

WINTER STORIES CONTEST

I SURVIVED AN AVALANCHE

By Rod Reimer, Dunster, B.C.



It was the morning of Nov. 17, 2002. I was at my backcountry trapping cabin, high up in the Rocky Mountains near Dunster. I had climbed up my trail from the main valley seven days earlier with barely a couple inches of snow the whole way.

"Snowshoes, why bother?" I thought as I left them at my tree cache near the top of the mountain.

It hadn't snowed much yet up there but it started to snow the first day and continued all week at a rate of over a foot a day. However it wasn't too bad getting around in the deep woods without my snowshoes, as I went about my trapping activities.

As the week went on I began to worry about the amount of snowfall, not having my snowshoes to get home with and the very real potential for avalanches in the alpine basin I had to travel through to get home. So here I was on my last day trying to decide what to do. It hadn't stopped snowing and was falling heavy now.

The plan was to be home on the seventh day. My dilemma was that my wife, Deb, wouldn't know when I would be coming home if I wasn't home on that day. If I stayed to wait out the storm, who knows how long that would be. At what point would she call Search and Rescue and what if I was having coffee in the cabin when they showed up?

I knew I shouldn't leave because of the avalanche risk, but I decided to go for it anyway. I had a sense of foreboding as I closed up the cabin and headed up the alpine valley. I was now almost waist deep in snow. It was going to be a tough slog, breaking trail all the way. About the third level up the alpine I was startled to see an avalanche come roaring down a chute about 200-300 metres ahead of me. "Thank God I wasn't there," I thought, just in time to look up and see a wall of snow cascade over the cliff above me. The next thing I knew I was hit hard by something between my eyes and then came what seemed an eternity of rolling and tumbling in a whirling world of white. I don't know how long it lasted, probably a few minutes in real time, then all was still. I was totally encased in a snowy tomb and I knew I had to wriggle my body to prevent it from turning solid around me. I was in a standing up position with my arms stretched up, just enough for my hands to reach a lighter shade of white that I took to mean near the top of the avalanche.

I had a real shot at getting out of this alive. This made me struggle all the more. It wasn't long before my desperate fingers clawed a hole to daylight and life-giving air. Once out on top, I saw dark drops of blood colouring the snow at my

feet. My hands reached for my forehead which along with the rest of my face, was totally numb.

"I'm bleeding bad," I thought, as I saw my bloodied hands. I dug in my backpack which was still on my back and pulled out my spare woollen Stanfield shirt which I tied tight around my forehead, hoping it would stop or at least slow down the bleeding. I still had hours to go and didn't want to die of loss of blood. I had no idea how badly I was injured but I knew I had to get home by dark or I was dead.

I also knew at this point if I had been wearing my snowshoes,

I would have never made it out of the avalanche at all. My task now was to get out of that basin which now had avalanches sliding down all around me. I had one way to get out which was to head straight into a patch of trees growing straight up the mountain.

Easier said than done. It was trees growing out of rock cliffs and I literally had to pull myself up tree to tree until I got up on top of the ridge. Once there I found myself in a raging, whiteout blizzard. I had to navigate along a stretch of goat trails, windblown open, but on the edge of thousand foot cliffs. Finally

I reached the summit, where I had walkie talkie radio reception. I radioed home and thank God my son Josh, six years old at the time, was around the radio to answer my call.

"It's dad," I said, "Get mom and tell her I'm hurt." Soon Deb got on the radio with her steady, calming voice. I was starting to get shaky from shock, blood loss and hypothermia setting in. It was

now about 3 o'clock and I had an hour of daylight to get down. I wanted to lie down and sleep but I knew I had to keep going. As I would start to lose it, Deb would talk me back. It was hard to follow my trail ribbons as it was getting darker.

After much struggle and great difficulty, I got down to my truck just as it got dark. All in all, a miracle to be sure. Thank you God! Once home Deb took one look at me and said, "It's bad, you'll need stitches."

We went to the hospital.

