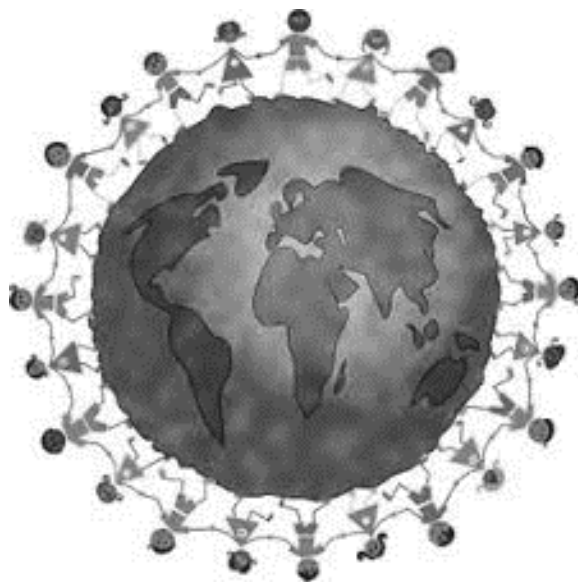


Stories from around the world

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A Boy Made of Wood

Geppetto's workshop

Long ago in Italy there lived an old clock-maker named Geppetto. *Tick-tock-tick-tock* went all the clocks in his shop. When he worked, Geppetto felt happy. But when he rested, a sad feeling came over him. "Ah!" he would think. "All my life I have had no child to call my own!" So, one day Geppetto carved a puppet from wood in the shape of a boy.

The arms and legs could move. He cut and sewed a little outfit for the puppet, as if it were a real boy. "I will call you Pinocchio," said Geppetto. That night, as Geppetto was getting ready for bed, he saw a big star out of the window. Geppetto looked out the window at the twinkling star.

"If I could make one wish, it would be that I could have a real boy of my own." But of course, he knew that was not possible.

That night, Geppetto dreamed that the puppet changed into a real boy that could walk and talk. But before the puppet could become a real boy, he would have to prove that he could be brave and true.

In his dream Geppetto went into the workshop to look at the wooden puppet, but he was in for a big surprise.

"Here I am, Father!" said Pinocchio.

Geppetto looked around. "What? You can talk?"

"Yes! I am Pinocchio, your boy!"

"How can this be?" said Geppetto. He rushed over to the puppet and held the wooden puppet in his arms. "Pinocchio, my son!" he said with great happiness.



Off to School

One day Pinocchio said, "I want to go to school, like other boys."

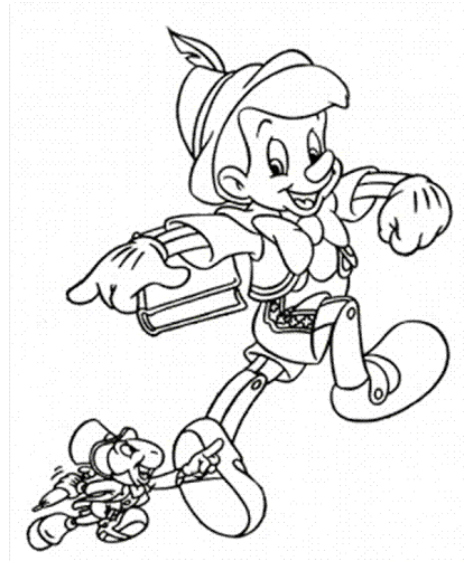
"Of course," said Geppetto. But he did not have the money to buy schoolbooks.

Later that day, Geppetto came back home with schoolbooks. "Now you can go to school," he said.

"But Father, where is your warm coat?"

With a wave of his hand Geppetto said, "There's no need to worry about that. What matters is that you will go to school tomorrow!" He did not want Pinocchio to know he had sold his warm coat to buy the schoolbooks.

The next morning, Pinocchio said good-bye to Geppetto. He skipped along the path to school, humming as he went. A friendly cricket followed him. The cricket would go with Pinocchio everywhere he went.



Coming up to them on the path was a fox and a cat.

"And where are you going on this fine day?" said the fox.

"I am going to school!" said Pinocchio.

"On such a fine day as this?" said the fox. "It is too nice to be stuck inside school! You should come with us, to the fair. Listen to me. Anything you need to know, you can learn at the fair. You don't need to go to school.

"Really?" said Pinocchio.

