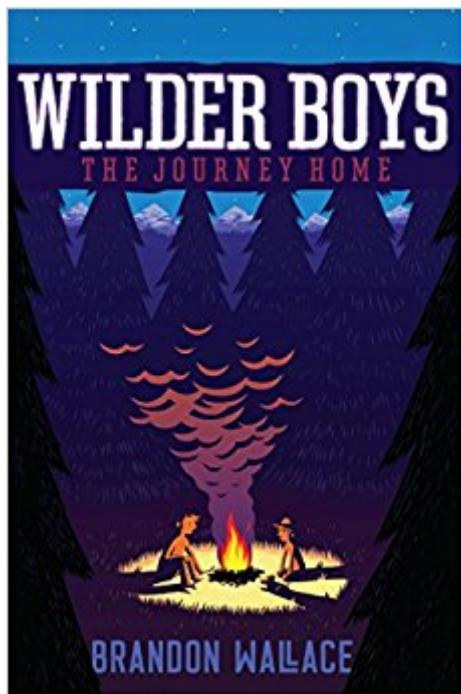


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The Journey Home (Wilder Boys)



Synopsis

Two brothers must rely on all their wilderness skills to survive their journey home after reuniting with their father and living off the grid in the second adventure of the Wilder Boys series. At the start of the summer, Jake and Taylor Wilder set out on the adventure of a lifetime. After seeing their mother loaded into an ambulance because of Bull, her terrifying boyfriend, the boys know they are no longer safe. So they go in search of their father, who has been living off the grid in Wyoming. After jumping trains, hitching a ride with a truck driver, and hiding in the luggage compartment of a tour bus, the boys finally find him in Grand Teton National Park. Just as the boys are getting used to their father's lifestyle and his "my way is the only way" attitude, they learn that their mother is still alive. But if the brothers don't give back the money they took from Bull last year, she could be taken away from them for good. Convinced that their father isn't going to help, the Wilder boys set out on their own again. It's a long way from Wyoming to Pittsburgh, and with winter approaching there will be new challenges. But they have to get back. Will the brothers be able to make it back to their mother before it's too late?

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0670 (What's this?)

Series: Wilder Boys

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Aladdin (January 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1481432672

ISBN-13: 978-1481432672

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #444,407 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #62 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Runaways #953 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Friendship, Social Skills & School Life > Boys & Men #1683 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Siblings

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Trekking solo across the remotest corners of Wyoming and Montana as a young man, Brandon Wallace learned how to survive the hard way in the harshest conditions nature could throw at him. Having spent the subsequent two decades as a trail leader, passing on his knowledge to a generation of budding adventurers, he turned his hand to fictionalizing his experiences, and the Wilder Boys series was born.

The Journey Home 1 Jake Wilder moved through the dense forest, making as little noise as he could. His breath steamed in the shafts of afternoon light slanting down through the trees. The chill in the air was like the hunger in his stomach; gnawing, but bearable. Just about. A thought flashed through his mind: I used to be able to pick up a burger and fries for a few bucks. He closed his eyes. Images of golden fries and neon-red ketchup surfaced in his memory, and the knot of hunger tightened. Sometimes it hurt to have left all that behind. Get a grip, he told himself. Focus on the hunt. He flicked his eyes open again and took a breath. The beauty of the forest all around him was unlike anything he had seen back home in Pennsylvania. This high in the Tetons, the aspen leaves had already begun to shift from summer green to autumn gold. But the birdsong that had brought the forest to life over the summer had disappeared; almost all the birds had flown south. The forest had a haunted, silent feel now, like an abandoned house. There was still life here, though, if you knew where to look for it. Jake paused and dropped down to squat on his haunches, looking at the fresh rabbit droppings that littered the forest floor. There were still plenty of rabbits for the taking. The trick, of course, was knowing how. . . . Jake made his way to the spot he'd picked out several days before, the entrance to a burrow near the edge of the forest. The two pegs he'd driven into the ground were still there. Working quickly, he fitted a small cross branch into two sockets cut into the pegs. Dangling from the cross branch was a loop of cord tied with a slipknot that would tighten around an animal's neck. Now for the trap, Jake thought. He pulled his dark hair back out of his eyes and bent a nearby sapling down toward the ground. He tied the cross branch to it with a piece of string. The crossbar strained with tension but didn't slip loose from its sockets. But if anything nudged it like a rabbit, it would pop free and whip upward with lethal force. Satisfied, Jake crept back through the foliage and sat down on a log. "And now," he whispered to himself, "we wait." Jake picked at a scab on his hand and let his thoughts wander back to his old life. He and his younger brother, Taylor, had lived a normal-enough life back in Pittsburgh. That was, until his mom's brutal boyfriend, Bull, had beaten her and threatened them. Convinced that their mother was dead, they

