helicopter was struggling to keep it in a controlled hover. It was not the twenty-five mile an hour winds that was the problem. But it was the forty to fifty mile an hour wind gusts that were creating havoc with the helicopter.

The pilot of the helicopter landed it about one hundred yards from the sinkhole. As everyone scrambled to the helicopter the Chief yelled out, "duck your heads, duck your heads."

The helicopter rotors continued to rotate. So needless to say it was a dangerous area to walk around.

Finally the Chief and the parents were able to get up to the cockpit safely. The Chief then began filling in the pilot all the details germane to the rescue. He not only informed him of the boys, but also told him to be on the lookout for two BMX bikes.

The helicopter pilot, Darren Dineen, had over five thousand hours of flight time. So he was considered a seasoned helicopter pilot.

His rescuer colleague was Jerry Garcia with the same namesake as the Grateful Dead leader. Jerry was in tiptop physical condition and has been assisting in these rescues for over twelve years. Both men were in their mid-forties.

Their last successful effort together was back last March. Together they rescued a family of three and their dog from their rooftop. The family had to flee there to evade the rising floodwaters of the Brazos River.

This rescue effort would be much more complicated. But these rescuers are fearless. They had yet to turn down a request for a rescue attempt.

Jerry began strapping himself into the rescue harness that was fastened to the end of the winch. He double-checked to ensure that all of the buckles were secured.

He knew how important that is, as he recalled an incident whereby one of the buckles became undone when he was one hundred and fifty feet in the air. It

scared the living bejeebies out of him. Ever since then he has been especially vigilant in securing all the buckles.

The plan was for Darren to elevate the helicopter and slowly swing Jerry from the safe ground into the air directly above the sinkhole. Then Darren would slowly lower the winch until Jerry was positioned at the very bottom of the sinkhole. This would be the general vicinity of where the boys might be.

This whole operation would require a high degree of synchronization between the pilot and the rescuer. But these guys have done this hundreds of times before.

"Can I ride along?" begged Linda. "That's my son you are looking for."

"Yeah, me too," chimed in Carol, also wanting to ride along.

"No ladies," barked a gruff sounding Chief Hernandez.

"Absolutely not. There's way too much danger. And besides, the insurance companies won't allow it."

Darren and Jerry were just about ready to begin. Jerry was all harnessed in and Darren relayed to the Chief that he was ready to lift off.

"(Radio) All clear for lift off Darren," said the Chief.

"(Radio) Okay Chief," replied Darren, as he began speeding up the rotor blade rotation.

When the blade flapping noise became almost unbearable, Darren slowly pulled back on the cyclic stick slightly raising up the helicopter. Jerry was still waiting on the ground with his heavy-duty battery powered searchlight. Soon all the slack was taken out of the winch, and Jerry got plucked upward into the air.

Darren deftly maneuvered the helicopter to a spot that he thought was directly over the sinkhole. It was hard for him to tell, because the gusty winds were forcing him to keep his eyes on the horizon so he could keep the helicopter aloft.

Its fuselage was wildly rocking sideways, like a scary amusement park ride. Darren's cyclic control lever was wobbling in his hand just like the walking cane of a ninety-three year old man.

"(Radio), How's it going up there Darren?" asked the Chief with a worried look on his face.

"(Radio), Not real good," replied an obviously nervous Darren. "There's quite a bit of turbulence up here and I'm having a lot of trouble controlling it."

"(Radio), Jerry, are you able to see anything yet?" asked the Chief.

"(Radio), I'm spinning like a gyroscope up here," replied a somewhat disoriented Jerry. "The wind started twisting me like a piece of taffy and I can't stop it."

"(Radio), I'll lower you some Jerry," replied Darren. "This might get you out of the wind to help you stop spinning."

Darren followed through with his suggestion and lowered Jerry further down into the sinkhole. This action did, however, diminish the spinning motion of Jerry.

But things weren't quite the same for Darren. He had all he could handle with the gale force winds rocking his helicopter like a cradle, except not nearly as gently. He knew that physics would only allow him to stay up in the air for so long.

"(Radio), How are you doin' Jerry?" asked Darren, knowing that he might be in trouble.

"(Radio), I think I'm stabilizing a bit," said Jerry, with slightly more confidence.

The wind gusts subsided for a while enabling Darren to gain a little more control of his helicopter.

However the winds at these levels are called 'wind shear' in the aviation industry. When an aircraft passes through a 'wind shear' area, from then on the wind controls the aircraft, not the pilot.

This was pretty much the situation with Darren. Right now he had a smidgen of control over his machine. But the wind gusts come out of nowhere when you least expected it.

Sure enough, the gusts of wind returned with a vengeance. This was probably the worst flying condition that Darren had ever experienced in his entire career.

His only hope was to raise the helicopter up some to gain back some control. He raised it up another one hundred feet. Now both the helicopter and Jerry were more stable.

"(Radio), Are you guys doin' okay up there?" asked the Chief.

