

I still bare the scars. At night, my dark room is still filled with the occasional scream from sleep, as those yellow, glowing eyes tower above me in my dreams. But his head still hangs on my wall and on those nights, I venture into my living room to remind myself, yet another time, that I won and he didn't.

My tale is one of a three month hell. Where snow and ice were my insidious demons and Old Bart might as well have been the devil, himself. A match was more valuable than gold, and my Bible was my salvation in more than one way.

It was a cold January morning when I boarded the rickety plane bound for my cherished hunting cabin, deep in the Canadian Rockies. *I was gonna get me a Moose and there weren't nobody that was gonna stop me.* Strange being from Georgia, but I found the cold, icy landscape, inviting. Almost alluring. Now, I cringe when I open my fridge.

My pilot, Rick, was an older man, not much past fifty, but as tough as an old stick of jerky. He motioned with his cigar where to stow my gear and then placed the smoldering obscenity back into his mouth.

“Gonna bag you a big one this time, Steve?”

“Just might this time Ricky, just might.” He grunted at my use of the name he was tormented by in his childhood. It was his fault he told me when he was in one of his drunken stupors. I guess he felt pretty close to me at that time, being lugged over my shoulder and all. He's a hellion when drunk, but when sober, he's a wizard in the air. Then again, he's pretty good when he's drunk also.

I secured my stuff in the cargo net and took the seat next to his. I liked seeing where I was going, made me feel more in control hundred's of feet in the air. As soon as I buckled up, I took out my pocket sized Bible and began to read where I left off.

“Readin’ bout those holy so and so’s again?”

“No Rick, just about some king that just got a two and-a-half foot blade shoved in his stomach while he was using the bathroom.”

“Why’d that happen?”

“He made God mad and God sent someone to get rid of him.”

“Woah, maybe I should start readin’ that thing.”

I handed the Bible to him and Rick acted like it was a snake that was going to bite him at any time. “Not now, bub. Maybe later.”

“It’s up to you man.” I just kept reading.

Several hours later, we touched down at a small air strip near Victoria, B.C. It was already snowing, not heavy, but enough to make moving from place to place difficult without the right equipment. The paths cleared out for the incoming planes already had a fresh frosting of snow which was getting thicker by the second. Quickly — well as quickly as we could — we moved my stuff and Rick’s to the inn not far from the strip.

The inside was warm and full of smoke from the fireplaces and cigars, or cigarettes that jutted from the mouths of pilots and patrons. Stereotypical moose heads and Canadian flags lined the walls and several people lounged on sofas and chairs in the front with plates or pints, or both. At the rear stood maybe six or seven tables, all full but one. Rick and I quickly made it there and took our seats.

A pretty blond waitress took our orders and we were soon nursing plates of steak and potatoes. I still could not get over the price difference. In the states a meal like this would have cost at least ten or maybe even twelve dollars. Here, in American currency, it cost about five dollars. Another good reason why I liked coming here every once and a while.

The meal finished, I decided to turn in early. Rick, on the other hand, decided to sample the social life offered at this fine establishment. I was to leave early the next morning, he could leave whenever he wanted to. What he did that night was up to him.

The morning came early and way before I expected it. I managed to sleep hours later than I intended, but still made it out by first light. Before leaving, I made sure that Rick knew to get me in a month. He mumbled from under his covers, which I took as an “I understand.”

My cabin had all that I needed, including two very nice and very expensive rifles, so I only took the essentials with me on my ten mile hike into the mountains. A pack of matches in a waterproof container, Swiss Army knife, sheath knife, hatchet, a coil of rope, flashlight, jerky and dried fruit, folding saw, water, camp shovel, A couple changes of clothes, dome tent and sleeping bag---all the items I needed just in case. Don't think I forgot the toilet paper. Three miles down the road then seven or so miles into the woods--near the end of the day I would be safe and warm in my feather-stuffed bed in the cabin. Too bad I never made it.

