

# WILDERNESS SURVIVAL FOR ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

by Kyt Lyn Walken

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*"The most effective way to do it is.. to do it"* Amelia Earhart

## INTRODUCTION

Getting outside does represent a remarkable reward, especially for those hunker-down inside four walls for the most part of the week, maybe doing a job they absolutely hate. Don't take me wrong: having a job should be considered a luck today, *but, hey*: who didn't once a day look at the window, contemplating the trees or the clouds, dreaming of being in the backwoods instead of stuck at a desk?

This is especially true considering the forced quarantine caused by the spreading of the COVID-19. Personally speaking, I dreamed to be outside quite 40000 times a day. And when it happened, even if strictly wearing the mask, I looked at the outdoors like I found myself being there for the very first time.

Adrenaline and enthusiasm are very pretty common feelings when it comes to be in the great outdoors, especially after a long period of reclusion.

Feeling again the fresh air gives special thrills, I reckon it. You immediately feel full of energies, getting the impression you can do anything, anywhere.

But you simply *can't*.

Mishaps and hazards can be right behind the corner, especially for those who truly recognised to be *absolute beginners* in the outdoors.

Looking at intriguing pictures on Pinterest which depict isolated places where to camp and get an unforgettable experience offgrid did lead some people in taking the decision of living the dream.

Watching thousands of videos on YouTube might grow in some hearts the compulsory needing of doing the same things (perhaps *to try* to do) like starting a fire with essential tools, improvising a natural shelter as well as throwing together something to eat with essential notions on edible plants or hunting.

But it simply *cannot* happen that way.

You cannot watch experienced people applying skills they practiced for years, even decades, and then just try to replicate them when it comes the chance to do it.

Even worse, you cannot grow in yourself the belief that you can survive in any emergency situation.

## OVER – LIVE

I am sure all the readers are familiar with the concept of Survival, although in recent times, thanks to the massive flourishing of TV programs and also throughout the Media's clickbaiting titles and true stories, has acquired a renovated attention.

The word Survival comes from Latin "*vivere*" (to live). It consists of *sur-* (over) and *-live* and it means "*a natural process resulting in the evolution of organisms best adapted to the environment*" (Cambridge Dictionary).

In few words, survival can be explained as to keep existing despite hardship or after others die. Charles Darwin's term survival of the fittest: "*only the best equipped live will reproduce and survive.*"

*To over-live* entails a long list of actions:

1. to think
2. to take decision
3. to select
4. to improvise
5. to adapt
6. to overcome difficulties
7. to suffer
8. to leave something (*or someone*) behind
9. to make mistakes
10. to learn

## **WHY SURVIVING**

Some renowned Humanistic Psychology Professors like Martin Seligman, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and Eric Erickson agreed on the point that "*positive thinking as a path to wholeness by encouraging individuals to focus on their personal strengths and virtues, and offering encouragement for others to do the same. In essence, it is about experiencing and portraying a positive attitude.*"

Survivors did in fact have the chance to choose between to yield to adversities and let themselves die or to react.

The human spirit is much more brave than we can actually think, and the primordial instinct that everyone of us has is strictly connected to the self conservation. So, to survive.

As we will see in few paragraphs, even ordinary people can overcome a dramatic situation, because the instinct has prevailed, no matter the features of the whole context they found themselves in or the knowledge they had.

This happens also with a larger amount of people, facing all together an unexpected scenario.

Let me quote *The Beethoven Factor* by Paul Pearsall, Ph.D., clinical neuropsychologist: "*Thrivers share their experiences not from the perspective of "Look what I did" but from the orientation of "Don't worry. Look at what you can do."*"

## **THE BASICS OF SURVIVAL**

Saying that, absolute beginners who have the willing to learn more on how the human mind deals with catastrophic and/or sudden change of fortune, can find a large amount of excellent manuals and books on the market which also dig all the aspects related to what happen to our body.

Let's sum up the main factors that anyone, anywhere, should keep in mind.

The most common example is given by the "logic of the pyramid".

At the base you have the *will to live*, immediately followed by *knowledge*, while at the top you can find *the gear (or kit)*.

If we specifically refer to *survival in the wilderness*, additional factors are provided by the presence (or absence) of the following *main* elements:

WATER

FIRE

SHELTER

and again,  
MEDICINE  
NAVIGATION

A lot of tensions, in fact, can arise from a stressing situation:

FEAR  
ANXIETY  
ILLNESS  
INJURIES  
COLD  
HEAT  
THIRST  
HUNGER  
FATIGUE  
ISOLATION  
BOREDOM  
LACK OF SELF ESTEEM  
SLEEP DEPRIVATION

All the above mentioned factors can depend on the geographical scenario, weather conditions, individual conditions, presence of resources, and a lot of variable topics that need to be considered and, first of all, accepted.