knew they had to get away, to a place where Bull couldn't reach them. So they'd taken Bull's money and struck out for Wyoming, in the crazy hope of finding the father they barely remembered. But Bull had followed them, desperate to get his money back and to silence the boys permanently. He'd chased them across half the country, all the way up into the mountains, where their dad, Abe, was living. Jake shivered as he remembered the day when Abe had fought like a grizzly to protect the boys. If their dad hadn't shown up when he had, the boys would have been dead meat. Instead, it was Bull who had died, plunging over a mountain waterfall. Jake tried to feel sorry for the man, but it was difficult after everything that had happened. A flicker of movement in the corner of his eye snapped Jake back to reality. He quickly turned his head and trained his sight on the burrow to see the furry brown head of a mountain cottontail emerge. Even from a distance Jake could see the rabbit's ears twitch, trying to sense danger. Jake continued to breathe slowly and steadily, not moving an inch. The rabbit seemed to think it was safe. It came all the way out of the burrow. It again sniffed the air and studied the forest in all directions. Jake held his breath. Come on, Mr. Rabbit . . . keep going. As Jake watched, the rabbit hopped along the path. Jake could feel his muscles tense as the animal's head got caught in the snare's loop and pulled the cross branch free of the pegs. Zing! The sapling sprang instantly upward, jerking the rabbit into the air by its neck. Heart thundering, Jake leaped to his feet and raced forward. "Got you!" he cried. Adrenaline washed through him. The rabbit was hanging, limp, not struggling—a clean kill. He undid the noose and excitedly took his catch. He peered into the rabbit's dead eyes, which only moments ago had gleamed as they'd looked around for danger. Before uncertainty could creep through him, he reassured himself. I'm only doing it to survive. Out here Jake could see the truth of what killing to live really meant, and he never took an animal's life for granted. He carefully placed the rabbit in his pack and broke down the trap, and then set off back toward his dad's cabin, pride washing through him. As he emerged from the forest into a small clearing, Jake found his dad and brother sitting around the fire pit outside the cabin. Warm flames crackled in the pit, and the smell of campfire smoke filled the air. "Hey, buddy! There you are." Abe sat in the shadow of a simple wooden dwelling, tending the campfire. Taylor sat in a growing patch of white shavings, busy whittling on a branch with a hunting knife. "Hey, Dad!" Jake called back. He hadn't known what to expect when they'd first arrived in the wilderness. He'd thought maybe they'd be making their clothes from skins and hunting or foraging for all their food. But although Abe lived off the land as much as possible, he wasn't a hermit; he was a park ranger. He was allowed to live in his little cabin