"(Radio), The winds are pretty wicked up here Chief," responded Darren. "It's almost like wind shear conditions."

"(Radio), I don't want anything to happen to you two," said a very rattled Chief. "Maybe it's best that you come on down. We can try it again in the morning."

"(Radio), I don't think so Chief," answered a very determined Darren. "We're up here now and we are going to do anything we can to find those boys."

"(Radio), I don't like it Darren," uttered the Chief in disgust. "You know I'm responsible for your welfare so you best get down here right this very minute."

"(Radio), Let me give it one more try as long as I am up here," appealed Darren to the Chief. "I think I might be able to handle the wind a little better now."

"(Radio), I don't like it one bit," responded a very concerned Chief.

But deep down inside he really was hoping that they would give it one more shot.

Darren slowly started his descent into the sinkhole again. This time Jerry was able to scour the bottom of the sinkhole with his high-powered flashlight. So far he was not able to see anything, not the boys nor their bikes.

"(Radio), I'm not seeing anything down here yet," relayed Jerry. "Try lowering me down just a little bit more so I can get a better view."

"(Radio), Okay, here goes," said Darren.

As requested, Darren gradually lowered Jerry deeper into the sinkhole. So far, so good. He was now able to shine his light on pretty much the entire bottom of the sinkhole.

But in an instant, Jerry's straight beam of light had now turned into a strobe light. The wind gusts had picked up velocity again.

Darren was having extreme difficulty controlling the helicopter again. The muscles in his right arm were feeling the strain from the intense grip he maintained on the cyclic lever.

Things were starting to get out of control. Darren was struggling to keep command of the helicopter. But right now he was barely winning the battle with the wind.

Then out of the blue, or should it be 'black', came a wild gust of wind. It really walloped the side of the helicopter. It made it resemble the Ping-Pong ball held

aloft by a stream of forced air used by advertisers. It's up in the air, but it doesn't know where it's going next.

In the meantime, Jerry felt just like the red rubber ball attached to the toy wooden paddle with a rubber band. He's bouncing everywhere in every direction, just like the red rubber ball does when it gets slapped around by the paddle.

"(Radio), I want you guys down here right now," demanded the Chief. "It's far too dangerous."

"(Radio), Okay Chief, your right" agreed a noticeably stressed out Darren.

Right about that time, the helicopter cyclic control lever slipped out of Darren's hand. The helicopter actually started going into a tailspin. Darren quickly regained control of the cyclic. But by doing so, he caused Jerry and the winch to crack like a whip.

Then, a loud crack noise was heard.

Although this particular whip cracking noise did not come from the end of a whip breaking the sound barrier. No, it came from the snapping of Jerry's fibula.

Immediately, an agony laced scream echoed from the inside of the sinkhole.

"(Radio), I think I just broke my leg," wailed Jerry. "It hurts like hell. Get me down Darren."

"(Radio), Okay buddy," said Darren. "Hang on tight. It's going to be a rough ride down."

"(Radio), I'll have some help ready for you when you land Darren," said the Chief.

Both Thomas and Sam overheard the radio messages between the Chief and Darren and they promptly volunteered to help.

Darren slowly retracted Jerry up to the helicopter on the winch. The pain in Jerry's leg had now become

excruciating as the shock slowly disappeared from his senses. When Jerry finally reached the helicopter opening for him to climb into, he realized quickly that the intense pain from his leg would not allow him to climb on board.

"(Radio), I can't do it," shouted a disheartened Jerry. "I don't have enough power to swing my broken leg onto the helicopter deck."

"(Radio), What do you want me to do Jerry?" asked Darren.

At that moment the Chief interrupted.

"(Radio), Darren, why don't you lower Jerry down to us," petitioned the Chief. "There are three of us here who can catch him and set him down gently."

"(Radio), Okay Chief, sounds like a plan," responded Darren. "But the wind turbulence is still pretty wicked up here. And you need to be careful down there too."

"(Radio), Don't worry, we will," replied the Chief.

The Chief, Thomas, and Sam were busy preparing a human safety net for Jerry. The plan was for all three of them to grab Jerry and catch him while he was in the air. Then, as quickly as he could, the Chief would unfasten his harness from the winch.

There was no need to call 911, because they ARE the 911.

Darren began to lower down Jerry into the arms of the human rescue net. The helicopter was still rocking wildly, but at least Jerry had stopped spinning which would help in the rescue.

Little by little Jerry was lowered down. So far, everything was going good. But then some strong cross wind gusts started blowing onto the side of the

helicopter. The winds were using the helicopter just like a sail.

Again Darren found it difficult to garner control of the helicopter. But he was learning fast. He now knew how to counter the wind gusts with his cyclic lever. It was kind of like leaning on a sailboat to counter balance the effects the wind had on the sails.

The lighting just wasn't the greatest. Unfortunately, Jerry lost his flashlight in the collision. The Chief would have to guide him down by radio.

