

Search and rescue on the Grand Canyon's North Rim

Grand Canyon Rescue: A Tuli Black Wolf Adventure

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## **Chapter 1: I'm Not Really Lost**

"Oh, no," cried Mr. Wabash, the biggest of the three men. "We're gonna stay out here until we die."

Mr. Wabash has tattoos on his hairy neck, which probably means he put tattoos on his arms. Both ears are pierced. His hair is tied back in a ponytail, but it doesn't look like he brushed it first. How come people think if they pull their hair back they don't have to brush it? Even that cowboy hat can't cover up his messy hair.

"I never thought the trip would end up like this," Mr. Johnston said. He was much quieter, smaller and less hairy than his friend Mr. Wabash. He had tears in his eyes and I thought he might cry, too.

Jody Johnston, whose father is also named Jody, is around 15. Yesterday he fell and sliced his lip, leaving blood all over his shirt. Now his mouth is swollen and he hurts. He doesn't say much, mainly because his lip is too puffy.

"L-l-look, if any of you get out of here t-t-tell my wife and kids I love them," said Mr. Martin in his quiet, stuttering voice that sounds like he's missing some vocal cords. He's even bigger than Mr. Wabash. His belly is large and his heavy moustache hangs down past the corners of his mouth. It looks like one of those scrub brushes Mom uses to clean the floor. He still looks pretty cool though, because he wears the same sunglasses the Terminator wore in his first movie.

I hardly ever see men cry. My little brother is five and he cries a lot. But adults are different. Mom tells me that men are afraid to let the tears flow. They act like people will think they're babies if they get caught crying.

All three men and young Jody are dressed in camouflage clothes and boots. Each one has a rifle, hunting knife on their belt

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and a full pack. If they're so well-outfitted, how come they're lost in the middle of the North Rim of the Grand Canyon?

Mom can answer the question about why people get lost better than anyone. She teaches third grade for a living. But what she's really good at is finding lost people. She volunteers for the McAlester Search and Rescue Dog Association (SRDA) that is part of the National Association for Search and Rescue. The group is small, with just Mom, four other handlers and their twelve dogs. Four of the dogs are puppies.

Because Mom is good at what she does she's asked to travel across the country to assist in rescues. Usually she has to leave fast after a phone call. That's why her search backpacks are in the mud room ready for her to grab as she runs out the door to meet the helicopter or airplane.

My mom knows about the minds of lost people and says that appearances aren't everything.

"Just because you have the right equipment doesn't mean you know what to do with it," Mom says. "Hunters and hikers with big packs crammed with food, clothes, even maps and compass get lost every season in almost every state in the country. The number of people who have no pack and get lost is even higher."

Then she'd look at me and my brother. "And don't you ever even think about getting lost. You should know better. *"Hash imponna,"* she says in Choctaw, which means "you are smart."

Mom is always telling me and my brother Pete about how to stay alive if we lose our way outdoors. We talk about survival a lot, especially on week-ends when we take long hikes. Mom makes us name plants and animals and then she gives lessons in orienteering. That's using a map and compass to find your way from one place to another.

Even if I have a map and compass Mom still tells me, "Stay put when you first think you're lost, honey. The more you wander around the harder it is for trackers to find you."

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I thought that everyone knew that, although it's pretty clear that the hunters I'm stuck with never took a survival course.

No one in my family has ever been lost. My dad isn't a tracker, but he always knows where he is. He's a vet who specializes in big animals, like horses and cows. The fun part is that he gets to work for zoos since he knows a lot about elephant, tiger and bear digestive systems.

The knowledge Dad learned for his job is not real helpful if he's out in the wilderness, but he's useful to take along on camping trips and hikes because he can identify the animal bones we find. Between what Dad and Mom teach me, I know a lot about animals, their tracks and what their bones look like.

Our house in Oklahoma is in the woods by a stream and lots of wildlife. I know to tell people where I'm going before hiking through the fields and woods around us. I've taken CPR, first aid classes and am an advanced swimmer. I can identify trees, insects, plants and know what is poisonous. I like getting ready for having problems in the wilderness. My packs are filled with gear to keep me warm and dry. I know how to track. Not as good as Mom, but I can follow deer until I find them.

She's told me that I read a map and compass slower than her, but just as accurately. I know where the constellations sit in the night sky as they wander through the seasons. I may be prepared for an outdoor problem, but I never thought I'd have to use that information to keep myself or anyone else alive.

"How long can we live without food?" Mr. Wabash asked in-between hiccups. The kind of hiccups you get after a good, hard cry.

I think crying is good for you and I do it lot. Of course, I'm a girl and I'm only 14.

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