

GROWING-UP IN MATTAPOISETT/ROCHESTER/MARION: GOING ON SURVIVAL

BY E.J. SMITH - YOUR SURVIVAL GUY

Editor's Note: *In this three-part series, I examine the benefits of self-sufficiency and resilience through the eyes of my teenage nephew, and myself. Rather than shielding children, it is important to empower them with the confidence to make decisions for themselves. That's something I learned on "Survival."*

Part I: June 19th 2018

I'm excited for my nephew. Saturday he left for a week-long camping trip called "Survival." It's a rite of passage for seventh graders at the tri-town regional junior high school from the towns of Mattapoisett, Rochester, and Marion, Massachusetts. I went on Survival, as did my sister, and now her son. And in this hazy, hot and humid New England weather—it will feel like survival.



By BILANOL @ SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

This is not your average camping trip. The kids are tasked with doing their own shopping for gear and food. The phrase "shop wisely" brings new meaning as each one carries their goods up a 3 mile hill to base camp. It wasn't unusual to see canned Spam tossed to the side of the road into a ditch as weary hikers realized they over packed. Plus, no one wants to be left behind or last to arrive. And everyone wants to see what Base Camp looks like.

The real test comes the next morning. The kids are split into two groups, A and B. There is a hat drawing to determine which group leaves for two days of survival— no food except for two apples and no tents. You have an apple for breakfast each day, homemade broth for dinner around the campfire at night. And you sleep in a shelter you put together using plastic/tarp that hopefully keeps you dry if it rains.

I remember how long those days felt and how hungry everyone was but somehow we made it. We were in it together. And when it was over we felt so good—tired, hungry but accomplished. I can't wait to see him this weekend to hear his stories from a week on Survival.

Part II: June 20th 2018

As I wrote to you yesterday in [Part I](#), my nephew is on a week-long camping trip called Survival with his seventh grade class from Old Rochester Junior High School—the tri-town regional junior high school for kids from the towns of Mattapoisett (where I'm from), Rochester, and Marion, Massachusetts. I remember like it was yesterday boarding the yellow school bus and driving several hours not knowing where we were going, but seeing fewer and fewer houses and then no houses, and realizing we were a long way from home.

When the bus stopped we lined up at the base of a rural dirt road and found our back-pack and milk crate (full of food) lined-up, off to the side, ready for us to carry to the top of the hill where base camp was located three

miles up. If you've ever carried a milk crate full of anything, then you know it's almost impossible to adjust the thing to where it feels comfortable. And I'm talking about walking from the garage to the car. Now, imagine you have a 30 pound pack on your back, it's about 85 degrees out, you're in seventh grade, and then you pick up this crate full of food that needs to be your sustenance for the next several days when you're not out on the "Survival" part of the trip. And that's when you start wondering if you really need that can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew.

One of my favorite memories from Survival, not including my time as a student in seventh grade, were the years I served as a counselor from eighth through twelfth grade. As a seventh grader Survival is at times an excruciating experience where you really don't know what's around the corner: Where is base camp? What is the Notch (I'll tell you in another post)? When will we go on the "Survival" part of the trip? That was the beauty of "Survival." You did not know the answers.

But, as a counselor you had the answers. You knew what to expect. But your job was to guide the kids—not do the work for them. Because the greatest gift of Survival was the feeling of accomplishment at the end of the week when you "Survived" on your own and with your classmates. And I was always impressed by how kids stepped up to the challenge from the minute they walked off the bus.

Stepping off the yellow-bus, seeing their backpack, milk crate and feeling like going back home, the first steps were always the hardest. On that first hike up to base camp, there were times where they wanted to give up. Then, just as they felt they couldn't make another step, a classmate they may have never talked to at school, would be jogging back down the road to help them carry that "damn" milk crate the last few hundred yards. And that's how a week of Survival began—Surviving with classmates, a long way from home.

Part III: June 21, 2018

You learn a lot about life and investing by simply putting one foot in front of the other.

Today is day five of my nephew's outward-bound excursion called "Survival." It's a legendary trip for seventh graders at Old Rochester Junior High School, in southeastern Massachusetts, from the towns of Mattapoisett, Rochester, and Marion.

It's a wet, sticky morning here in Newport, RI. At this point on the trip my nephew and his classmates will either already have accomplished the required two-days of survival or they will be waking up for day two of it. If it's day two, hopefully they constructed a suitable shelter last night.

The feeling you have on day two of Survival is a mixed one of uncertainty and relief. You still contemplate that you have a couple of long-days of hiking and food gathering ahead, but you conquered "The Notch" the day before.

From day one, the counselors talk about the Notch as if it were Lonely Mountain from J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit. And as far as the kids are concerned, Smaug is still alive, lurking near the top, waiting to pick them off one by one.

Stepping off the bus, early in the trip, someone always makes the mistake of saying out loud: "This is hard" or "I'm getting tired." Ding! Like Pavlov's dog a counselor shouts: "Wait until you reach the Notch! This is nothing compared to the Notch. It's the hardest hike you'll ever do!"

"Great," you think.

As they continue building up the Notch your mind works overtime, ratcheting up the angst and anticipation you've been feeling for the last couple weeks. Because it starts days before even leaving your house. I remember sitting on our living room floor, as a seventh grader, reading about moisture wicking wools, dehydrated meats, canteens, and wondering where in the world we were going.

The wondering continues when you're in the woods and walking. Thinking about the Notch. Imagining Smaug. But at least you're moving. You're putting one foot in front of the other collecting steps, much like an investor collects dividends, compounding them until, after a while, you realize you've put some miles behind you like money in the bank.

After a lot of steps, and a lot of hiking, you're told to stop, put your packs down and take a break. And that's when they tell you, "Congratulations you did the Notch!"

"What?! We, did? That wasn't so bad."

And then, after a brief break, it's time to put the packs back on, hit the trail again, gather some food, hike some more and set up camp. It's just another notch on the trip of Survival.

But, now, for some reason your pack feels a little lighter.

And at night, as you sing songs and put on funny skits and have contests, there's always a last song. As you sing Cats in the Cradle, staring nostalgically into the fire, missing your family, you hold that feeling inside of your heart that you created by simply putting one foot in front of the other—it's called a lifelong memory and it's a most precious commodity.

Survive and Thrive this Month.

Warm regards,

E.J.

E.J.

"Your Survival Guy"

P.S. There's a couple of ways to get in to the [International Tennis Hall of Fame](#): Dedicate your life to the sport and realize incredible success or, cross Bellevue Avenue from my office and enter the historic complex. This week, as is tradition following Wimbledon, competitors are in town for the [Dell Technologies Hall of Fame Open](#). It's a wonderful time to be in Newport for players and fans alike as both mingle about town enjoying what Newport has to offer. If you're a tennis fan and have questions about your investments, swing by for some coffee with me before heading across the street for the matches.

To schedule a meeting, please email me at ejsmith@youngresearch.com.