"(Radio), Okay Darren," acknowledged the Chief. "Jerry's about ten feet from us now."

"(Radio), Alright Chief," said Darren. "I'll lower him down ten more feet. You tell me when, okay?"

"(Radio), Okay, lower away," said the Chief.

Darren began to lower Jerry down inch by inch. The pendulum swinging motion of Jerry as he was descending would make it chancy for the three men to pluck Jerry out of the sky.

Jerry was now swinging to each side by roughly six feet. Soon, Jerry was only a foot away from the tops of their heads.

The Chief briefed the other two men on his plan to anchor down Jerry.

"On three, we all reach out and grab him quickly," instructed the Chief. "Everybody ready?"

"Yeah, let's do it," shouted Sam.

Darren continued lowering Jerry down to the three men.

The Chief had his eyes fixed on Jerry. In order to get the synchronization just right, the Chief practiced the timing in his head by counting to three each time Jerry

was in the perfect position. The Chief thought he was now ready to orchestrate the rescue.

"You guys ready?" asked the Chief. "Okay, on three. One...two...THREE."

Just as planned, a hexagon of arms reached out and simultaneously seized Jerry from thin air. They then gently place him on the ground.

The Chief quickly unfastened the safety harness from the winch and waved the okay sign up to Darren.

"My leg is killing me," cried Jerry, obviously writhing in pain.

"I know it hurts Jerry," said the Chief with empathy, as he held onto Jerry's shoulders to comfort him. "Darren will be down here in a couple of minutes and will have you in the hospital in another ten minutes."

"Did you see anything while you were down there?" inquired a very curious Thomas. "Like, anything at all?"

"I got a little bit of a look," replied Jerry. "But I really couldn't see anything of interest. And don't forget, I was fighting for my life up there with all that wind turbulence."

Soon, as expected, Darren was back on the ground and was already tending to Jerry. He administered the obligatory EMT routine to him, but he knew Jerry wanted to get going to the hospital as soon as possible.

Darren also brought with him the EMT rescue stretcher.

"Could you three guys give me a hand with Jerry?" asked Darren, knowing he needed additional manpower to transfer Jerry to the stretcher. "One guy on each corner of his body, okay?"

So, per Darren's instructions, two guys positioned themselves at Jerry's shoulders and the other two guys were at his feet.

"At the count of three," briefed Darren, "We lift him off the ground and place him on the stretcher."

"Ready, One...two...THREE...lift."

Everything went well from there. The four men transferred Jerry to the helicopter via the rescue stretcher. This was one of those rare cases where the rescuer became the 'rescuee'.

In all the commotion, Linda briefly shifted her focus to Jerry's snafu. But she was soon begging for more answers from the Chief about her son J.P.

"What are we gonna' do now, Chief Hernandez?" questioned an almost delirious Linda. "What happens next?"

"Well, you know there's nothin' really more we can do tonight," responded the dispirited Chief as he slowly shook his head from side to side signaling no.

Linda began having a conniption fit in front of everyone. Carol seemed to be handling the situation with much more composure than Linda.

"Where's my son? Where's my son?" cried out an obviously distraught Linda, as she broke down into a full-fledged tear infused cry.

Finally, Carol put her arm around Linda in an effort to try to comfort her. She then started leading her back to her car, while Thomas and Sam stayed back to continue talking with the Chief.

"Do you have any moah ideas, Chief Hernandez?" asked a very concerned Sam.

"We all know that there's nothin' more we can do tonight," confirmed the Chief. "How 'bout we all go home for tonight and get some sleep? In the meantime, I'll try to come up with an alternate plan."

"Sounds good to us," replied Thomas, speaking for both Sam and him.

"How 'bout we meet back here in the morning at 6:00 am?" suggested the Chief.

"Perfect," answered Thomas. "We'll see you then. Goodnight Chief."

"Goodnight," reciprocated the Chief."

Just then, the whirring noise of the helicopter blades got progressively louder, as Darren began his flight to the hospital ER.

Chapter 6

Completely oblivious to what was going on above them, J.P. and Caleb continued on their sojourn in their effort to escape to freedom. The two boys had been crawling through the tunnels for quite some time. They had no idea which direction they were travelling. They didn't even know if they were travelling straight, up, or down. But one thing they knew for sure was that they must keep moving.

The two boys had made some significant progress thus far. The slow, deliberate movements they executed have realized some positive results. Even though they had no clue as to where they were, both boys somehow still maintained a real positive attitude.

"How you doin' back there Caleb?" asked J.P., as he looked back at Caleb.

"I'm makin' it," replied Caleb meekly.

"How's your leg doin'?" asked J.P., deeply concerned about Caleb's injured leg.

"The pain comes and goes," answered Caleb. "As long as we keep movin'... movin' takes my mind off of the pain."

The boys' journey had not been a pleasant one. But at least the tunnel surface that they had been crawling over had been somewhat smooth. That aspect had definitely contributed to their progress.

