

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

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

#### 2 Key words

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

amenities      cardiac      conventional      embrace      foraging      fuel  
hide      juvenile      passion      rehab      wilderness

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is an area of land that has yet to be farmed or have anything built on it.  
*You need some basic knowledge and skills to survive in the \_\_\_\_\_.*
2. \_\_\_\_\_ means *related to the heart or heart disease*.  
*The \_\_\_\_\_ diet helps to improve heart health and includes primarily vegetables, whole grains, and fish.*
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is the process of helping someone return to everyday life after having been injured or ill.  
*After knee surgery, you can expect three to six weeks of \_\_\_\_\_ before returning to your normal activities.*
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is ordinary or traditional.  
*I don't wear bright colours. I would describe my style as quite classic and \_\_\_\_\_.*
5. \_\_\_\_\_ are things thought to be necessary to live comfortably, like hot water.  
*The charity aims to provide basic \_\_\_\_\_ like clean running water in communities with low resources.*
6. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to move from place to place, searching for things to eat or use.  
*In the autumn, bears \_\_\_\_\_ for fruit and berries for up to fourteen hours a day.*

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the thick skin of an animal that you can use to make leather.  
*Moccasins are shoes that are made from animal \_\_\_\_\_.*
8. \_\_\_\_\_ means *related to young people who are not yet adults*.  
*He is funny, but I find his \_\_\_\_\_ behaviour inappropriate. He should learn to act his age.*
9. To \_\_\_\_\_ something is to accept it with interest and enthusiasm.  
*We moved here three years ago and have since \_\_\_\_\_ rural life. We even grow our own food now!*
10. To \_\_\_\_\_ is to keep people's ideas or feelings active or make them stronger.  
*Her parents were always overprotective, which only \_\_\_\_\_ her desire to explore the world.*
11. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something you enjoy and are very interested in.  
*Their two main \_\_\_\_\_ are reading and the outdoors.*

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

**Donny Dust**

**25 October, 2023**

- 1 Two days before I had a heart attack in February 2017, I'd been leading an expedition in Alaska. At home in Colorado, I thought the altitude change was causing my chest pains. I was 37 and active. I'd been in the Marine Corps before I became a wilderness and survival skills guide. I was training for a 245km ultramarathon through the Peruvian jungle. Even when I was rushed into an operating room, I struggled to believe I was having a heart attack.
- 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. I was an outdoors guy and knew where I needed to be. 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. My longest time away was just under two months.
- 4 I had a series of caves, each with different amenities – some were near springs, or better fishing, hunting and foraging. The "main cave" had a comfortable pile of grass and leaves for a bed. The smoke from my fire could rise through its skylight, and I could see the stars. I would fix a stick between the cave walls, dry clothes on it, and keep an old soup tin to boil water in. I'd store animal hides in one cave, and if I wanted to treat myself, 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, a photo of my sons and something to write with.
- 6 Foraged food formed most of my diet – plants, berries, and roots. I caught fish, squirrels, and rabbits. You learn to really appreciate food: "Yes, I've got a fish and five berries!" I missed my sons but knew this was my time to heal and reflect. I would stay busy making stone tools, building traps, baskets and clay pots, tan hides, and 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 saw a juvenile black bear at my feet, licking my toes. I screamed, and the bear ran away. I lit a big fire and sat up all night waiting for him to return.
- 8 I was becoming part of the pattern of life in the wild, understanding the sounds and the smells. You can choose to fight or try to control it, but when you accept it, you reach a deeper understanding of who you are. The heart attack changed my life because it was a reawakening. Knowing that eventually, one day, you will die, you need to live the life that you want and find value.
- 9 Now, I live between the worlds. I rent a place, drive a truck and have a TV. For all the time I still spend in the wilderness, social media has become a big part of my life. After the attack, people encouraged me to start a YouTube channel sharing my skills. I've written books, done reality shows and consulted for movies. I've embraced this element of modern life, hoping to fuel people's curiosity about the natural world.
- 10 Many of us accept that life is just how it is, but some people want something different. 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; we can learn much from that.

© Guardian News and Media 2023  
First published in *The Guardian*, 25/10/2023

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Fix any that are false.

1. The author did not have a particularly active lifestyle before his heart attack.
2. He could live off the land because he was trained as a wilderness and survival skills guide.
3. He was in a rehab group with other men his age.
4. The main cave had a mattress in it.
5. He always carried a book to read to help kill time.
6. He ate primarily plants, berries, roots, and sometimes fish, squirrels, and rabbits.
7. He would spend most of his time making stone tools, building traps, baskets and clay pots, tanning hides, and collecting firewood.
8. He became friends with a black bear, his only companion.
9. He now rents a place, drives a truck, has a TV, and shares his skills on YouTube.
10. He believes we can learn much from ancient humans' lives.

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the nouns to form compound nouns from the article.

attack   channel   guide   light   pots   rehab   room   tools   wilderness

1. heart \_\_\_\_\_
2. survival skills \_\_\_\_\_
3. operating \_\_\_\_\_
4. cardiac \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ session
5. Colorado \_\_\_\_\_
6. stone \_\_\_\_\_
7. clay \_\_\_\_\_
8. YouTube \_\_\_\_\_
9. sky \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Level 2: Intermediate

b. Complete the questions with compound nouns from the previous activity. Then, discuss the questions.

1. What lifestyle decisions can help you prevent a \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Have you ever been inside an \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Does your house have a \_\_\_\_\_?
4. Have you subscribed or visited to any outdoors \_\_\_\_\_?
5. What primitive artefacts came first: \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Would you rather go to Alaska or the Colorado \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Would you go into the wilderness alone without a \_\_\_\_\_?

### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Do you think you could survive alone in the wilderness or go on Dust's diet? What would be the most difficult thing for you to give up?
- What is the most important thing we can learn from the wilderness?
- Some people die when they go unprepared into the wilderness. Should people who don't have survival skills 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.