There was one thing that I forgot, a compass. My Scoutmaster would kill me for that. I thought I knew the way, been there so many times. So off I went. The three miles

were nothing. Because the road was pretty much clear of snow, I made it in a little more than an hour. On the right of the road, I found the bright orange ribbon on the trees that marked the beginning of the trail to my cabin, so snowshoes on, I began my trek.

It was difficult going, of course, but nothing that I haven't done before. I saw the occasional rabbit or deer on my way, but other than that, the way was clear of both person or animal. Fine by me. I was there for solitude and solitude was what I was going to get. I began to sing one of my favorite hymns and then another, loud and to the trees and beautiful mountains around me. It was because of my loud singing, that I didn't hear the bear until it was too late. I heard his growl, and turned to find a huge, black bear looming over me, massive sharp fangs dripping with saliva. Petrified, I stared at him, fear rooting me to where I stood. It was nothing but God's grace that I ducked when his claw swiped at me, knocking off my stocking cap, and part of my scalp with it. The sharp pain brought me to my senses and as fast as I could, I put as much distance behind him as I could. Limbs tore at my face and clothing as I fled, roots, hidden in the snow, tripped me dozens of times. But I dared not fall, because I knew that my life depended on the fact that I was ahead of the bear and not below him. I glanced over my shoulder a few times as I ran. The bear was too close. We must have run for hours until he got bored. He left and I collapsed where I stood, exhausted.

I looked around and knew that I was lost. I was too tired to think about that now, it was getting dark and I needed to last the night. I cleared out a spot for a fire and managed to find some semi-dry wood. Twelve matches and a roll of toilet paper later, I

had a nice fire going. I sat up my tent close to the fire, and climbed into my sleeping bag within. Soon, I was dead to the world.

I awoke the next morning very stiff. The sun was bright over the canopy of pine and oaks. After my near-death experience the previous day, the snow never looked so white, the air never smelled so sweet. I rubbed my fingers through my blood matted hair, cringing slightly at the gashes that the bear left me to remember him by. Although I couldn't see them, I didn't think that the gashes were infected, but I washed them in the fresh snow all the same.

I gnawed on some of my jerky and dried fruit and took some swigs from my canteen before I broke camp. Not the best breakfast, but it would last me until I reached the cabin. I packed the tent and sleeping bag on my pack and went toward where I came from the day before. From there I should be able to find my way to the cabin from the ribboned trees along the trail. My thought was to follow my tracks left from before, but as I soon found out, the fresh snow made those tracks just a memory.

Now, if I did what I should have done, which was stay there and carefully plan what I was to do next, things might have turned out better. I didn't, and like every man from the states, I thought I knew where I was going, so I left without a thought of what I was going to do later. Later came, and I was more lost than I was to start. I followed my tracks back, but as the next of a series of snow storms that continually taunted began, I knew it was time hunt for firewood before night came. Night and a snow storm just do not mix in this type of a situation. I managed to chop and stack a nice pile of wood and set up my tent right before the snow came in force. No fire tonight, just a pile of wood to

stare at from the warmth of my sleeping bag. By flashlight I read my Bible and fell asleep with it still in my hands.

I awoke the next morning with droplets of water cascading down on my nose. A wall of snow was shoved tight against my tent, surrounding it. The bright sun was melting it little by little. It must have snowed quite a bit the previous night, because the tent was half way covered. I tried the zipper on the screen, but it was frozen where it was and would not budge. Thank God I keep my pack inside with me. The camp shovel made little work of the snow, though the tent door was way beyond repair. I tunneled a path to the surface and surveyed the extent of the snow coverage.

No tracks now; I could not even see my stack of wood. It was a different place now. Nothing looked familiar and I had planned the night before to search for the trail, but from previous experience, I decided to make a more permanent camp. With the snow the way it was, I wasn't going anywhere any time soon. I checked my provisions: three sticks of jerky and a half way full bag of dried fruit were left and my canteen was nearly empty. Melted snow gave me water aplenty, but where would I find food? First a fire, than I would have to find some game in the area. I had not yet seen any deer or moose. Birdsong filled the air, but they were high in the trees and I had no weapons. That would soon change.