But that was all about to change real soon.

J.P. and Caleb didn't know it yet, but they were about to enter a stretch of tunnel composed of rough-cut rock. That stretch was bound to wreak havoc on the boys' hands.

J.P. shined his ever-weakening flashlight ahead in the tunnel. Sure enough, J.P. could readily see the jagged rock up ahead. He turned his head toward Caleb to give him the 'heads-up'.

"We've got some jagged rock up ahead Caleb," warned J.P. "Be extra careful with your hands."

"Gotcha," replied Caleb.

Sure enough, when the boys entered the jagged rock section, their hands began writhing in pain almost immediately. They would only put partial weight on them because of the searing pain that the punishing rocks were administering.

That jagged rock section of tunnel was slowing the boys' momentum. The rough tunnel surface was basically decreasing the boys' pace by about fifty percent.

The reason for that was because the boys had to keep repositioning their hands to relieve the pain. They both sometimes ended up being in weird pretzel like contortions. It was almost like playing the 1960s' game 'Twister', where you never know where your hand would end up next.

"I gotta' take a break," said J.P., while exhaling an extra deep sigh. "These rocks are killing me."

"Yeah," agreed Caleb. "I know what you mean."

The boys had travelled a mere fifteen feet. But the pain in their hands was forcing them to take a break.

"How much moah of this rock crap is thah?" asked Caleb.

J.P. shined his flashlight down the tunnel and did not see any end to the rock problem. Of course the beam from his flashlight, now in its weakened state, only extended out around five feet.

Not wanting to give Caleb the bad news, J.P.'s mind started racing like a Lotus sports car. Then, just like that, it came to him in an epiphany.

"I got it," said J.P. as if he were saying 'Eureka'. "Give me your Swiss Army Knife."

"Okay," complied Caleb, as he handed the knife over to J.P.

"What are you gonna' use it fah?"

"I'm gonna' cut off the bottom four inches of my jeans," declared J.P.

And just like he said, J.P. cut off four-inch strips from the legs of his jeans. Then he took one strip and wrapped it firmly around his left hand. He showed what he did to Caleb.

"These will act as cushions for our hands," revealed J.P. proudly. "Think of them as knee pads for your hands."

"Awesome idea," said Caleb, his voice suddenly filled with life.

After J.P. cut strips off of both his pant legs, he handed the knife back over to Caleb. Caleb then duplicated what J.P. had just done. Now they both had makeshift cushion pads for their hands. They were not the prettiest things to look at, but they sure would help.

"I sure am glad I brought my Swiss Ahmy Knife along," said a relieved Caleb.

"You're not the only one," agreed J.P. "Whatever you do, don't lose it. We might need it again."

"Don't worry I won't," replied Caleb, hoping to show J.P. that he was very responsible. "I'm gonna' guard it with my life."

Now that the two boys were outfitted with new newly cut denim pads, the two boys commenced their crawling with renewed enthusiasm.

The denim pads definitely helped to minimize the pain they were experiencing in their hands.

Now that the boys were in the rock-laden section of the tunnel, they wouldn't have the luxury of crawling on their sides or backs. The protruding rocks would cause significant damage to their sensitive ribs and hips. It's like trying to crawl over a bed of nails.

If you could find one silver lining in this travesty, it would actually be the lack of sunlight. With no sun beating down on them, their bodies remained much cooler. They wouldn't have to expend much energy just to keep cool. There would be much less sweating involved. That in turn provided them with more energy reserve, which they would later need.

"How are your hands and knees holdin' up Caleb?" asked J.P., concerned about the integral parts of the body that would transport Caleb.

"My hands still hurt like crazy," replied Caleb in a slightly pain streaked voice. "But these pads make my hands feel much bettah than befah."

"I know it hurts," agreed J.P. "But we have to keep pushing on. I don't know how much longer this flashlight will work. And once it goes out, well you know what that would be like."

The two boys kept plugging away. The speed of their distance travelled could be better measured in feet per hour, instead of the generally accepted miles per hour.

The boys also had no concept of what time it was. But they had been travelling for quite some time.

One thing the boys would be grateful for was the fact that their primal hunger and thirst drives had not yet reared their ugly heads. Both boys still seemed to possess relatively high energy levels. And they would need all the energy they can muster for this trip.

J.P.'s and Caleb's hands and knees were taking quite the beating. Even with the jerry-rigged pads, their hands were still performing functions that they were not designed to do.

Their feet were designed to support all their body weight because of the strong vertical bone support. However, now their wrists were bent back ninety degrees so as to put their palms down. That meant that their hands had to support half their body weight with little bone support, relying mostly on muscles and tendons.

To further the complication, they had to use even more muscle power to slowly put their weight on their hands. That of course would require the use of even more energy.

The one thing the two boys had going in their favor was a plentiful supply of adrenaline whisking through their veins. This was essentially what was keeping the boys going. As always, their brains allowed the adrenaline to supersede their tiredness.