#### **ACCEPTANCE OF THE SITUATION**

A sure statement is that *we can't change situations as we wish*, but this specific concept has a determinant value in survival.

You cannot have control on anything as well as you cannot refuse to accept the sudden change of a situation.

So, acceptance is a mandatory step in any SHTF scenario.

#### **MURPHY'S LAW OR SNAFU?**

*"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong" or "Situation Normal: All F\* Up"?*

Any easy situation can suddenly turn into the worst nightmares.

Take for example a relaxing walk in the backwoods.

The possibility of a change of weather conditions or being stranded, without GPS, and no chance to call the Search and Rescue are surely not so much remote. Quite each single day news report of people stranded somewhere and forced to face a situation they could have never imagine.

You can have the best (and the most expensive) gear on you in terms of clothing, boots, backpacks, tools, navigation systems and so on.

But having the right mentality and being prepared to the worst are, as matter of fact, your most trustful allies.

Refusing to accept the possibility that anything bad can happen – because of all the elements around you and also inside your brain – tell you the opposite is not just stupid, but also dangerous.

Underrating the risks of a place, even if you are familiar with it, is something to strictly avoid. Knowledge can help you, but situational awareness can really make the difference when it comes to face an abrupt change of the basic conditions.

Your comfort zone can be hopelessly damaged, your plans compromised and your confidence even assaulted.

## THE WEIGHT OF GEAR versus THE WEIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE

Cutting edge gear can represent an remarkable aid to the knowledge acquired in the past. But knowledge does necessarily stand alone if not paired with practice.

So, in order to make a good use of gear you have, you must know details, eventual flaws and even borders. This will lead you the way to chose it in an appropriate way, considering the features and the possible issues you may encounter in your adventure.

Acquiring survival skills is certainly a top option to consider: starting a fire, potabilize water and building a natural shelter requires not only some fundamentals, but also hours of devotion to practice.

Even some Scouts essential can come in handy when it comes to survive, as depicted in the following paragraph.

### AN ORDINARY SURVIVAL STORY

August 9, 2018.

Matthew Matheny, 40, borrows a friend's car and heads for the famous volcano Mount St. Helen, in Washington State.

It should be a simple excursion, because Matthew, although he has been a boyscout for years, wears a t shirt and short pants.

And he wears flip flops. In short, a simple walk, a brief escape from everyday life in a suggestive scenario.

The Blue Lake Trail is his destination, he also reported to his friend. But Matthew will be found six days later somewhere else.

Something has certainly gone wrong. Yes, but what?

This is an *ordinary survival story*.

First of all, the area: Matthew, as he will later report to the media, doesn't know much about it. And it has no map, no map, no compass and no GPS with it.

The Blue Lake Trail looks like a trail suitable for everyone. The scenario is certainly breathtaking: very high Douglas Firs surround a lake of an almost unnatural calm.

Matthew faithfully follows the signs that indicate the path, then something goes wrong.

He happens to no longer find precise signs, and the path becomes narrower and narrower, until it is almost non-existent.

But the ex boy scout has confidence and continues, certain that, sooner or later, he will cross a path much more beaten than what he is going through, which has now become made of rock - the remains of the volcanic eruption of 1980.

Almost blindly and without any geographical knowledge, Matthew struggles to pay attention to both the terrain and any reference points.

In a steep point, in fact, it loses its balance, falls and the flip flops break completely.

It is now late, the phone is without charge and he is definitely in a bad situation. Moreover barefoot.

Contacted by parents and friends, the local Search and Rescue group starts to look for him, doing so without wasting time and begging for resources: 30 rescuers, search dogs, a drone and helicopters.

And they do it non-stop for six days.

Meanwhile Matthew continues to walk, exhausted and dehydrated.

The hope of salvation hangs by a thread, and hunger first devours his brain and then his stomach.

Thanks to his consolidated knowledge of boy scouts, he will later say, he is able to recognize edible berries.

And then there are the bees.

Imagine being thirty, forty, fifty times stung by bees. Matthew lets them get close to him, even prick him, and then with a sudden gesture he kills and eats them.

Rescuers find him on the seventh day, dehydrated but "*not in so bad shape*" (I quote verbatim). He tells everyone that previous skills have saved him.

## **CONCLUSION**

If everything happens for a reason, being unprepared is something to definitely avoid.

At the same time, being unrespectful towards the wilderness can reveal incompetence and inappropriateness.

There are a lot of good ways to approach any kind of activity in the great Outdoors: manuals, videos, experiences from others.

Anyone of us must learn from mistakes and spend time on the field to practice skills.

Nature will embrace and accept only those who accept her as an entity to learn from.