"Yes, of course," said the fox.

"Pinocchio!" said the cricket. "He does not know what he is talking about!"

The fox covered the cricket with his hat. No one could hear the little fellow as the cricket tried to call out, "Pinocchio, do not listen to him!"

"Okay!" said Pinocchio to the fox. "Let's go to the fair!" And off they went.

The Fair

What an amazing fair it was! By the gate was a man dressed in white. He called out, "Come in, come in! Right this way! Get your tickets here!"

With a sad look Pinocchio said to the fox and cat, "I do not have any tickets."

A man was selling old things at a table near the gate. He called, "Hey, you! Sell me those new schoolbooks of yours! That is how you can get money for tickets."

The fair was so bright and colorful and exciting. Pinocchio could not resist selling his school books for tickets.

"No, Pinocchio, stop!" called the cricket, who finally got out from under the fox's hat. But Pinocchio, the fox and the cat did not hear him. They were already inside the fair.

The man who ran the fair

On a stage was a puppet show! "I am a puppet, too!" said Pinocchio. "I can dance like that!" He jumped right onto the stage and started to dance with the other puppets.

"Look at that new puppet!" someone called. "It has no strings!"

"No strings?" said another. "Amazing!"

Everyone laughed and laughed. They threw coins on the stage.

The man who ran the fair saw coins fly onto the stage. "Well, now!" he said, thinking carefully, "This puppet with no strings will make me rich!"

The next thing Pinocchio knew, he was picked up and thrown in a birdcage. In the next moment, the door was locked shut.

"Hey, get me out!" called Pinocchio. But the person who had thrown him in just left the room. Only the cricket heard Pinocchio's calls. The cricket ran back and forth, in and out of the birdcage, trying to find a way to free the lock. But he could not unlock it.

"I am stuck!" cried Pinocchio. "How did this happen to me?"

The Nose Grows

Along came a kind lady.

“Please!” said Pinocchio. “Can you help me?”

“Tell me something first,” said the lady. “How did you get inside that cage?”

“Tell her what happened,” said the cricket.

Could he really tell the lady what had happened?
What would she think of him?

“I was robbed,” said Pinocchio.

“Is that right?” said the kind lady with a frown. Pinocchio’s nose began to grow.

“Yes, robbed!” said Pinocchio. “By two mean men – no, four!”

The nose grew more.

“They took my books. They made me come here. And they threw me into this cage!”

His nose grew longer and longer. Until Pinocchio could see nothing in front of his face but one big giant nose.

“Why is my nose so big?” Pinocchio cried out.

“Pinocchio!” said the lady in a stern voice. “You must know what the truth really is.”

“I guess so,” said Pinocchio. “I wanted to come to the fair. I came here with a fox and the cat.”

The nose grew shorter.

“I had to sell my books to get some tickets.”

“Had to?” said the lady.

“I mean, I decided to sell my books to get tickets,” he said.

The nose got shorter still.

“Then someone put me in this cage,” he said.



The nose was back to normal. "Good job, Pinocchio!" said the cricket.

"Well done," said the lady. "Now I will get you out of here."

The lady picked the lock with her hair clip and Pinocchio was out of the cage.

"Now," said the kind lady, "Make sure you do the right thing from now on."
And she was gone.



The Coachman

Pinocchio decided to leave the fair and go back home and go to school. A coachman drove up. "Would you like a ride?" he asked.

"No, thank you," said Pinocchio. "I am going home and then going to school."

"You will ride faster with me," said the coachman to Pinocchio. He said to himself, "He will ride faster all right, but not to where he thinks he is going!"

"Alright," said Pinocchio. "I want to get home and go to school right away!"

When Pinocchio was inside the coach, the coachman said, "Boy, why do you think boys like you go to school?"

"To learn things," said Pinocchio. "And to grow up, I guess. So we can get a job and earn money, and do something that we would really like to do."

"Well," said the coachman, "what if I told you that you could do what you wanted, right now?"

"Right now?"

"Yes! Think of it. No need for books. No need for school. Right now, how would you like to have all the sweets you can eat!"

"All the sweets?"

"Yes. Ice cream, too, of every flavor. You can smoke a cigar and play as much as you like. All this and more, at Pleasure Island."

"Pleasure Island?"