"How's it look up ahead?" asked Caleb. "Do you see an end to these sharp rocks?"

J.P stopped, stretched his arm out, and tried to shine his weakening flashlight down the tunnel as far as he could. All he could really see was more jagged rock. But then again the beam on his flashlight only extended out around three feet.

“Looks like we might be nearing the end of the rock,” answered J.P., even though he really saw no end.

He just wanted to keep Caleb’s spirits buoyant.

The two boys kept limping along through that rough section of tunnel. So far they had gone relatively unscathed, discounting a few bruises here and there due to the meddlesome rocks.

Always wanting to know his progress, J.P. shined his flashlight down the tunnel as far as he could. He was not sure yet, but this time he thought there might be some relief up ahead. At the end of his flashlight beam, he was not seeing the reflection that he had earlier when the rocks were present. That was telling J.P. that a smoother travelling surface was just up ahead.

“I think we might be coming to another void in the tunnel,” exclaimed J.P. with some exuberance. “Looks like the end of those damn rocks.”

Sure enough, the stretch of the tunnel lined with rocks was finally coming to an end. All J.P. saw now was more regular, run-of-the-mill dirt.

“All I can say is awesome,” said Caleb, displaying some animation.

After a few minutes, the boys reached the hollowed out section of the tunnel. This void was slightly larger than the last one.

But they didn’t care. All that mattered to them was that they could now stand upright and do some necessary stretching of all their muscles.

“I nevah thought I’d be so happy just to stand up,” remarked a very surprised Caleb.

“Yeah, it sure is a good feeling at that,” concurred J.P.

Both boys spent a little time stretching all their muscles in preparation for the next leg of their journey. Limbering up their muscles was absolutely critical. This would ensure that neither boy endured any cramping, which would result in their ultimate demise.

While the boys were doing their stretching exercises, they noticed that this time there were three tunnels from which to choose. The one on the left had the same rock protruding surface same as the last one they travelled. They ruled that tunnel out immediately, mainly because they have had enough of that kind of punishment.

They also ruled out the right side tunnel because it was slightly smaller than the other two. Logic dictated to them that the center tunnel was the one for them to choose.

The boys continued doing their stretching for about five minutes. It didn't sound like a lot, but five minutes was more than enough time for them to loosen-up and re-charge their muscles.

Besides, they both knew that time was of the essence to them. That's because they knew all too well that the battery in J.P.'s smartphone was wearing down rapidly.

"Do you really think we'll evah get outta' heah?" postulated Caleb.

"Of course we will," said J.P. assertively in the hope of bolstering Caleb's survival concerns. "These tunnels have to lead somewhere and one of them is going to lead us out of here."

After the five minutes of stretching, the two boys sat down and took some deep breaths. They both put their makeshift hand cushions in their back pockets just in

case they might need them again. Now they were ready to embark on the next leg of their underground trek.

J.P. slapped his smartphone against the other palm of his hand facetiously thinking that he would shock more life into its battery. Of course his effort was futile. If anything, the battery may have even weakened some more. In any case, the boys couldn't afford to waste anymore time.

J.P. entered the tunnel aggressively showing some signs of intrepidity. He shined his flashlight as far down the tunnel as he could go. And it didn't go very far. The light beam now only extended out a little over two feet.

J.P. pondered in his mind what he could do to improve this increasingly deteriorating situation. What could he do to help this problem?

Then the answer came to J.P.

It wasn't a revelation or anything. No. In fact, it was rather quite simple. All J.P. was going to do from then on was to turn the flashlight on for two seconds and then turn it off for ten seconds. This would definitely extend the life of the battery.

When you think of it, they only needed the flashlight on for two seconds to see the area they would traverse in the next ten seconds. They were only going in one direction so that would be plenty of light for them.

This two seconds on, ten seconds off method would help prolong the life of the battery. Because once the battery was gone, the boys would be left in dire straits.

"I'll turn the flashlight off every once in a while," explained J.P. "this might keep the battery going a little longer."

"That is really sick," said an amazed Caleb.

The two boys continued on their odyssey using J.P.'s new modus operandi. In effect, they were crawling through the tunnel receiving light only seventeen percent of the time. But so far this new technique seemed to be working rather well.

"I can't believe we're makin' such good progress like this," Caleb shouted up to J.P.

"I can't either," replied J.P. "But we have to keep movin'."

Even with the little amount of light that the boys were travelling in, they were still making twice as much headway as they had when they were on the rocks, so to speak. J.P. had now become pretty adept at counting the seconds his flashlight alternates on and off in his head.

"How's your leg holding up, Caleb?" asked J.P., still troubled by Caleb's injury.

"It's not quite as bad as it was befah," responded Caleb. "I think it might be becoming numb."

"Better to have it numb than to be in pain," cited J.P., offering his own medical ideology.