"How is it you weren't knocked out?" asked the doctor as he dug the dirt out of my forehead and stitched me up with 12 stitches.

"If I had been, I wouldn't be here," I replied.

I suffered PTSD for years after this incident but nothing could take away my thankfulness for surviving.

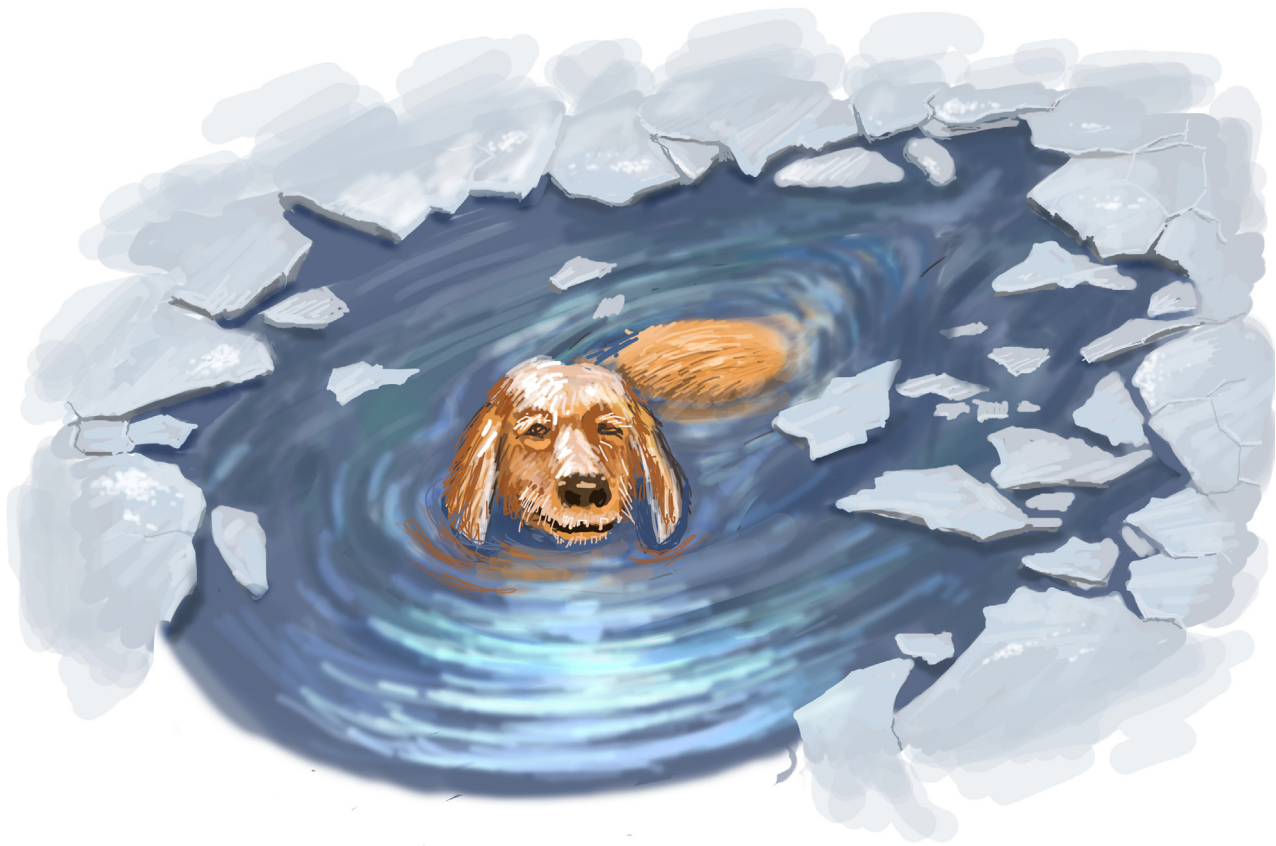


WINTER SURVIVAL STORIES

FULL MOON AND FORTY BELOW

By Tim Nusse

I am older now. My joints complain often. But my memory is sharp.
 I remember it was New Year's Eve.
 The temperature had plummeted to minus 40.
 The sky was clear and the full moon was sharply displayed.
 I was comfortably dozing under the kitchen table when I heard the plan being discussed.
 "I have been waiting for a clear sub-zero night to light the burn pile. This pile is close to immature spruce trees and the cold air will keep the flames close to the ground so heat will not singe the needles on the spruce trees. I will take Luke with me and be back in about 3 hours."
 That was welcome news to my golden retriever ears.
 I was privileged to ride in the front seat of the truck to our property 3 miles outside of town.
 While my owner went about his business I went about mine. I was allowed to wander as long as I responded when I heard my owner's whistle.
 Soon my nose was filled with scent as I followed endless game trails. I was on one particularly fresh rabbit track when a hole opened underneath me. I had wandered onto the river. At a narrow spot the moving water had caused



the ice to thin and I had fallen into the icy water.
 Swim to shore.
 Swim tooooo shooore.
 Swim ... I cannot swim anymore.
 Best to rest. Maybe sleep a little.