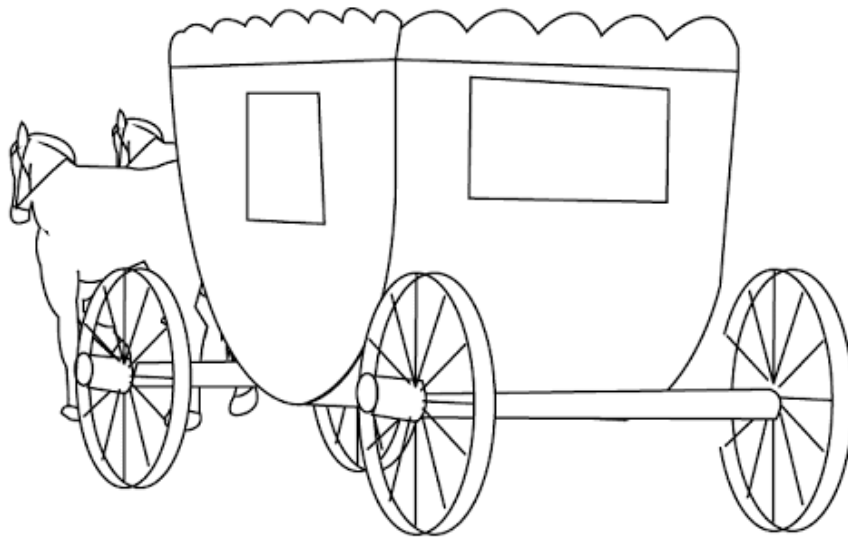
"Best place in the world for boys like you!"

"Don't listen to him, Pinocchio!" shouted the cricket.

"Why wait?" said the coachman. "I know just where Pleasure Island is. This is your lucky day, boy. So what do you say?"

"Let's go there!" said Pinocchio. "I'm going to Pleasure Island!"

"No!" said the cricket, waving his arms in the air.



Pleasure Island

After a while, the coach stopped. A man came up to the coach. "Have you got a boy with you in that coach?" said the man to the coachman.

"Yes," said the coachman. He grabbed Pinocchio and threw him down onto the ground. "He's all yours. Just pay me \$100."

The man paid the money and the coachman drove off.

What could it all mean? But as Pinocchio looked around, he no longer cared. He was on Pleasure Island! Everything the Coachman had told him was true! There were lots of sweets all about and tubs of ice cream in every flavor. Boys like him could eat and eat, and play all day. None of them had to work or clean up. There were even cigars if you wanted one.

But after a few days, something felt strange. "Where did all the boys go?" he asked the cricket.

"All I see now are donkeys," said Pinocchio.

"I must say, there used to be more boys around here," said the cricket.

Just then, one of Pinocchio's ears popped into a donkey ear. Then his other ear popped into a donkey ear, too.

"Oh!" cried the cricket. "What is happening to you?"

"I don't know - HONK!" said Pinocchio.

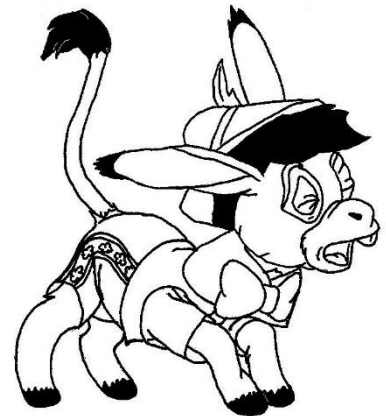
Pinocchio and the cricket saw a line of donkeys led by the man, onto a truck. "Oh, no!" said the cricket.

"Now I understand! Boys get turned into donkeys here. Then the donkeys are sold! Pinocchio, we have to get you out of here, fast - while we still can!"

"Let's go - HONK!" said Pinocchio. His two feet had popped into four.

"Run, quickly!" said the cricket. One good thing about Pinocchio's new four legs was that he could run very fast! Quickly, quickly, they ran out of Pleasure Island. Soon they were at a wharf by the ocean.

"Please sir!" Pinocchio called out to a man by the wharf. "I am looking for an old man named Geppetto. Do you know him? - HONK!"



“Sounds like you are getting a bad cold,” said the man. “Hmm, Geppetto. That’s the old man whose son left one morning and did not come back. He went out on a boat to look for him. No one has seen the poor fellow since.”

“Oh no! This is all my fault – HONK!” said Pinocchio. “I must look for my father!” Pinocchio jumped off of the wharf into the ocean. The cricket jumped in too, close behind.

