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Virginia on my Mind *The Four Basic Rules of Event Planning*

Learn to Survive in the Wild!

BY TRICIA PEARSALL

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This past weekend, I participated in a Wilderness First Aid course taught by Matt Rosefsky, a Wilderness EMT and SOLO certified instructor from Charlottesville. And I can't stop thinking about the sheer enormity of great information we received, trying to

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review acronyms for assessment and proper procedure and continue digesting the anatomical review and emergency skills and practices we learned.

I had taken a Wilderness First Aid course some 10-12 years ago, but it in no way measured up to this 17-hour immersion. First of all, the promise of the experience comes with the instructor, and Matt's a gem. I'd expected sort of a military leftover, backcountry know-it-all and was completely sucked into the course delivery by this genial, unassuming giant of wilderness expertise at maybe 5'8".

As one who glazes over and begins to nod after an hour or so, I never once zoned out. His instruction was fast-paced, no-nonsense, but patient, with few digressions, only a couple of valuable "war stories", and given with the assumption that participants came with a certain mastery of backcountry skills. Classroom instruction was broken up multiple times throughout each day with outdoor emergency scenarios to test patient and caregiver.

Folks come from upper New York State, Vermont, Maryland, DC, all parts of Virginia, from college students to social security recipients; we were runners, backpackers, cavers, climbers, teachers, camp instructors, wilderness leaders, and disaster technicians. Thanks to Blue Ridge Mountain Sports (local BRMS manager, Randy McMunn took the class as well) sponsorship, the course was more than reasonably priced. BRMS even gave 10% of their proceeds to the James River Outdoor Coalition. And we all 'graduated' Wilderness First Aid certified. For about a 1/3rd of the group, this course was recertification for Advanced Wilderness First Aid. Most of those had taken the two-week course at SOLO's home campus in Conway, New Hampshire.

What is SOLO and why is this so important? SOLO stands for Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities and it's the oldest continuously operating school of wilderness medicine in the world. Since its inception in the '70's, SOLO is the wilderness standard and offers hundreds of courses from WFA to Advanced Wilderness EMT to Winter Medicine and Survival all over the US from New Hampshire to Colorado to Washington and abroad in Africa and Nepal.

Importance? Accidents happen in the wilderness and 911-type urban response is often hours and even days away. This course gives classroom and hands-on instruction in basic skills of: Response and Assessment, Musculoskeletal Injuries, Environmental Emergencies, Survival Skills, Soft Tissue Injuries, and Medical Emergencies. Full list below. It's a necessary opportunity for anyone who spends time outdoors from recreation to study to job... and I think a must for backcountry trip leaders and those who work with kids in such environs.

For three days last fall I hiked out of Nepal's Manaslu Valley in tandem with two members of a trekking staff carrying a young cook who had fallen some 60-feet and badly broken his lower leg. I was blown away by how precise and secure the leg had been splinted. Those guys knew exactly what to do and how to care for their patient. I ended up catching a ride with them to Kathmandu where the urban medical system broke down for lack of doctors on duty, but the trekking staff, local Nepalis, had done their job. They had exhibited excellent wilderness first aid training...maybe even a SOLO course.

What is probably just as important, I feel confident, at least for the moment, in walking up to someone in need along the trail and saying "I'm certified in WFA I'm here to help you," assessing the situation and moving forward. It's a humbling, but empowering experience. Because of continuous evaluation, updates and revisions made in backcountry emergency procedures and approaches, even urban medicine has benefited from these practices and implemented technique changes.

More classes are scheduled around the state this spring and next fall or have your group **arrange a class**. I recommend this for everyone.

Some of the Topics Addressed:

Anatomy of a Wilderness Crisis

Anatomy of the Musculoskeletal System

Asthma

Backcountry Essentials

Cold-Related Injuries

Environmental Emergencies & Survival Skills (including lightning)

Heat-Related Injuries

Medical Emergencies & Critical Care

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