 Then I heard it. Faintly at first, then repeated many times coming closer. My owner's whistle. How long had it been since I left him at the slash pile. 10 minutes? Maybe 30? An hour. It did not matter. I must respond to the whistle.
 Paw...swim...claw at the ice...swim...paw...I am out of the river. I must find the whistle.
 There he is and I cannot move any further. I try to wag my tail in greeting but there is ice covering my fur. I lay down and waited.
 I heard my owner greet me. Is that a choked sob I detect in his voice?
 I feel him lift me and carry me from the river through the wooded trail to the bonfire. Welcome heat. Then he lifts me into the truck. Warmth.
 When we arrived home he carried me into the house and placed me on my mat in the kitchen. All the children were hugging and petting me.
 The ice covering my fur was melting. I could feel my muscles again.
 As I began to drift into a sleep I could hear my owner talking.:
 "I waited 10 minutes after whistling then I decided to go looking for him. The moon was so bright it was like daylight. You could see clearly without a lantern. I climbed a hill and could look down and see that the river was open in one spot. I wondered if he could have fallen through the ice and decided to head to that spot in the river. I kept whistling and then suddenly he burst out of the bush beside the river and laid down waiting for me to arrive."
 I spent 3 days recovering. I was hand fed. I was carried outside for relief. I was pampered by the children.
 And I was a wiser dog. A much wiser dog.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT

Thanks to all who contributed to our 1ST WINTER STORIES CONTEST.



Watch for our SUMMER STORIES CONTEST in early summer!

