

"I Survived Being Snowbound in a Car"

Trapped in a blizzard for four nights, I left the only shelter I had in order to save myself

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When my boyfriend, Rod, and I were leaving his mother's house near Sacramento, California, late last fall to drive home to Nevada, it was a warm, overcast day--nothing unusual or threatening. Normally we would have checked the weather before driving home through the Sierra Nevada mountain range, but for some reason that day we didn't. Rod had his four-wheel-drive Jeep and we knew the roads well, so we weren't worried. Usually we have a survival pack in the car filled with blankets and flashlights and first-aid items, but as we loaded stuff into the Jeep, including some green tomatoes Rod's mother had given us, we took it out so we'd have more room.

As we passed our favorite camping ground, Burnside Lake in Alpine Country, Nevada, we decided to take a drive through it. The gates to the trails were locked, so we went around them. As we drove down the trail about six miles to where we had camped that summer, it started to snow. We still weren't concerned, but while turning our car around to leave, we heard a "thunk"--the left front tire had rolled into a varmint hole about three and a half feet deep.

It was around 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 29. Rod tied a winch cable around a tree and tried to pull the Jeep out, but the cable snapped three times. I found some logs, hitched them under the car, and jumped on the bumper to try to rock it out, but it didn't work. Snowflakes the size of dimes swirled around us from every direction. After trying to pull the car out for over four hours, we got back in to cuddle up and get warm and wait till morning, when we believed the storm would be over.

At dawn on Friday we tried again to free the Jeep, but to no avail. Rod left to get help at about 9 a.m. He hadn't walked 25 feet from the car when he started disappearing into the snowfall.

I rolled down the window and yelled, "Rod, I think you should wait for this to let up."

He threw his hands in the air like, "Nah, I got this."

Taking Refuge

The car had very little gas and there was no cell service. I started panicking.

I screamed into the CB radio, "I'm stuck out here in the wilderness. This is not a joke. I am not a child." I heard voices, but they couldn't hear mine.

On Saturday, when Rod had been gone a full day, I went into survival mode. I looked around inside the car to see what I could find. I tore up some paper and put it in a crumpled beer can that I found under the seat, poured in some motor oil and a few small stones I had collected earlier, and set the paper on fire. It was a short, fast burn, but it heated the stones enough to warm me when I put them in the inner pockets of my jacket.

The snowstorm was still raging. Every half-hour I rubbed my feet so they didn't lose circulation. I ate one of the green tomatoes--they were all the food I had--and as much snow as I could manage for hydration.

This was bear and mountain lion country. When I had a bowel movement (I stuck my bare butt out the window), I covered it in snow. I didn't want to attract animals.

On Sunday the storm broke, and I decided to attempt the six-mile trek back to the road. I wrapped my fingers with tissue and masking tape and covered them with my thin gloves. I did the same with my feet and socks. I packed my backpack with a knife, flashlight, the tomatoes, and a pillbox filled with Benadryl, ibuprofen, and an aspirin. But almost as soon as I left the car, another storm swept in. I got back in the Jeep. It was the coldest it had been; ice formed inside the windows.

By Monday, I was convinced Rod hadn't survived, and I thought I probably wouldn't either. With the little power I had left in my phone, I made a video for my 11-year-old twin sons and my mom, who is 82. Sobbing, I told my boys to stay away from drugs and alcohol and said, "I'm sorry your mom got herself into this position."

Into the Storm

I realized it was now warmer outside than inside the car, so it was time to leave. I swallowed the aspirin, figuring that thinning my blood could help me in the cold. The snow was still coming down; it was so high I couldn't open the car door at first, but finally I was able to push it open enough to get out. The snow was up to my chest.

About 20 minutes out of the car I started throwing up blood--a sign of dehydration, I've since learned. Three hours or so into my trek, it started sleeting. My hands were frozen. At this point I felt ready to take off my clothes and get dying over with; I wanted to be taken. But then I saw a hollow tree on its side. I slipped in through the roots, feet first. My head didn't fit so I put my backpack over it. It stank inside, like from mold, and spiders were biting me. But it was shelter. It stormed the whole next day, so I stayed in the tree. That night I swallowed all the ibuprofen and Benadryl, about five or six pills each. I wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. Funny, it was the only night I didn't sleep. Coming out of the tree the next day I hurt my ankle and my knee, so I had to crawl to the trail.

I came across fresh mountain lion tracks, but I just kept crawling, my head down. Then I saw Rod about two feet ahead of me: He was lying on his back, his shirt off (hypothermia can make your body feel hot, I later found out), his arms crossed over his chest, a sort of smile across his face. He was dead. I cried and prayed and talked to him for maybe half an hour. Then I told him I had to go so I could tell his kids what happened and take care of mine.

I spent the next three hours crawling faster than ever. I couldn't feel my fingers or my feet. At around 6:30 it started to rain, and I just wasn't ready for that. This was it. I curled up in a ball and started to wail.

Then I heard a tractor. I started screaming and whistling. It was my brother Gary. Convinced that I was in these woods, he had commandeered an empty front loader that had keys in it. I was still four miles from the road when he found me.

"I got you," he said when he saw it was me. "I got you."

Read and annotate the following true story-

“I Survived Being Snowbound in a Car”

Annotate by using a pencil, pens, highlighters, etc:

- * Exposition (establishing setting, characters involved, time, background situation, etc.)
- * Rising action (this is like a list of problems and challenges between the expo & the turning point)
- * Climax (turning point) - (main character makes what could be a life-altering decision)
- * Falling Action (the events that happen after the character takes action and made that decision to leave)
- * Resolution (how the whole situation ended - bittersweet)
- * Circle words or phrases that have unclear meanings or that you just don't know (**great opportunity to address vocabulary-in-context based on what students need help with**).
- * Out to the side wherever there is some space, write down words and phrases that show what you're thinking as you read: what you think, what you would do, how you feel, your own ideas. (**Have students share these annotations, these active-reading notes, to talk about what they were thinking and feeling as they read**)
- * The narrative just kind of “stops”... Pretend you are the narrator and write an ending or closing that shows what the author learned from the experience (Hint: Do not write that the theme or life lesson is to be prepared during a snowstorm or not to wander away from a car when you're stranded. There's more to it than that. Think: what could you learn about yourself as a person after having experienced something like this?)

“I Survived Being Snowbound in a Car”

Make a list of three words and phrases from the article that you need clarification about.	Explain the three most important decisions the character(s) made. Answers will vary, but suggestions are-	What one event in the article represents the turning point for the main character?	Write a summary of the article (beginning, middle, end) in four sentences or less.
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1.	1. deciding to take a different road home in the beginning (par. 2)	Students can summarize the paragraph they already hi-lighted (don't re-copy the whole thing—summarize it).	Have students follow this format for a good summary that addresses the most important points while leaving out all the details: “Somebody wanted... But... So... Then... Finally” They can do this in just a few sentences to help them understand how to stay focused when summarizing a reading selection.
2.	2. the decision to stay in the car and wait for help while trying to stay warm and alive		
3.	3. the decision to leave relative safety of the car to look for help		

Exit Ticket

Why are details in the setting so important to the events of the plot not just in this story about being snowbound in a car, but in any story?

The plot of a story can't unfold or happen without details to help it along. If details from the beginning (exposition) are missing or unclear, then the next steps in the plot can't even take place. If the time is missing, if the characters seem confusing to the reader, or if the right amount of background information or important objects are all missing, then what happens in the plot later on, like with the rising action and turning point, won't even make sense and will seem very random and confusing for the reader.

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