

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC

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This quarter, I am sharing David Wagoner's classic poem, **Staying Alive** (1966, Indiana University Press), both for its beauty, and its practical advice on backcountry survival. I have taken the liberty of bolding several phrases that I think bear some worthy contemplation. Enjoy!

*Staying alive in the woods is a matter of calming
down*

At first and deciding whether to wait for rescue,

Trusting to others,

*Or simply to start walking and walking in one
direction*

Till you come out--or something happens to stop you.

By far the safer choice

***Is to settle down where you are, and try to make a
living***

***Off the land, camping near water, away from
shadows.***

Eat no white berries;

Spit out all bitterness. Shooting at anything

Means hiking further and further every day

In and out of shelter

*At will. Following their example, build for a whole
season:*

Facing across the wind in your lean-to,

You may feel wilder,

To hunt survivors;

*It may be best to learn what you have to learn without
a gun,*

Not killing but watching birds and animals go

But nothing, not even you, will have to stay in hiding.

If you have no matches, a stick and a fire-bow

Will keep you warmer,

*Or the crystal of your watch, filled with water, held up
to the sun*

Will do the same in time. In case of snow

Drifting toward winter,

*Don't try to stay awake through the night, afraid of
freezing--*

The bottom of your mind knows all about zero;

It will turn you over

*And shake you till you waken. If you have trouble
sleeping*

Even in the best of weather, jumping to follow

With eyes strained to their corners

(cont.)

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*The unidentifiable noises of the night and feeling
Bears and packs of wolves nuzzling your elbow,
Remember the trappers
Who treated them indifferently and were left alone.
If you hurt yourself, no one will comfort you
Or take your temperature,
**So stumbling, wading, and climbing are as
dangerous as flying.**
But if you decide, at last, you must break through
In spite of all danger,
Think of yourself by time and not by distance, counting
Wherever you're going by how long it takes you;
No other measure
Will bring you safe to nightfall. Follow no streams:
they run
Under the ground or fall into wilder country.
Remember the stars
And moss when your mind runs to circles. If it should
rain
Or the fog should roll the horizon in around you,
**Hold still for hours
Or days if you must, or weeks, for seeing is believing
In the wilderness.** And if you find a pathway,
Wheel-rut, or fence-wire,
Retrace it left or right: someone knew where he was
going
Once upon a time, and you can follow
Hopefully, somewhere,
Just in case. There may even come, on some uncanny
evening,
A time when you're warm and dry, well fed, not thirsty,
Uninjured, without fear,
When nothing, either good or bad, is happening.*

*This is called staying alive. It's temporary.
What occurs after
Is doubtful. You must always be ready for something
to come bursting
Through the far edge of a clearing, running toward
you,
Grinning from ear to ear
And hoarse with welcome. Or something crossing and
hovering
Overhead, as light as air, like a break in the sky,
Wondering what you are.
Here you are face to face with the problem of
recognition.
Having no time to make smoke, too much to say,
**You should have a mirror
With a tiny hole in the back for better aiming, for
reflecting**
Whatever disaster you can think of, to show
The way you suffer.
These body signals have universal meaning: If you are
lying
Flat on your back with arms outstretched behind you,
You say you require
Emergency treatment; if you are standing erect and
holding
Arms horizontal, you mean you are not ready;
If you hold them over
Your head, you want to be picked up.
**Three of anything
Is a sign of distress.** Afterward, if you see
No ropes, no ladders,
No maps or messages falling, no searchlights or trails
blazing,
Then, chances are, you should be prepared to burrow
Deep for a deep winter.*

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