The Whale

Most of Pinocchio’s body was still made of wood, so he could float on the ocean. The cricket rode on top of Pinocchio. “Father!” Pinocchio called out, paddling the water with his arms. “Father!” but there was no answer.

All Pinocchio could see around him was blue water, everywhere. But then he saw something far away... something that was rushing up to him. It was very big, and coming very fast!

In a moment, a giant whale was upon them. It opened its giant jaws and with one gulp, swallowed Pinocchio and the cricket! Like falling down a waterfall, they landed in the dark belly of the whale.

“Are you okay?” said Pinocchio to the cricket.

“I am fine,” said a voice of an old man.

“Wait a minute,” said Pinocchio. “Father, is that you?”

There was Geppetto!

“Father, Father, it’s me!” said Pinocchio.

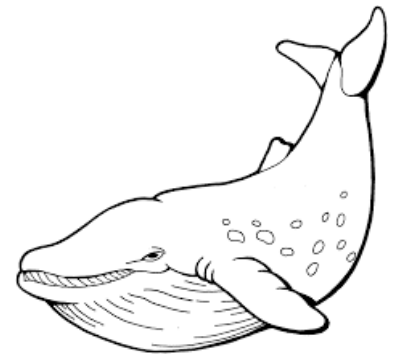
“My son!” said Geppetto.

They hugged in joy.

“Father, let’s tickle the inside of the whale’s tummy and make it cough.”

The whale gave a cough. “Hang on!” said Pinocchio. And then... WHAM!! In one big cough from the whale, Pinocchio, Geppetto and the cricket flew out of the whale’s mouth. They rolled over and over in the waves of the sea, and at last they rolled up onto the shore.

“Pinocchio, where are you?” called Geppetto, getting up from the sand. The cricket was there beside him. But where was Pinocchio?



And then they found him! Pinocchio was face down, his head in a pool of water.

“Pinocchio!”

Were they too late? Geppetto and the cricket cried when they saw Pinocchio, the boy puppet, laying very still in the water. They thought he was dead. They rolled him over, face up.

Pinocchio opened his eyes and sat up. He looked at his soft arms and soft legs.

“Father!” he cried out. “Look! I am a real boy!”

“That you are!” cried Geppetto. “You have proved that you are true, and proved that you are brave.”

Then Geppetto found himself back in bed in his cottage. He woke up. It had all been a dream. He quickly went to the workshop to find Pinocchio. Pinocchio, his little wooden puppet, was still there. Geppetto decided that he would never sell Pinocchio. Geppetto made more puppets, but he kept Pinocchio as his favourite puppet, that he had dreamed about. That dream would always remind him about the importance of being brave and true.



Dick Whittington and his cat

Once upon a time, in small village in England, there was a boy called Dick Whittington who was very sad. His father and mother had died, and he was left all alone in the world. He had no one to look after him and he was very hungry.

He had heard a lot about London, the capital city of England. He had heard that it was a wonderful city where you could pick up gold in the streets, and where everyone was rich and happy. So Dick decided to travel there and become a rich man.

Dick walked for many days, but when he arrived in London there were no streets of gold! Tired and hungry, he fell asleep on the steps of a great house.

The house belonged to a rich businessman, named Mr. Fitzwarren, who found Dick and gave him a job. He was to clean the kitchen and help the cook.

Dick worked very hard and was fairly happy. He had enough to eat and at night he could sleep by the fire. There was a problem though! The cook was very cross, and beat him and made him work very hard; and he was given a little dark place to sleep in. At night, rats ran around the kitchen and kept him awake. They even ran over his bed.

“If only I had a cat!” he thought. “A cat would chase them all away.” Then one day he cleaned a gentleman’s shoes, and the gentleman gave him a coin. Dick went out into the street and there he saw a girl carrying a cat. “Will you sell me your cat?” asked Dick. The girl said ‘yes’ so Dick bought the cat and took it home. After that things were much better. The rats and mice stayed away and Dick grew to love the cat, his only friend.



Then one day Mr. Fitzwarren called his servants together. “I am sending a ship to a faraway country,” he said. “The ship will be filled with things to be sold.” (That was how he made his money.) “Each of you can put something on the ship to sell. Then when the ship comes back you will all get the money.”

The servants were very pleased, and they all had something to send on the ship, all except for Dick. He didn’t have anything to sell.