WINTER SURVIVAL STORIES

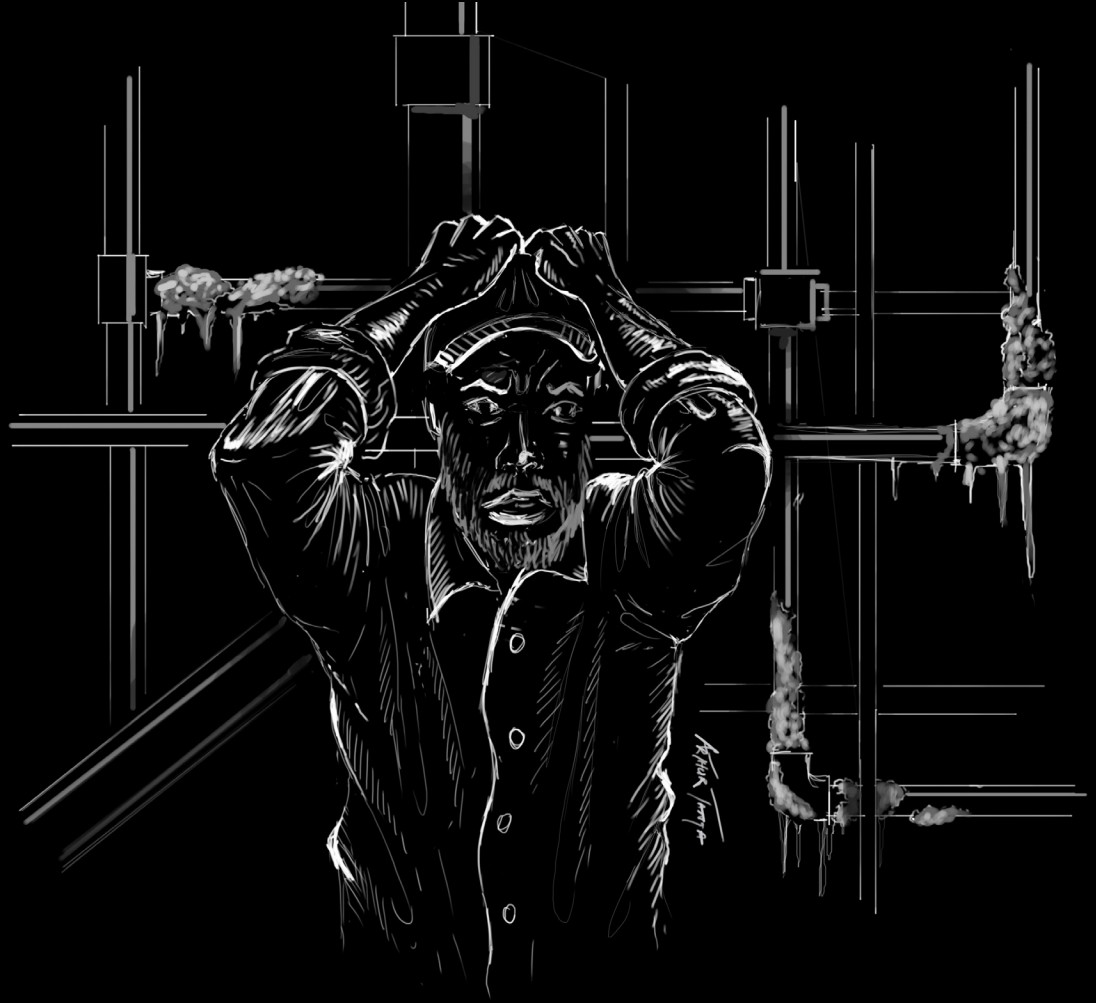
WINTER IN THE WILDERNESS

By Nick Hunter

When you see the words “Winter Survival,” you conjure up images in your mind of Ranulph Fiennes walking across the Antarctic or mountain men and women spending months trapped in sub-zero temperatures. As I sit here, racking my brain about all the many winter adventures I have been on and deciding which would be the most worthy of writing about, the one that would guarantee me a place in the winter survival hall of fame, it has dawned on me that not one compares to the struggles of daily winter life we faced here in our cabin when we arrived in 2017. I could tell you tales of trudging through waist deep snow and camping on -30 degree nights with makeshift shelters but all would fall short of our first winter in Dome Creek. We moved here in July of 2017 full of excitement for our new cabin life, our very own piece of the Canadian wilderness. I knew winter could be cold here so I started bringing in firewood almost as soon as we arrived. Having filled the woodshed, I was sure we would be able to get through our first winter. Mother Nature had different ideas!

The burst pipes in the basement should have been a good indication that our cabin wasn't insulated quite as well as it should have been, but I put this down to it having sat empty for the last four years. As soon as I lit the fire I thought it would warm the place up a treat, or so I thought. What actually transpired was that if the outside temperature dropped below -20, then anything more than 15 feet from the fire that had anything to do with water froze almost immediately: water pipes, washing machine and even my water filter system. Of course, there was always a first time for each different appliance freezing and with that would begin my search for said problem.