I managed to find a couple of hardwood trees, and using my saw, fell one the width of a coffee can. I sawed the tree in sections and thought about splitting it, but I was already sweating, and in this cold, it was not a good thing. The sweat stopped after a little rest and I then proceeded to split the logs in wedges. By the time I returned to camp

with the last load of wood, I was famished and it was already noon. The bright sun brought remarkable warmth while I was gone, melting the snow enough to show the top of the wood pile I had left from the night. I bit a stick of jerky in half and returned the other half to my pack. Though starving as I was, I knew the jerky had to last me as long as possible.

I cleared the snow away from the old wood pile and stacked the new on top for both to dry. It was now warm enough for me to take off my heavy coat and put on my fleece windbreaker from my pack. My stomach growled and I knew it was time to search for some type of game trail. I pulled a red undershirt from my pack, and ripped it into strips. These strips I tied to trees along the way, so I could find my way back easily. I searched for hours and at the point that I was about to give up hope, I stumbled upon some tracks of deer or moose. I searched a little farther and found fresh spoor, still steaming. Wherever these animals were, they were just here, and Lord willing, they would return. As I was walking back to camp, I saw a large fallen tree — large and heavy. I had an idea and I hoped it would work.

I brought my rope, sheath knife, and saw back with me to where I saw the tree. Carefully, I sawed the tree— at least as big around as a large tire— into a segment as long as I was tall. My saw was all but ruined after this. It took me quite a few times to throw the rope over a limb in the trees above me, but I soon had the rope tied to the end of the log I had made and began, slowly and with much discomfort, to lift the log in the air. Ten feet off the ground should be enough. I quickly wrapped my end of the rope around

a stake I pounded into the ground beside a large maple tree. I placed a pile of dried fruit below the log and hid behind the tree to wait.

Five hours came and went with no sign of game. The weather was warm compared to what it had been, so considering it all, I was not that uncomfortable. I must have dozed off, because I snapped awake as I heard snorting. I all but hugged the tree to keep from being seen as a herd of deer wondered toward my trap. A large buck perked up its ears and I could swear he could hear my pounding heart. His nostrils flared and he looked all around. Another deer saw my pile of fruit and went for it. The buck lowered his antlers and the other backed away. He bent down and began to eat the fruit, now was my chance. I took my knife and cut the rope, which whistled through the air as the log came down with a crash, slamming into the back of the buck which collapsed to the ground. The herd of deer fled in all directions leaving the buck to his fate.

I approached the buck and tears filled my eyes. There laid such a beautiful creature, still alive and trying to move with no avail. Just then it occurred to me that I never killed an animal. Sure, I shot at some and helped clean others' kill, but I myself had never killed one. My heart panged for this fallen lord of the woods, but I needed the food. I knelt down beside him and quickly slit his throat to end his pain. The blood flowed, and I whispered to his lifeless body, "Thank you, my friend".

I untied the rope from the log and gathered the remaining coil. I then gutted the deer and left the innards in a pile beside the log. With the deer thrown over my shoulders, I made my way back to camp. I hung the deer on a tree to finish bleeding and rummaged through my pack to find my Swiss Army knife. I found it and felt the edge to

make sure it was still sharp. I finished skinning the deer and cleaned the gore from the pelt with snow. I didn't worry about quartering the deer because it was cold and the meat would keep for a while. As the sun began to set, I put on my heavy coat and began to build a fire.

I was more careful with my matches this time. I had five left and had no idea how long I would be stuck in the Canadian wilderness. I cleared out snow until I hit the frozen ground. The ground was too hard for the shovel, so I used my hatchet to dig a pit. Recalling my training in the Boy Scouts, if the fire was hot enough, even wet wood would burn, though slowly.

Sticks and toilet paper began my fire as I slowly added the hardwood wedges. Hardwood burns very hot and as the snow melted and ran into the fire, it merely sizzled and kept burning. I cut a piece of meat from the carcass and was about to throw the sinew away until I remembered something from Scouts. I placed it in my pocket and found a stick to shove the meat onto. I cooked the meat over the fire had never smelled anything so good. Soon my hunger got the best of me, and thought the meat was a bit rare, I gobbled it down in no time. It was very good.