The two boys continued moving forward in their adventurous freedom quest. Nothing had been able to stop them yet. But soon the going would start to get a little slower.

J.P. suddenly sensed a fluffy substance trying to wrap itself around him. That substance felt precisely like the consistency of cotton candy. It was sticky. It was gooey. It was clingy. It was like a net made entirely of cotton candy.

The more that J.P. moved, the tighter he got tangled up in that diabolical web. It must have been a web. But if

it was a web, there must be quite a big spider capable of building it lurking nearby.

But the immediate task at hand was to get J.P. out of that web as quickly as possible.

This was an extremely egregious situation. J.P. was virtually wrapped up like a sandwich in Saran Wrap. He was now completely incapacitated, as he now couldn't use his arms or legs.

Caleb knew that it would be up to him to free up J.P. from his web entanglement. And he had just the tool that would do it. His trusty Swiss Army Knife would come to the rescue again.

"Help, I'm trapped," yelled J.P. "I can't seem to get out of this thing."

Unfortunately there was even less light to work with. That's because the flashlight J.P. had in his hand was now pointing down, thanks to the web locking it in that position.

Caleb felt his way to the web. He felt the web material with his hands.

"This is definitely a spider web," revealed Caleb. "I can tell by the feel of it."

"Well hurry up and get me outta' here," demanded J.P. "Whatever made this web must be gigantic."

"This must be some kind of mutant spider on steroids," reckoned Caleb. Since Caleb was extremely proficient at using his Swiss Army Knife, he deftly unfolded the sharp knife he needed out of its total array of thirty-three tools.

He grabbed a section of web that was containing J.P. The web material was very thin but there was a lot of it.

Because Caleb couldn't cut the web material in its present form, he had to take a handful and twist it into a kind of rope. He used the same kind of motion they use to twist salt-water taffy.

First he tried pulling it off J.P. There was no way he could. It was super strong. This web material is the kind of material that NASA scientists would love to have.

But fortunately for him, Caleb was able to twist the web into rope form. Then he could easily cut it with his knife. He would then repeat this procedure three more times.

After Caleb cut loose the four sections of spider web, J.P. was then able to slide out of the web.

"Thanks Caleb," said a relieved J.P. "I thought I was a goner. I wonder what the heck made it?"

"It has to be a spidah," emphasized Caleb. "It just has to be."

What the two boys didn't know was that that spider was the dreaded Vesper Cave Spider.

This species of spider can grow upwards of three feet in diameter. It grapples its victims with its eight legs, tantamount to a Venus Flytrap clamping down on its prey. Then it injects a lethal dose of fast acting venom. Shortly after the venom takes effect, the Vesper Cave Spider than gorges itself on the prey's bodily fluids.

Somehow, this spider got on the endangered species list. There are only supposed to be two places in Texas where they are known to exist. This would make it three places.

Because they are endangered, very little had been published about the behavior of the Vesper Cave Spider. The one thing that had been documented was that it was

a scientific fact that the venom from a Vesper Cave Spider could indeed kill a man.

So far the two boys had not seen evidence of the spider, outside of the web it wove. But they knew that the spider would be lurking nearby.

These spiders didn't survive this long by being stupid. And they also have voracious appetites.

Caleb was able to fashion four ropes out of the spider web material and then cut them to size. That also provided a clear opening for them to pass through the web. The two boys took advantage of the opportunity and both crawled through the opening and continued on their journey.

The boys' euphoria that came with their success with handling the spider web would be short lived.

J.P.'s flashlight was starting to flicker. It was the first sign that the battery was nearing failure. Now J.P. knew that they only had minutes left instead of hours.

"Am I stupid or what?" Caleb asked rhetorically.

"What do you mean?" J.P. answered with his own question.

"I know I broke my smartphone," said Caleb. "But hey, the battery should still be okay."

"Sick, sick, sick," said a very pleased J.P. "Excellent idea. Why didn't I think of it?"

Sure enough, that's what they did. Caleb, operating in almost complete darkness, took out his Swiss Army Knife.

He unfolded the screwdriver tool and took off the battery cover from his broken smartphone. He then took its fresh battery out and transferred it to J.P.'s smartphone.

Voilà.

J.P.'s smartphone flashlight was working as good as new. The light beam now extended out about fifteen feet, which would be plenty to fulfill their needs.

The two boys continued crawling through the tunnel with the renewed vigor they had gotten from the much brighter flashlight.

A person's body always functions better with more light. Plus, it's always better to see where you are going.

Even though they were showing some signs of fatigue, things had gotten much better for the two boys.

First of all, the crawling surface was much smoother than it was, and now they had more than enough lighting to see the way.

"I'm feelin' pretty good about the progress were makin' now." said a very please J.P., sensing that the travelling conditions had improved immensely.

"It's about time things finally got bettah," conceded Caleb.

But as had been the case throughout the boys' pilgrimage, as soon as things seemed to get better, something else went wrong. They were again beginning to sense evilness permeating through the air.