I awoke one Friday to no running water. My first thought was that a pipe had frozen in the basement. I went to investigate and after 30 minutes I came to the conclusion that the well must be the issue. I wrapped myself in multiple layers and headed outside to the well. After inspecting it, I eventually worked out that the pressure switch had frozen shut. I threw my ladder down the well and climbed into the watery depths. I stripped the pressure switch and with lighter in hand melted all the frozen parts. I put it back together and presto, it worked. Problem solved. Not quite; I should have known things are never quite that simple for me. When I returned to the house there was a rather large puddle of water in the basement. This puddle of course was coming from behind one of the only areas that had been dry walled. After several minutes of head scratching and hoping I could rectify the issue without removing the wall, I reluctantly started to dismantle the panel, very delicately with a hammer. With the

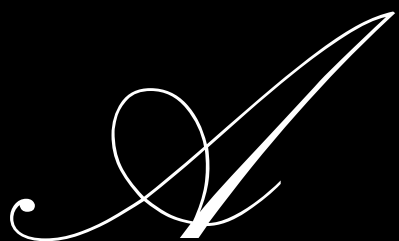


wall removed and the pipework exposed, it became apparent to me that the soakaway pipe coming off the bathroom toilet had frozen and split at one of the joints. This was confirmed when I heard the toilet flushing upstairs and water began to spray all over me. I was a little frustrated. Some might say I was even grumpy. Anyway, I patched up the joint nonetheless and then very cleverly poured hot water down the pipe until I heard the ice blockage clear. Problem two solved. Onto the next one, which I discovered when attempting to use the washing machine. One thing I have found whilst living here is that if the water stops running and I turn it on again, then the first minute or so the water comes out looking rather rusty. I think this is due to a high iron content in the water and the filter being backflushed. With this knowledge, I decided that I would run the washing machine empty to begin with to clear the crappy water out of the pipes. I set the machine to a quick wash, pressed the start button, and nothing happened. Very quickly I discovered the water intake pipes that connect to the washing machine had frozen. I thawed them out and again hit the start button, and it fired into life. At this point I went back upstairs, as I needed a very well-deserved cup of tea. Having calmed my nerves

and feeling ready to take on the washing pile in the laundry room, I again ventured into the basement to begin the washing. Only to discover that the washing cycle hadn't completed. It was still full of water and making funny noises. I realized that the discharge pipe was frozen. I emptied the machine of water by hand with a jug, then refilled it with hot water which unblocked the discharge pipe. I'm wishing at this point I had checked the soakaway pipe that the washing machine empties out into but alas that is hindsight. Instead what can only be described as an indoor fountain began to erupt, covering me and everything in the laundry room in water. The joys of living in the “great white north.”

You have to remember, due to the cold, the fire had been chewing through wood at an alarming rate and it was the beginning of January when we ran out of wood completely. This is when my daily wood finding missions began. I had absolutely no machinery, so this was all done by hand, trudging through waist-deep snow on an almost daily basis.

This to me sums up true winter survival here in Canada and probably one that many can relate to. Here we are in the middle of our 3rd winter, and I can't wait to see what Mother Nature throws at us this time.



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WINTER SURVIVAL STORIES

WINTER OF '65

By Grace Michaud



This morning as dad was preparing to leave the house for his daily chore, I asked if I could join him. "Most certainly," was his reply. "But make sure you dress warm, it's mighty cold out there!" I agreed and was very excited to be able to accompany him. As this involved starting the International, also known to us as the old corn binder, which dad had already been prepping by putting a pan of hot embers under the motor, which was wrapped with a large canvas to keep the heat in and later to try and start it. As he left the house I continued dressing. With my tights, undershirt, warm sweater and pants already on I decided to put on an extra pair of pants and socks just for safe measure. Next my warm coat, scarf, toque, boots and mittens, I was now ready for a little adventure.

Our cows were wintering at the west farm which was about five miles from home. As I heard the truck start, I knew it would be a few minutes before he got the tarp put away and for the truck to warm up. He returned to the house with ash pan in hand and announced to Mom that we should be back for lunch and not to worry. I scurried on behind him excited to tag along. I knew what was in store for me at the other end: I got to go for a sleigh ride! Not thinking that once we were out of the truck there was no heat whatsoever until dad had the fire lit in the old shack. But even then there was not much heat as everything was so cold. As he got the fire going I went out to get a pail of snow to put on the stove to melt. Stoking the fire up well out to the little barn we went to harness up the horses. He usually always fed his horses before putting them to work, but today they were only able to eat while he harnesses them. They would have plenty of time to eat when their job was done.