Weeks turned to one, then two months. I now sported a full, scraggly beard which I trimmed with my pocket knife, but soon left it alone out of frustration to grow as it would. My shoes were in shambles, so I wrapped my feet with rabbit pelts. My coat grew moldy from the dampness, so I traded a fashionable deer hide jacket, sewn from shoestrings and rope. I saved the deer sinew until I had enough to try what I heard about in Scouts. I stretched it and weaved it, and soon I had long, surprisingly stout cord of

sinew. I found three green saplings each an inch in diameter. After shaving and shaping them some, I tied them together on each end with a majority of my remaining rope. After I wrapped the middle to make a grip and added part of the sinew cord to make a string, I made a pretty strong bow. To this bow I added some crude arrows made from saplings with sharpened, bone points. More times than most, I missed my target, but once I got a nice sized bird.

Within the next few weeks, my armory grew from a bow and arrows to a spear and a sling. I was horrible at the sling, but I did manage to bring down a few birds, which gave me feathers to fletch my arrows. With the new accuracy, I added a few rabbits and a wild pig to my meager rations. I was using my jerky to bait traps and my fruit to add flavor to rabbit stew. My spear throw even brought down a nice sized deer.

As food waned, I grew bolder in my wanderings. I still had no idea where I was, and at this point, I no longer cared. I began to think less and less about that states and more and more about survival. I became obsessed with survival. This is what led me to wander a good mile or so. Game was becoming more and more sparse, and I needed food, soon. That morning, I ate the last of the pig and went hunting farther than I had ever gone before. I carried my Bible, sheath knife, spear, and matches; all I thought I needed. It was this night that it snowed more than it had in a very long time.

I was caught unprepared, the weather grew colder fast, and then the snow began. I searched for shelter of any kind, and thanks to God, I found a small cave. I was freezing and desperately needed a fire. There were plenty of sticks in the cave, but as I tried to light them, none of it would catch. I tried to stack the wood differently, but to no

avail. I tried smaller sticks, larger ones, moss for kindling, nothing. I was soon down to one match. I then remembered my Bible. This was life or death, so I chose, though it tore my soul, to rip pages from it for a fire starter. Page after page went for the fire, and with one match left, I touched the flame to the paper. I was such a beautiful sight to see the fire rise to engulf the wood. My Bible truly was my salvation that night. Thought it was cold outside, my cave was warm and I slept soundly.

My sense of direction must have gotten better, for I found the faded, tattered undershirt ribbons on the trees with no problem. I also found deer tracks. With spear in hand, I followed the tracks to not come upon a heard of deer, but a single moose, foraging for grass under the newly fallen snow. As he turned, my spear was already in the air, sinking deep into his chest. It made to run, but fell in its tracks. It was a clean kill, probable dead before he hit the ground.

There was no throwing this monster over my shoulder, so after I gutted it, I all but dragged it back to camp. My chest was heaving when I got there, but I was ecstatic! Not only did my bring down a moose, but with a homemade spear! After the adrenaline wore off, I was exhausted. I climbed into my tent, and fell asleep.

It was then that *he* attacked me again. I awoke hearing a strange noise outside. I stepped out to find the cause of the living hell that I have been through the past months. He had to be the same bear. I knew him and he knew me. The bear saw me and rose to his full height. My spear was outside my tent easily within reach. I was ready this time.

It was the smoke from my fire that brought him. Rick with a group of Mounties came into my camp and froze in their tracks. I don't know if it was the piked bear head on a homemade spear, or me with a massive bearskin cloak, deerskin jacket, and rabbit skin shoes. Maybe it was the rows upon rows of slowly healing wounds all over my body. Rick would never tell me.

So here I am. Haunted once more by the bear I called Old Bart. Writing now is what I must do to keep my sanity. You may choose not to believe what I have written; that's up to you. This is my story, oh, and Old Bart says hi.