“Now Dick,” said Mr. Fitzwarren, “haven’t you anything at all to send?”

“No sir,” said Dick. “I only have my cat.”

“Well why not send that then?” said his master.

Dick was very sad to think about sending his dear cat away, but at last he agreed.

He was so lonely when the cat had gone, and the cook was so cross that he could not bear it anymore and he ran away.

After a while he stopped to sit on a stone and rest. There was a church nearby and the bells were ringing. He listened, and the bells seemed to be saying

‘Turn back, Dick Whittington. You will be Mayor of London!’

So Dick went back to the house and stayed there again, and soon Mr. Fitzwarren returned.

“My ship has come back,” he said, and everything on it has been sold. And who do you think has made the most money? It’s Dick! His cat has been sold for all this money.” And he gave Dick a big bag of gold.

Dick was amazed. “But why would anyone pay all that money for just a cat?” he asked.

The ship’s captain told Mr. Fitzwarren the story. “We went to a country in Africa,” he said, “and the king and queen were very pleased to see us. They invited us to dinner. But just as we were starting to eat, in rushed lots of rats and mice, that ate all the food. The king told us of the terrible trouble they were having with these creatures, and they did not know how to get rid of them.”

“I think I can help you,” said the captain, and he sent for Dick’s cat. More food was brought in, and in rushed the rats and mice again, but as soon as the cat saw them, she dashed at them and chased them all away. The king was so pleased and grateful that he bought the cat for a very big sum of money. And it was all for Dick.”

So Dick became a rich man, and began to do business in the city of London. In time he became Sir Richard Whittington, and after that he was made Lord Mayor of London.

About this story: Richard Whittington was a real person, a wealthy business man who became Lord mayor of London, who lived in the 1300s. But this story is probably not true. It is a famous children’s story that has been made up about the real Dick Whittington.

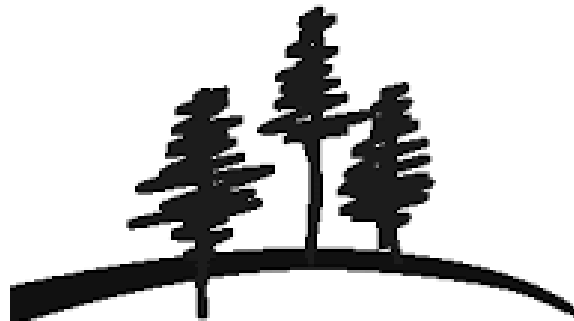


The story of God's trees

This is the re-told story by Helen Frazee-Bower, who was born in the USA in 1896.

Far away on a hillside grew a forest of trees, little and big, old and young, tall and short. The trees were very happy with life just as it was on the hillside. They loved the warm sunlight of summer, the cool rain of spring, the beautiful colours of autumn and the blanket of glistening snow that fell in winter. We know that trees can't talk, but if they could, we can imagine that they sometimes spoke of the future, the things they would like to do and be when they grew up.

In this forest there was a mother tree and her three children.



One said, "You know, I would like to be a baby's cradle when I grow up. I have seen people come into this forest carrying babies in their arms."

The second tree spoke: "That would not please me at all. I want to be something important. I would like to be a great ship, beautiful and strong. I would like to cross many waters and carry cargo of gold."

The third little tree stood off by himself, thinking carefully. "And what would you like to be?" asked Mother Tree? Do you have any dreams for the future?"

"No," said the little tree. "I just want to stand on this hillside and point people to God."

“I could think of nothing better,” said Mother Tree.

Years passed and the trees grew up to be beautiful tall trees. One day men came to the forest and cut down the first tree.



“I wonder if I will be made into a baby’s cradle now,” said the first tree. “I hope so. I have waited so long.”

But the little tree was not made into a baby’s cradle. Instead he was sawn up into pieces of wood that were put together to make an animal’s feeding trough – a manger, in a stable, in the town of Bethlehem.

“I do not like this,” he cried. “This is not what I had planned. I did not want to be put into a dark stable with no one to see me but animals!”

In the same country there were some shepherds in a field, keeping watch over their sheep at night. And suddenly an angel came to them, and a bright light shone all around them. The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news, that will bring joy to all people. Today, in Bethlehem, a baby has been born. He is Jesus Christ the Lord and He will save people from their sins. You will find the baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.” Then suddenly there was a whole host of angels, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace to those who please Him.”