Once the horses were harnessed and hooked to the sleigh off to the field, we went to get a load of hay from the stacks that had been left there after haying was done. These stacks had been formed during the summer by dad and us kids. Already I was getting

cold so dad suggested I run behind a bit. The horses trudged through the deep snow and I tried running in the tracks, with a lot of difficulty. We finally arrived and dad pulled up close to the stack as possible, only having one fork to handle the hay he suggested I trample the hay as he forked it onto the sleigh. This in turn helped to warm me up somewhat. As our load was completed, I decided to again run behind the sleigh until I was too tired. Calling out, "daaaad!" He stopped the team and tied the reins to the post, walked in the loose hay to the back of the load, knelt down and with an outreached hand called out, "Over here, Grace!"

Noticing him, I stretched out my arm, he reached it and pulled me up onto the load. I followed him to the front where he motioned me to sit right next to him, in the coziness of the hay and the sweet smell of alfalfa. Dad removed his mittens, which were thick wool mitts, inside of leather ones, and he suggested we exchange mittens. What a magical moment as I slipped my cold hands into these huge mitts that contained so much heat. The magnitude of it didn't only warm my hands it also warmed the rest of my body, and especially my heart. As we sat next to each other on this large load of hay, the horses trudging through the snow, their harnesses rattling, the sleigh runners squeaking on the crisp snow and noticing how beautiful the glittering blanket of snow appeared in the sunlight, all I felt was sheer happiness and joy for having the opportunity to spend quality time with my dad.

Once we arrived to the yard we again exchanged mittens and seeing the smoke billowing from the chimney, I knew the snow would have melted and I'd have hot water to make myself a hot cup of chicken in a mug to warm my insides while dad finished up with the chores.

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WINTER SURVIVAL STORIES

PROVIDENCE OR COINCIDENCE?

By Don & Adella Gordon

This story is about an experience we, Don and Adella Gordon of McBride, had about 60 years ago. We were both in our teens then and had been dating about three months, when my mom invited us to visit her. Of course, I wanted her to meet my beautiful little blonde. Mom lived near Lytton, so to make the trip a bit of an adventure. We decided to take the train to Valemount rather than drive. Although it was getting later in the fall, the weather was quite mild, for Della remembers wearing a skirt.

As we were waiting in my car for the train to arrive, the motor starting knocking, so I realized we would have to find another way home when we returned. We had a good visit with Mom and on the way back I found a fellow who was on his way back to work at Lammings Mills, the same place we were from. He had left his vehicle - a yellow Studebaker pickup - at Valemount and graciously offered us a ride back with him. We arrived back in Valemount early Sunday morning facing a drastic change in weather. Winter had arrived with close to two feet of snow and 20 below temperature. Our friend got his pickup going and we started out. There was only one set of tracks

in the fresh snow, and we soon discovered that in order to keep from being pulled toward a ditch we needed to stay in those tracks. Our friend had good stories to tell, and while sharing stories the pickup kept veering to the ditches. We both tried respectfully to caution him to be more careful. We hadn't gone far, when suddenly we found ourselves in the ditch practically buried in snow. A quick search turned up matches and some lunch paper. Looking around, after fighting my way back up to the road, I saw,, hardly believing my eyes, a big spruce tree with a lot of dry limbs at the bottom, near the edge of a field, just across the road from me. It didn't take long to get the fire going, and help Della over to it.

It was about an hour and a half before a logger came along and pulled the pickup back on the road. When we were ready to leave, Della asked our friend if I could drive. He consented, and we made it safely home. Were, where my car motor started knocking, to the big spruce with the dry limbs just coincidences? We don't think so. We believe they were all providences of a Loving God taking care of His kids which He has continued to do many times since.



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