

Lost in the Woods

14-year-old Matt Long has always loved spending time in the forest. He loved hiking and camping. He loved cooking food over a campfire. After what happened this past weekend, however, Matt might not be so ready to get back into the woods any time soon.

Matt Long spent a long, cold night lost in the woods.

Matt and a group of friends from school had decided that hiking and camping would be a great way to spend the weekend. They got three of the boys' fathers and one high-school age older brother to come with them. The group of twelve set off early Saturday morning.

On the drive up, the boys decided to use a buddy system. They thought this would help make sure that everyone stayed together. Each boy paired up with a friend. They promised each other they would stick together so no one would be alone or get lost. "We tried to make plans to have a fun, safe trip," explained Doug Allen, father of one of the boys.

Matt's buddy was his best friend, Bryan Nichols. Bryan's dad, Greg, was there too.

The group hiked for two hours in the morning. Then found a spot by the water where they could eat lunch and then go swimming. "We were climbing around on some rocks and through some bushes by the water. Bryan suddenly started yelling and waving his arms around like crazy," said Matt. A bee had stung Bryan on the arm.

"Bryan had never been stung before. His mom is really allergic to bee stings, so I was worried,"

explained Bryan's dad. Bryan and his dad decided to hike back down to the car and head back to town. They wanted to be closer to a doctor in case Bryan had an allergic reaction and needed medical attention.



The rest of the group spent the afternoon swimming. Then finished the day with a campfire.

The group set up tents, with each pair of "buddies" sharing a tent. With Bryan gone, Matt was on his own. But he was comfortable with that.

Sometime during the night, however, Matt woke up and left the tent. "I had to go to the bathroom," Matt explained. He's not sure what time it was. "I think everyone else was asleep. It was dark, but there were a lot of stars. The moonlight was pretty bright."

Matt explained, "I walked back onto the trail a ways." The moonlight was bright enough that he wanted to find a darker place in the trees for some privacy. "The moonlight in the trees made these really cool shadows. I think I walked for a little while just looking around."

At some point, Matt stepped off the trail and back into the trees. "I stepped around tree and tripped on a root. I fell. But instead of hitting

the ground and stopping, I rolled and just kept on falling.”

Matt didn’t realize it at the time, but he fell 75 feet down a hill into a dry creek bed. He was knocked unconscious by the fall.

“When I woke up, the sun was just starting to come up. I was so cold. I was so tired. I didn’t want to wake up. I tried to pull my sweatshirt down over my legs. That’s when I noticed how much my arm hurt.”

Matt’s arm was twisted under his body. The weight of his body had held it steady all night. The cold ground had made it numb. But after he rolled over, he felt his arm start throbbing painfully.

Back at the campground, the others were waking up. They soon noticed that Matt was gone.

“We notified the sheriff’s office immediately,” said Doug Allen. “We had no idea how long Matt had been gone. We couldn’t see him anywhere close to camp.”

Within an hour, two teams of rescuers were searching the woods around the campsite.

Matt was working his way through the woods as well. “I was too cold and hurting too much to sleep anymore. I started walking. I didn’t know where I was. I decided that since I’d fallen down, I should start by climbing back up.”

The hill was steep, so he climbed at an angle. He didn’t know that was moving further away from the campsite and the people looking for him.

At 10:30am, two rescuers walking down the trail saw a boy walking back toward them. Matt had found his way back to the trail. It had

taken him several hours to do it. His arms, legs and face were covered in scratches and bruises. His arm was broken just below the wrist.

“Matt was extremely lucky to not have been hurt more seriously,” said one of the rescue team members. “And he was lucky to make it back to the trail.” Rescue teams generally recommend that someone who is lost stay in one place. “It’s usually much easier to find someone if they aren’t moving around. Also, staying in one place conserves energy. This means you’ll be okay for a little longer without food and water.”

The best recommendation is simply to stick with a buddy. “Walking alone in the woods, especially at night, is never a good idea.”