as part of his job—keeping an eye out for forest fires, monitoring wildlife, and keeping trails clear. The boys' Jack Russell terrier, Cody, raced over to greet Jake. "Hey, boy!" Jake squatted down and affectionately tussled with the dog, letting Cody wriggle and squirm through his arms. "You okay?" Abe asked. "You were gone awhile." "Wanted to work on my trapping skills." Abe nodded, his weather-beaten face wrinkling with good humor. "Good idea." Taylor paused in his whittling, his green eyes flashing anxiously up at Jake. "How'd it go?" Jake straightened up and stepped over to the fire, warming his hands above the flames. Then, unable to suppress a smile, he opened his pack and pulled out the dead rabbit. Cody raised his nose in the air, circling Jake, trying to catch the rabbit's scent. Taylor looked stunned for a second, and then a smile spread across his face. "Way to go!" he cried. "Thanks, Bro!" Jake laughed, pulling the rabbit away from the eager dog. Abe grinned at Jake. "Looks like all that hard work paid off." "Thanks, Dad," Jake said, and grinned. He looked into the flames. Being back with their dad after so many years was great—he'd taught them so much since they'd been here. Not just the normal school subjects but all about the wilderness, which he knew like the back of his hand. Taylor caught the look on Jake's face and laughed. "You do know we'll need more than one rabbit to get through the winter, right?" "Of course I know that!" Jake snapped back. Way to ruin the moment, Taylor. "Leave him alone, Taylor," Abe said. "Winter's nothing to joke about. My first winter in this place nearly killed me." That explains a lot, Jake thought. Their dad was preparing for winter as if he were readying a castle for a coming siege. In fact, the thought of winter was beginning to scare Jake. Abe seemed to sense Jake's discomfort. He reached for his guitar and plucked a few long, melancholy notes that reminded Jake of wolves howling in the distance. "Did I ever tell you boys about that first winter?" Jake and Taylor shook their heads. "Well then, listen up." Taylor hunkered down beside his dad to listen, wrapping Cody under one arm. Jake sat on a stump and warmed his hands by the fire. On the horizon the sun was setting and the dark was already drawing in. "I'd been out hunting all day long. Just me, all alone in the cold, with a sack of dead rabbits," he began. "It got dark real quick, and I should have headed for home right away, but I got greedy. I had one more rabbit in my sights, a big, fat one. He was pure white, like the spirit of winter." "Did you catch him?" Taylor asked. "Afraid not, buddy. He got away, but not before he'd led me deep into the woods. I was totally lost." Abe plucked a

whap-whap-waaa sad set of chords that made the boys laugh. "It seems funny now," he continued, "but back then I was scared to death. Especially when I figured out I wasn't alone. There were eyes watching between the trees. Hungry eyes." "Wolves?" Taylor gasped. "A whole pack of them," Abe said, his eyes flashing. "The leader was a gray, one-eyed brute. They wanted the rabbits I was bringing home. And I knew that once they were done eating them, they'd start on me." Jake leaned forward, listening hard. "But then I found it: Polaris, the North Star," their dad continued, pointing up at the darkening sky. "Right there at the tip of the Little Dipper's handle." "Then what?" Jake asked. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Taylor stand up and rummage around in his pocket. Jake was about to ask what Taylor was up to, when his dad fixed him tight with his stare. "That star guided me right out of those woods. I was bruised and shook up, but thankfully I'd managed to lose the wolves. Once I figured out which way was north, I headed up to the hills to build a snow house and . . ." As Abe went on talking, Taylor crept up behind him and pulled out the wooden carving he'd been working on earlier. "Raargh!" he yelled, waving the carving in his dad's face. It was a miniature wolf with gaping jaws. "Argh!" Abe cried, caught off guard. He let a broad grin arc across his bearded face. "You nearly had me!" He dropped his guitar and wrestled Taylor and his wolf to the ground. Jake just laughed. "You didn't escape those wolves after all. . ." "This one's much fiercer than a wolf," Abe said, and chuckled, letting go of Taylor. "It's coming for you next, Jake," Taylor growled, brandishing the carving in his brother's face. Jake added another log to the campfire and sat back, in mock fright. "You know, Jake," Abe said, turning back to winter. "That rabbit of yours couldn't have come at a better time." "What do you mean?" Taylor asked. Abe poured him a mug of hot broth from his flask. "Thanksgiving's just a few weeks away, and the snows could come any day now. We need to eat well tonight, because tomorrow we're heading into town for the last of our supplies." Jake laughed. "Supplies? I thought we had everything we needed right here." Abe patted him on the shoulder. "There are some needs nature can't provide. Unfortunately, we can't tap a tree for kerosene, or dig up knife blades. Wyoming winters can be harsh. You know how long we might get snowed in for up here?" Jake thought it over. "Six weeks?" he said, fearing the worst. It would be tough, but he figured they could survive being cut off from the world for that long. "Sorry, Jake," Abe sighed, his brows

knitting together. It's more like six months.

Great book! My students in a self contained middle school classroom loved it and are begging for more! I as the teacher love it as well. Thank you for writing this!

I have 10 & 11 yr old boys, who both read this book and its prequel. Both stated that it was one of those books they were sorry had to end, and want to know if and when there will be another in the series. They loved it!

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