

A moment that changed me: I had a heart attack at 37 – so I went to live in a cave

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

wilderness: an area of land that has not been farmed or had anything built on it. It is usually challenging to live on due to its natural conditions.

1 Warmer

a. Read the definitions and discuss the questions below.

1. Have you ever slept in the wilderness? Where?
2. Do you know any examples of people who went to live in the wilderness?

2 Key words

a. Complete the definitions below using these key words from the text. Then, use the words in the example sentences under each definition.

guide

heal

heart attack

stream

therapy

1. A _____ is a serious and painful medical condition in which the heart does not get enough blood. It can often lead to death.
They called an ambulance when it looked like he was having a _____.
2. A _____ is someone who shows you a place or shows you how to get somewhere.
The tour _____ told us all about the important buildings in the town and their history.
3. _____ is a treatment to help someone get better or stronger after being ill.
Peter is going to physical _____ to help him walk again.
4. To _____ is to become well again.
I cut my finger while cooking last week, but look! It _____ quickly.
5. A _____ is water that flows naturally along a path cut in rock or ground.
I love to walk down to the _____, take my shoes off, and put my feet in the water.

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cave

hunt

root

skill

trap

6. A _____ is a large hole in the side of a mountain or hill or underground.
Many ancient humans lived in _____.
7. To _____ is to try to catch and kill an animal for food.
The park has many animals, but it is a protected area. You cannot _____ here.
8. A _____ is the part of a plant that grows down into the earth to get water.
Most plants grow _____ before they grow leaves and flowers.
9. A _____ is a manufactured thing or hole that is used to catch animals and prevent them from escaping.
This mouse _____ is incredible. You put food inside, and it catches the mouse without hurting it.
10. A _____ is an ability to do something well, mainly because you have practised it.
I don't have very good fire-making _____; I will have to practice more before I can go camping.

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Donny Dust

25 October, 2023

- 1 Two days before I had a heart attack in February 2017, I got back to Colorado from Alaska. I was 37 and active. I was in the Marine Corps before I became a wilderness guide. I was training for a 245km race through the Peruvian jungle. When I got to the hospital, I still didn't believe I was having a heart attack.
- 2 Three days later, I could almost not walk. I was put into a therapy group with 85-year-olds. But I believed I needed something else to heal me. So, I went to live in a cave, near where I could hunt animals and drink from streams.
- 3 I spent six months between an everyday life and living in the Colorado wild. My wife and I were separating, but I didn't want to be away from our two sons for too long.
- 4 There were different caves – some were near water or better fishing, hunting, or plants to eat. The "main cave" had a comfortable grass and leaves bed. I also kept an old soup can to boil water in. But I moved around. I kept animal skins in one cave, and if I wanted a treat, I put dried mangoes in another – a two-day walk away.
- 5 I didn't take much. I always had a notebook with me, a photo of my sons, and something to write with.
- 6 I ate primarily plants, berries, and roots. I caught fish, squirrels, and rabbits. I missed my sons, but I knew that this was my time to heal and think about my life. I stayed busy making tools, building traps and baskets, and collecting firewood.
- 7 One night, when I woke up, a young black bear was at my feet, licking my toes. I screamed, and the bear ran away.
- 8 I was becoming part of life in the wild, understanding the sounds and the smells. The heart attack changed my life. Knowing that eventually, one day, you will die, you need to live the life that you want.
- 9 Now, I live between the worlds. I rent a place, drive a truck, and have a TV. After my heart attack, people told me to start a YouTube channel sharing my skills. Now, I've written books and done reality shows.
- 10 Many of us accept life is just how it is, but some people want something different. Ancient humans focused on family, community, and the natural world; I think we can learn much from that.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article. Are the statements true or false?

1. Before his heart attack, the author did not exercise much.
2. He knew how to live in the wilderness before his heart attack.
3. He was in a therapy group with other men his age.
4. The main cave had a bed in it.
5. He always carried a book to read.
6. He ate primarily plants, berries, roots, and sometimes fish, squirrels, and rabbits.
7. He spent most of his time making tools and traps and picking firewood.
8. He became friends with a black bear.
9. He now rents a place, drives a truck, has a TV, and shares his skills on YouTube.
10. He believes we can learn a lot from how humans lived in the past.

4 Key language

a. Match the verbs and nouns to make word pairs from the article.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. have | a. in a cave / the life you want |
| 2. train for | b. firewood |
| 3. live | c. fish/squirrels/rabbits |
| 4. drink from | d. a heart attack |
| 5. boil | e. a race |
| 6. hunt/catch | f. your skills |
| 7. build | g. streams |
| 8. collect | h. traps |
| 9. share | i. water |

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b. Fill in the gaps with word pairs from the previous activity. Then, discuss the questions.

1. Do you like running? Have you ever _____ for a _____?
2. Would you _____ in a _____ without a bathroom?
3. Is it safe to _____ from _____ where you live?

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Could you live alone in the wilderness?
- Would you be OK with eating only berries, roots, and squirrels?
- What would you miss most from your everyday life?
- What is the most important thing we can learn from the wilderness?

6 In your own words

a. Write about an experience you had in nature.

1. Explain why you were there.
2. Describe the nature around you.
3. Say what you learned from that experience.