After the angels had gone back to Heaven, the shepherd said to one another, “Let’s go quickly now to Bethlehem, and see what the angel has told us about.”

And when they arrived in Bethlehem, they found Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, the Son of God, lying in a manger.”

“Well,” said the first little tree. This is better than anything I had planned!” And the trees on the hillside clapped their hands because their brother’s dream had come true.

Months passed by, and men came to the forest to cut down the second tree.

“I wonder if I will be made into a great ship now,” he said. “I have waited so long. Perhaps I will do the great things of which I dreamed.”

But the second tree was not made into a great ship. Instead he was made into a tiny fishing boat, owned by a fisherman called Peter of Galilee. The little boat was very unhappy. His owner, Peter was not even a good fisherman. He had been out all night and had not caught a single fish.



The next day the fishing boat was anchored by the shore of Galilee while Peter cleaned his nets. Out from the crowd came a person called Jesus, who came and sat in the little boat and taught people about God. People listened eagerly to what He had to say. When He had finished, He told Peter to launch out into the deep and let down the nets again.

This time, there were so many fish that the nets broke. The little boat knew that he was carrying a wonderful person, who had made this miracle happen.

“This is wonderful,” he said. “This is better than anything I had planned!” And the trees on the hillside clapped their hands because their brother’s dream had come true.



Weeks went by, and men came to the forest to cut down the third little tree. This was the tree that wanted to stand on the hillside and point people to God. He was most unhappy as the axe cut into him. "I do not want to go into the valley," he said. "Why couldn't men leave me alone?"

But the men did not leave the little tree alone. They cut off his branches and cut into his bark. They sawed his wood into a large cross. He knew what this meant, because in his country, bad people were put to death by being hung on a cross.

"This is terrible," he whispered. "They are going to hang someone on me and the person will die. Oh, I never wanted this to happen. I only wanted to point people to God."

One day, outside Jerusalem, a great crowd gathered. There was Jesus, and beside Him was a cross. As they led him away, they forced him to carry the cross until He could carry it no longer. Then a man called Simon carried it for Him. And when they came to the place called Calvary, they nailed Jesus to the cross.



Jesus had done nothing wrong. He did not deserve this treatment, but He allowed His enemies to kill him, because He knew that it was part of His Father's plan. Every one of us has done wrong. This stops us from being a friend of Father God, because God is perfect. But God made a way for us to become friends with Him. Because Jesus loves us so much, He died instead of us. He took the punishment that we deserve. To become a friend of God we can ask Jesus to forgive us for the wrong we have done, and become a follower of Jesus.

If those trees could talk, they would say, "Thank you God, that even though we couldn't see it at the time, your way turned out to be best."

The tree that became the cross said, "This is wonderful. In all my dreams I never thought I would point people to God in this way. This is better than all I planned."

When Jesus is in charge of your life, the things He shows you to do will always be best for you.



Cave rescue

This is the true story of the rescue of thirteen members of a boys' soccer team, who were trapped in a flooded cave in Thailand.

On June 23rd 2018, twelve boys went exploring in Thailand's Chiang Rai province with their football coach. They all found themselves trapped deep inside a cave underneath a mountain.

What happened over those two weeks is a remarkable story of friendship, and human endurance, and shows the lengths some people will go to save someone else's life. Here's how it happened.

It all began with a birthday. On Saturday June 23rd, one of the members of the Wild Boars soccer team turned seventeen. His family had prepared a bright yellow birthday cake in football colours, and several colourfully wrapped presents, at their home in a rural village in Mae Sai district.

When their football practice ended, the boys raced through the rice paddies on their bicycles and up into the hills. They were heading for their favourite spot, the Tham Luang caves. The boys loved exploring the nooks and crannies of the mountain range towering over Mae Sai.

When they reached the entrance of Tham Luang caves, they left their bikes and bags. The team and their coach had often ventured deep into Tham Luang, sometimes as far as 8 km. With excitement, they clambered into the cave with just their torches. They didn't need much else. After all, they were only planning to be there for an hour. However, this time, they would not come out again until two weeks later.

Back at the seventeen-year-olds home, his family began to worry. His birthday cake sat untouched. Where were the Wild Boars?

The caves were popular for exploring, but there were dangers. People had gone missing in Tham Luang before. And once monsoon season starts in July, the caves become extremely dangerous. When water fills the caves, you cannot see under the water because it so muddy. Once the caves flood, it's risky even for experienced divers.

