

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from  
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This issue, I am sharing a story written by my youngest daughter – 16 now, but 14 when she wrote it. Enjoy!

## Mary's Great Adventures

I grew up in the outdoors. Well, not literally. I spend plenty of my time indoors and most of my nights in a nice cushy bed. But I have had my share of outdoor adventures.

My name is Mary Zook and I was born in Harrisonburg, VA. I am the youngest of four children and I wouldn't have it any other way. My love of the outdoors began with my dad. He has always had a passion for hiking and climbing. He didn't do much of it as a kid growing up in Zimbabwe, Africa. When he came to the States he discovered hiking and camping. Now, it's his job and his lifestyle. He dragged my sibs and me into it too.

My family used to go on hikes almost every Sunday afternoon. Dad is a college professor during the week and he would get tired of being indoors. Frankly, the rest of us were also bored with school and cooking and sitting and driving. Those afternoons in the woods were relaxing and (dare I say?) educational. When I was very little, too little to walk far on my own, I would ride on Dad's shoulders or in a strap-on baby carrier. I can remember playing with his hat or hair and being taller than everyone else.

On one particular hike (I must have been five years old), I made an amazing discovery. My older sibs, Ethan, Katie, and Aaron, had gone ahead. I was stuck back with Mom and Dad (boring) and wanted to catch up with the big kids. Upon gaining permission from the parental unit, I struck out. The siblings were within sight, but a good ten yards away. As I trotted along in all of my short five-year-old splendor, I came upon a small camouflage pouch lying by the side of the trail. Naturally, I stopped and picked it up. By this time, my parents had caught up with me.

"*What've you got there, Mary?*" my dad asked.

I shrugged. "*Oh, something camouflaged...*" Honestly, I had no idea.

I opened the pouch and pulled out a three-inch-long, lock blade Buck knife. My dad's eyes doubled in size. My siblings had come back to see what was going on. They were dumbstruck. Their tiny kid sister had noticed what they had missed. They say it was because I was closer to the ground. I say it was because they were unobservant.

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Another hike that stands out in my memory took place in the middle of winter. The whole family wasn't along this time; it was just Dad, Aaron, and me. We had finished walking and were heading back to the car when Aaron pointed out an enormous icicle across the stream. The term "icicle," however, really doesn't do justice. This was an actual waterfall that had frozen in place. We couldn't see it very well and wanted to get closer. Forging the stream was out of the question but there was a cable bridge. The bridge was much like those rigged by Dad in the backyard. There were two cables stretched between trees on either side of the stream. The bottom cable was for standing on, the top one for grasping. Aaron crossed the bridge without a problem. I tried to go next but quickly discovered that I was too short and couldn't reach the top cable. This was rather upsetting for a five year old who desperately wanted to see the giant icicle. Dad, being a quick thinker, devised a plan. I stood on his boots, wrapped my arms around his waist, and held on tight while he crossed the bridge slowly and carefully. I don't remember being exactly scared, though it was a very edgy situation. I totally trusted my dad and wasn't worried for my own safety, because I knew he would be cautious. We made it across and back safely. On the trip home, the three of us agreed that we would say nothing of Mary's Most Recent Great Adventure to Mom. We kept our mouths effectively shut for about two years before telling her. She was terrified.

Kids will pack any number of things to bring to camp, but at the church campout every summer at Highland Retreat, there was always at least one common item: the bikes. Every kid brought their bike. My friends and I smashed soda cans and fit them into the back wheel of our bikes so that they buzzed like a motor when we rode. The faster we went, the louder the buzzing. Sometimes, Monica and I would ride up a long and rather steep trail to a pond. The first time we did this, we hesitated before going back down. We stood there a moment at the top of the trail, straddling our bikes, looking down at the endless expanse of rock and loose dirt.

"Ok, Mary," Monica said, taking a breath. "*We can either die, or we can **not** die.*" Clearly, this was intended to be a cautionary proverb meaning, "*take this slow and ride your brakes.*" I took it instead as a choice of two options.

I grinned maniacally. "*I'm gonna die!*"

With that, I kicked off and rode down the trail as quickly as I could. No brakes. I could hear Monica shouting behind me but I didn't care and pedaled harder. No helmet. The only thing on my head was a baseball cap worn backwards that I hadn't taken off all weekend. When I hit the bottom of the trail, I turned around and waited until Monica caught up. Still grinning, I pointed to my head and she realized that I had just hurtled down half a mountain, helmetless.

I'm not fearless. Not entirely, at least. To truly have fun in the outdoors though, I believe one needs to be just a little bit crazy. There is always a risk factor. When my dad takes clients climbing or paddling or caving, they sometimes ask "*is it safe?*" The truthful answer is "*no.*" The outdoors is never completely safe. On the other hand, what is? I once read of a trapeze artist who made his living by risking his life every day. He had a friend who killed himself just by walking down the steps of his trailer. Of course it's not safe. That's what makes it fun. I've learned to be cautious but not hold back. It's the people who aren't willing to get scraped up and dirty who end up sitting in the car, bored. So I say, Mary's next great adventure – bring it on!

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