The two boys still kept plugging away. They were actually making more progress now than during any other segment of their trek. This progress was making them feel better about themselves.

"How's the leg Caleb?" asked J.P.

"I think it might be bleeding again," surmised Caleb. "I feel some warmth down thah. Must be blood."

Just as Caleb had suspected, his leg wound was starting to ooze blood again. It was not nearly as bad as it was earlier, but it still was cause for some concern.

Both boys were continuously pulling off the clingy spider web material from their bodies. It was just like getting sprayed with three cans of Silly String. In no time you are completely wrapped up in it and it takes forever to get it off of you.

That evilness aura was building its presence again around the boys. It bore a striking resemblance to that ominous feeling they had earlier with the Devil Worm.

J.P. deduced in the back of his mind that if there were a spider, it would have had to be ahead of them. That's because they had not yet crossed paths with the spider.

"Keep looking ahead for any signs of a spider," advised J.P. as he became extra vigilant.

"Don't worry, I'm watching like a hawk," replied a much more alert Caleb.

"Don't forget to listen up too," said J.P. giving Caleb another 'heads-up'.

The two boys remained on a nice steady crawl through the tunnel. All five of their senses were now honed razor sharp. Their alertness level had now been ramped up to the highest it has ever been.

Then suddenly a muffled snap was heard. It was the same sound a snare makes when trapping animals in the woods.

J.P. saw nothing up ahead with the flashlight. That meant it had to be coming from Caleb.

J.P. swung the flashlight behind him and he couldn't believe what he saw. It really was the Vesper Cave Spider and it has Caleb clenched within its eight legs, getting him prepared for dinner.

The shock from the spider had temporarily muted Caleb. He's too stunned to even scream.

J.P. was on his 'A' game as he shined his flashlight directly into the spider's eyes. He knew that these creatures were accustomed to living in sheer darkness. So shining a very bright light into its eyes should make it retreat.

That's precisely what happened. After J.P. virtually blinded the spider with his flashlight, the spider released his leg grasp allowing Caleb to escape.

"Stab it with your knife Caleb," shouted J.P. "Put some hurt on it."

Caleb acting almost instinctively nimbly unfolded the large knife tool from his Swiss Army Knife in less than a second. He then proceeded to stab the spider twice in its body. It was enough for the spider to take several retreating steps backward away from Caleb.

"Are you okay?" asked J.P. "Did it hurt you at all?"

"I'm still in a little bit of shock," admitted Caleb. "I didn't expect that at all. But I'm pretty sure it didn't hurt me."

"Wow," said an absolutely amazed J.P. "I thought for sure that it was curtains for you. I couldn't even see you inside its legs. That's how bad it looked."

"I thought I was in a coffin," said a still reeling Caleb.

Both boys tried to catch their breaths while wondering how this kind of chaos could even happen. The next question they were asking themselves was whether or not the spider would return. It retreated back far behind them, but that didn't preclude it from returning with a vengeance.

J.P. shined his flashlight down both ends of the tunnel checking to see if the spider was gone. As far as he could see, there didn't appear to be any evidence of the spider in either direction.

“Let’s get movin’ Caleb,” ordered J.P., as he knew he couldn’t waste any more time. “If we keep movin’, we should be able to stay in front of it.”

“Okay, let’s roll.” affirmed Caleb.

So the two boys persisted in their endeavor to crawl to their freedom.

Because of how long they had been at it, both boys were actually getting rather proficient at traversing through the tunnel. They could now recognize how and when to reposition their bodies to get the optimal use of their muscles and tendons.

It almost seemed that the boys’ wherewithal was bolstered every time they run into one of those setbacks.

They still were not showing signs of any kind of tiredness. Their hunger and thirst drives had yet to kick-in. And their eyes had become much more acclimated to the scarcity of light.

“Do you think anyone is looking fah us up top?” asked Caleb rhetorically knowing darn well that the whole town would be frantically looking for them.

“Yeah, they’re probably all looking for us now,” concluded J.P. “But we’ll beat them to the punch. We’ll find our way out of here ourselves,” added J.P. displaying some of his mettle.

“I’ve got faith in you J.P.,” said Caleb, realizing that before now it was really ‘blind faith’.

What was strengthening their tenacity and fortitude was thinking of their families and friends. Memories of fun times with them were panoramic through their minds.

Since their physical movements were getting perfunctory, they were focusing all of their thoughts on their loved ones. They were now almost in a ‘daydream’ state of mind.

J.P. was now shining his flashlight behind him toward Caleb more frequently, since that's where the spider was seen last. It had now been about fifteen minutes with no recurrence of the spider.

The two boys were starting to become complacent. Things were moving along reasonably well.

But just then, J.P. thinks he heard a noise and shined his flashlight back toward Caleb. He shined it in that direction for about ten seconds but didn't see a thing.

Then the unthinkable happened.