Almost everyone in Mae Sai knows this. So when the parents of the Wild Boars began to worry about their missing boys, they headed straight to the caves. The boys' plans to visit Tham Luang had been discussed in a group chat on a

messaging app with other friends. They found the bikes, the bags, and some football shoes outside. They raised the alarm.

Deep in the caves, the Wild Boars found themselves in trouble. It had been raining for the last few days, and all that water falling on the mountain had to go somewhere. That somewhere was the Tham Luang cave system, which was fast filling up. The boys needed to get out, but instead had no choice but to scramble even deeper into the caves.

The Wild Boars eventually found themselves marooned on a small rocky shelf about 4km from the entrance. Surrounded by darkness, the boys and the coach lost all sense of time. Fear, perhaps even terror, would no doubt have crept in. But they were determined to survive. The group used rocks to dig 5m deeper into the shelf, to create a cavern where they could huddle together and keep warm.

But an extraordinary set of circumstances also worked in their favour. They had no food, but they did have a supply of drinkable water in the form of moisture dripping from the cave walls. It was dark, but they had their torches. There was also enough air for a while, because the porous limestone and cracks in the rocks meant air could come through. They had the right conditions to survive, at least for a little while. And most importantly, the Wild Boars had one another.

Outside the cave entrance, a full-blown rescue operation was quickly unfolding. Authorities called in the Thai Navy Seals, the national police, and other rescue teams. Local volunteers also pitched in to help. Initial investigations found footprints at one of the chambers in the cave, but no other sign the boys were still alive. The Wild Boars were somewhere in the depths of the Tham Luang Caves, but where exactly? And more importantly, how could rescuers get to them?

Exploring the cave system was a challenge. Most of the Navy divers had little cave diving experience, and the heavy rain meant the water level was still rising, flooding chambers and cutting off rescuers from parts of the cave. Engineers desperately tried to pump water out of the cave, but struggled, at least at first.

Rescuers brought whatever equipment they could think of: small water pumps, long pipes, knives and shovels, but much of it was unsuitable. They even tried drilling into the mountainside, desperate to find cracks into the cave system

which they could squeeze into. They also used drones with thermal sensors to try to locate the boys.

While the rescue operations were going on, a small group stood at the mouth of the cave. These were the boys' families, praying for the lives of the boys. The group gradually expanded to include concerned teachers from the schools the Wild Boars attended. Classmates of the Wild Boars held group prayers, sang songs of encouragement into the cave, folded paper cranes, and posted messages of hope on school noticeboards. Village people donated money and hundreds of packages of food to the relatives of the boys and their coach. News of the boys quickly spread all around the world. People all around the world were praying for the boys.

The first international rescuers arrived on Thursday 28 June. These were US air force rescue specialists, and cave divers from the UK, Belgium, Australia, Scandinavia, and many other countries. Some had volunteered, and some were called in by Thai authorities.

Over the next few days, they and the Thai divers would fight a constant battle with the forces of nature. They had to swim against a strong current, and were often forced back by rising floodwaters.

On Sunday July 1st, just over a week after the boys went missing, the rescuers made some progress. They reached a large cavern that would be later called "chamber three". This cavern would serve as a key base for the divers.

The very next day, two British divers, John and Rick, made an incredible discovery. As they continued onwards into the darkness, they found an air pocket. John shone his torch into the air pocket and there was one of the boys, coming down the ledge towards him.

Rick started counting the boys, while John asked: "How many of you?"

"Thirteen!" came the reply in English.

"Thirteen? Brilliant!"

Rick and John couldn't quite believe what they were seeing. "They're all alive!"

The lost Wild Boars had been found. The two divers spent some time with the boys, encouraging them. Then, they left lights with the boys, and promised to return later with food.

Rescuers set to work to figure out how to extract thirteen people, some of whom couldn't swim, from a winding, flooded 4km-long stretch of caves that even experienced divers would struggle with. Time was not on their side because of the heavy rains.

Food stalls were set up. Some were staffed by members of the Thai royal kitchen, serving free drinks, hot noodles, chicken rice, and even ice lollies.

Former Navy Seal diver Saman Gunan was one of many volunteers who had rushed to help in the rescue. On July 6th, while on a routine run to deliver air tanks to the boys, he lost consciousness after running out of air for himself. His dive buddy pulled him out and tried to revive him, but sadly, he died.

