

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

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

1. Have you ever camped out in the wilderness? Where?
2. Why do you think some people retreat into the wilderness after a trauma or life-changing event?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

amenities

cache

cardiac

embrace

expire

forage

hide

outlier

reawakening

reflect

rehab

stent

tuber

wilderness

1. _____ is an area of land that has not been farmed or had anything built on it.
2. A _____ is a long, thin object that is put in the body inside a tube so that body fluids can easily flow through it.
3. _____ means *of the heart or heart disease*.
4. _____ is the process of helping someone return to their normal life after having been injured or ill.
5. _____ are things thought to be necessary to live comfortably, like hot water.
6. To _____ is to move from place to place searching for things to eat or use.
7. A _____ is the hidden place where you store things.
8. A _____ is the thick skin of an animal that you can use to make leather.
9. A _____ is an underground plant stem or root from which new plants can grow, like a potato.
10. To _____ is to think carefully about something.
11. A _____ is the process of noticing, remembering, or feeling a wish, emotion, or interest again.

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12. To _____ is to die.
13. To _____ something is to accept it with interest and enthusiasm.
14. An _____ is a person who is very different from and doesn't fit the pattern of other people.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. _____ do things differently from everyone else and that can make the interesting characters.
2. Following her accident and surgery, a physical therapist, a nurse, and a counsellor helped Tamara with her _____.
3. Radishes and turnips are among the easiest _____ to grow for first-time gardeners.
4. *Into the Wild* is a book and film about Christopher McCandless, who survived for approximately 113 days in the Alaskan wilderness by _____ for edible roots and berries and hunting.
5. Two residents were placed under arrest after a _____ of stolen goods was found in their garage.
6. From an infinity pool to a co-working space, the new luxury block of flats is adding exclusive _____ to attract tenants.
7. I know you are facing feelings of insecurity, but I personally think you should _____ this opportunity and accept the job offer.
8. _____ can be used to reduce symptoms in patients with obstructive artery disease.
9. The _____ Act states: "A _____, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognised as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

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10. One spokesperson from the community said that the documentary triggered a _____ of cultural values.
11. In this episode, we interview three survivors who _____ on their experiences while lost at sea.
12. As I jogged past the bridge, I noticed a new line graffitied on the concrete: "Aspire to inspire before we _____."
13. Sudden _____ arrest is the sudden loss of heart activity.
14. The anthropologist made her own Palaeolithic-style canoe from animal _____ and went on a journey to recreate how people travelled thousands of years ago.

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I wanted to heal and thought the Colorado wilderness was the best place to do it. So I began six months of hunting and foraging, with a pile of leaves for a bed

Donny Dust

25 October, 2023

- 1 Two days before I had a heart attack in February 2017, I had just got back from Alaska, where I'd been leading an expedition. At home in Colorado, I thought the chest pains were to do with the change in altitude. I was 37 and active. I'd been in the Marine Corps until 2011, then I became a wilderness and survival skills guide. I was training for a 245km ultramarathon through the Peruvian jungle. Even when I got to hospital, I struggled to believe I was having a heart attack, but I was rushed into an operating room and a stent was fitted.
- 2 Three days later, I could barely walk and was put into cardiac rehab with a group of 85-year-olds. But I believed I needed something else to heal me. As an outdoors guy who could live off the land, I knew that was where I needed to be. And so, after several rehab sessions, I thought, "I'm out of here!" and went to live in a cave, near where I could hunt animals and drink from streams.
- 3 I spent around six months alternating between a conventional life and living in the Colorado wilderness. My wife and I were separating, but I didn't want to be away from our two sons for too long, so I would come back often. The longest stretch I was away was just under two months.
- 4 I had a series of caves and each had different amenities – some were next to springs, or near better fishing, hunting and foraging. The "main cave" had a bed in it – by which I mean a big pile of grass and leaves, which was comfortable. It had a bit of a skylight, so the smoke from my fire could rise through it and I could see the stars. I would jam a stick between the cave walls and dry clothes on it, and would keep an old soup tin to boil water in. That was the cave that had the most resources, but I would move from cave to cave. I'd cache animal hides in one, and if I wanted to treat myself to something special, I'd put a jar of dried mangoes in another – I'd have a two-day walk to go and get it.
- 5 I didn't take much. I always had a notebook with me with a photo of my sons, and something to write with. I'd take a steel bottle back out to the caves, which made it a bit easier to boil water.
- 6 Foraged food formed most of my diet – plants, berries, tubers, roots. I caught fish, squirrels and rabbits. You learn to really appreciate food: "Yes, I've got a fish and five berries! Today is awesome." I missed my sons, but I also knew that this was my time to really heal and reflect, and there was always something to do. I would make stone tools, build traps, baskets and clay pots, tan hides – they all gave me so much value. And you're always collecting firewood.
- 7 One night in my main cave, the fire had gone out when I started feeling a warm, wet sensation on my foot. When I woke up, I could see there was a juvenile black bear at my feet, licking my toes. I let out a scream, and the bear took off. I lit a big fire, and sat up the whole night waiting for him to return.
- 8 I was becoming part of the pattern of life that existed in the wild, understanding the sounds and the smells. You can choose to fight it, or to try to control it, but when you accept it, you reach a deeper understanding of who you are and what you're doing out there. The heart attack changed my life because it was a reawakening. Knowing that eventually one day you will expire, you need to live the life that you want, find the value.
- 9 Now I live between the worlds. I rent a place, drive a truck and have a TV. When I have my sons, we like to watch documentaries, but they also have their own interests. For all the time I still spend in the wilderness, social media has actually become a big part of my life. Before my heart attack, I was never on it, but, afterwards, people encouraged me to start a YouTube channel sharing my skills. Now I've written books, done reality shows and consulted for movies. I've embraced this element of modern life, and hope to fuel people's curiosity about the natural world.

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10 Many of us accept life is just the way it is, but there are some outliers who want something different. I don't judge anybody for the choices they make, but I think some people get influenced to believe in things that don't matter. My passion is doing less with more, in the simplest way possible. Ancient humans focused on family, community and the natural world, and I think we can learn so much from that.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and answer the questions with as much detail as possible.

1. What was the author's level of fitness before the heart attack?
2. What made him qualified to live outdoors?
3. Who were his peers in rehab?
4. What amenities did the caves have?
5. What did he take with him?
6. What made up his diet?
7. How did he keep busy?
8. What scary experience did he have?
9. What helped him reach a deeper self-understanding?
10. What is his current relationship to modern life?
11. What does he think we can learn from ancient humans?

4 Key language

a. Find verbs from the text to form collocations from the article. An approximate antonym has been provided for each verb.

1. (*follow*) _____ an expedition
2. (*taken slowly*) _____ into an operating room
3. (*remove*) _____ a stent
4. (*released*) _____ from cardiac rehab
5. (*take for granted*) _____ food
6. (*miss*) _____ a deeper understanding
7. (*reject*) _____ elements of modern life
8. (*deplete*) _____ people's curiosity

b. Write five personalised questions using the collocations above. Ask and answer your questions with a partner.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Would you like to undergo wilderness survival training? Why (not)?
- How would you fare on Dust's diet?
- Which amenity from your current lifestyle would you miss the most?
- What is the most important thing we can learn from the wilderness?
- Some people die when they go unprepared into the wilderness. Should unskilled people be allowed to try?

6 In your own words

a. Write about an experience in which you found comfort in nature.

1. Explain the situation that led to that moment.
2. Describe the natural setting you found yourself in.
3. Say what you learned or gained from that experience.