Suddenly, the spider was able to get in front of J.P. and snap wrap its legs around him in the same configuration as it did with Caleb. The reason the spider was able to get in front of J.P. had to be because it was familiar with the labyrinth of tunnels.

The spider ambushed J.P. with such impact that it knocked the flashlight out of his hands. Grappled within the spider's legs, J.P. tried with all his might to spread apart just two of its legs in an attempt to escape. They didn't even budge. It was like trying to spread apart cell bars at San Quentin Prison. They were that strong.

As soon as Caleb saw the flashlight on the floor he retrieved it. He did exactly what J.P. had done earlier when the situation was reversed.

He guided the flashlight beam directly into one of the spider's eyes. This time the light beam stunned it, but the spider did not release its grasp on J.P. He still remained trapped inside the spider's clutches.

"Get the knife and try to stab it in the eye," screeched

J.P. tried his hardest not to sound too panicky.

“Okay,” said Caleb trying to muster up some courage. “I’ll give it a try.”

“Try to keep the light in its eye,” suggested J.P. “It will blind it temporarily so you can stab it in the eye.”

That’s exactly what Caleb did. He focused the flashlight beam directly in one of the spider’s eyes. The spider started rotating its head violently trying to escape the light. It made for a difficult target for Caleb to hit.

It’s always hard to hit a moving target. But this one was especially difficult. That’s because Caleb had to hold the flashlight in one hand, while trying to stab the spider with the other hand.

Caleb was waving both arms in the air trying to stay in sync with the spider’s head movements. At times he resembled the conductor of the Philadelphia Philharmonic. You almost had to be ambidextrous to accomplish this task.

Caleb lunged toward the spider and thrust it in the head with his knife just a couple of inches from its eye.

“Try it again,” said J.P. “You almost got the eye.”

This time Caleb garnered all the courage he could and leaped toward the spider. He then aggressively stabbed it multiple times using the shotgun approach. Odds were that with the sheer number of stabs Caleb inflicted on the spider, one was bound to hit an eye.

And that was exactly what happened.

In fact, Caleb managed to stab both of the eyes of the spider. Blood like fluid was spurting everywhere. The stabbing rendered the spider absolutely defenseless, as it couldn’t see at all anymore.

The spider slowly retreated back to where it came from, leaving a trail of a blood like substance. There was

no way that that spider would be a threat to the boys anymore.

“Wow,” exclaimed J.P. “Did that really happen?”

“It sure did,” confirmed Caleb. “We must be the luckiest guys alive.”

Alive. That’s the operative word. Both boys had just survived some horrifying ordeals with creatures they had never before seen. They battled them. They beat them. And because of their tenacity they were still alive.

J.P. and Caleb were breathing a lot easier now.

Again, they both came out of this nightmare relatively unharmed. As a matter of fact, they were feeling pretty good about themselves. Between the two of them, they were able to defeat two menacing beasts with only a flashlight and a Swiss Army Knife.

“Ya’ want to heah something funny?” asked Caleb.

“What’s that?” inquired J.P.

“This whole thing we’re goin’ through,” explained Caleb, “reminds me of that video game we played at your place last week.”

“Ya’ know,” said J.P. “It kinda does me too. And you know what else? We won then and we’re winning now.”

The two boys weren’t exactly on cloud nine but their spirits had been lifted. They got a sudden burst of elation due to their recent success battling those unexpected adversaries.

But they don’t have time crack open the champagne and celebrate. They still had to keep moving ahead. Even the new flashlight battery would only last so long.

J.P. continued leading the way in their backbreaking excursion through the tunnel. It was getting monotonous. It was getting tedious. And it was getting really tiresome.

There was nothing there to interest the boys while they were travelling. It was the same as driving across the state of Montana. You don't see hills, trees, or houses. You don't even see any billboards.

But a break in the tedium was about to occur.

J.P. thought he might have seen a speck of light in his peripheral vision while shining the flashlight on Caleb. He tried it once again having the same exact result.

This time J.P. completely shut off his flashlight. He looked ahead down the tunnel. He was a lot more confident now that the light was originating from somewhere up ahead.

"Caleb," shouted J.P. "I see light up ahead."

"You're jokin'," said a doubting Caleb.

"No I'm not," assured J.P. "I'm movin' up for a closer look."

J.P.'s mind had been playing crazy tricks on him. So he had to ascertain if this was, indeed, a light source up ahead or just a tunnel mirage.

He rubbed his eyes a couple of times to get rid of any distortion in his focus. The light was still there. It must be real.

As the two boys approached, the light was getting brighter and brighter. Their hopes had also gotten brighter. This could be their way out to freedom.

The boys were now only ten feet from the light. They still didn't hear anything, but they sure could see the light. Now the boys were hurrying as fast as they could to see what the light was all about.

They were just a few feet away from seeing the source of the light. They finally got there and they just couldn't believe what they were observing. Both boys

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stared out at the light in sheer bewilderment and tried to process what they saw.



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