The death showed the danger of the rescue mission, and the risks facing the boys. Saman was a fit and healthy diver who had also represented Thailand in triathlons in the Olympics.

There was another thing to worry about too. Despite efforts to replenish the air, oxygen levels in the chamber had fallen to 15%, lower than the usual 21%. Time was running out.

Rescuers worked out three possible options:

1. Training the boys to dive through flooded areas of the cave, - a very dangerous process. so considered a last resort.
2. Pumping water from the cave and waiting for water levels to recede naturally - but this could take up to four months.
3. Finding or drilling alternative passages into the cave.

The divers started practicing with some local boys at a swimming pool, trying to work out how to transport a child safely underwater.

Finally, late on July 6th, rescuers set up an oxygen supply. And in the end the boys communicated with their parents the old-fashioned way - by writing letters. They listed the food they wanted to eat: fried chicken and pork crackling. One even cracked a joke: "Teacher, please don't give us too much homework!"

Sunday July 7th, two weeks had passed since the boys went missing. The Thai authorities announced they were pulling out the boys – now!

Why the snap decision? There had been a break in the heavy rain, giving rescuers a rare opportunity. Locals had also told the Thai Navy Seals that by

around July 10th every year, the Tham Luang cave system would be completely flooded. It was time to launch what would later be described as a "superhuman" rescue effort, one that involved nearly 100 Thai and foreign divers.

The journey out was split into two sections.

The first stage: from the boys' rocky ledge to chamber three. This was the most difficult. Rescuers made their way for hours through pitch dark waters that were extremely cold, feeling their way with guide ropes. At times they had to navigate sections so ridiculously narrow that they could only just about fit a body through. Each boy was given a full-face air mask to ensure they could breathe, and clipped to a diver. Another diver accompanied them. A cylinder was strapped to the front of each child, while a handle was attached to their backs, and they were held face down to ensure water would run away from their faces. At the narrow sections, rescuers had to unstrap their air tanks in order to squeeze through, while also pulling along their precious cargo, their boy.

It would have been terrifying for experienced divers, let alone for children who were not strong swimmers. The boys and the coach were given anti-anxiety medication to relax, to ensure they would not panic.

The second stage: Once they reached chamber three, it was time for the second phase. This took another few hours. Each boy was secured in a stretcher, and carried by a team of at least five men. At one point they had to place the stretcher on a raft and pull it across a chin-high pool of water.

Rescuers had to winch the boys up a steep slope using a pulley system. In some rocky areas they formed a human chain, passing the boys hand to hand, while at others they slid them on top of pipes pumping out water.

One by one, the Wild Boars were brought out of the darkness of Tham Luang. As soon as they were out, they were given oxygen before they were swiftly taken by ambulance to a hospital in Chiang Rai city.

Rescuers took them out in three batches over several days, as they needed time in between to replenish air tanks. But they were cutting it close. By the time the last batch of boys and the coach were out, water levels were starting to rise again, as rapidly as 30cm in one hour.

It was Tuesday July 10th, the day that locals said the cave would become completely flooded. But while the boys were out, there were still rescuers left on the rocky ledge deep inside Tham Luang. These were the Navy SEAL divers and medic who had looked after the Wild Boars, as well as Richard Harris, an Australian cave diving expert and doctor.

They emerged shortly after the last boy was taken out. It was not a moment too soon, as a pump suddenly stopped working. Floodwaters rushed in, sending workers clearing up the site fleeing for their lives.

All around the world, millions of people who had anxiously followed the story celebrated the return of the Wild Boars. Their parents, who had waited so very long to hold their sons again, were not by their side. They were behind a viewing window in the hospital, some sobbing with joy at the sight of their boys.

At the hospital, the boys and coach were put through a series of health checks. Eye shades were a must at first. Their eyes, accustomed to two weeks of darkness, could not bear the light. Hospital authorities said that some had minor lung and eye infections and needed antibiotics. Apart from that, they appeared to be doing OK and all of them recovered.

Eventually, parents were finally allowed to briefly see the boys, although they had to maintain a 2m distance, and put on hospital gowns and masks. At first the boys could only eat small amounts of special food that was easy to digest, but soon they were able to start eating normal food again, after days of craving chocolate and their favourite snacks.

