

Survival at all Costs

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Background

A 13 year old boy traveling to Canada in a single engine bush plane is haunted by the thought of why he's on this plane in the first place. Divorce; the idea of divorce and everything that comes with it like the lawyers, the courtroom, and the unsettling feeling of being shared between parents. Brian, the main character, soon finds himself fighting for his life when the pilot of the small plane suddenly has a heart attack and Brian must take over and attempt to survive a crash landing. After the pilot dies, Brian scrambles to grasp what little knowledge he has on the world.

The author, Gary Paulsen, is best known for his five part series on "Brian's Saga", which begins with the book "Hatchet". This Newbery Honor-winning novel was released in 1986, and has since gained attention for its young adult survival theme. Gary Paulsen began reading at the age of 7, and once he picked up a book, he couldn't put it down until it was complete. He experienced a rougher childhood with divorced parents and the vast majority of his life traveling, and having to split time with his mother, father, and grandmother. He is described as living an adventurous life and thus giving him the outward attitude towards reading and writing. Which has led us to his hit novel "Hatchet".

After the pilot suffers a heart attack, Brian must take over the plane and perform a crash landing. As the radio transmission fades in and out, Brian hears the engine cough and feels the plane viciously nose dive towards the green forest. His stomach tightened as he tried to regain

control of the plane and find a better place to land. All in a flash the plane slammed into the ground and slid towards the pond. Brian had no idea what had happened and slowly regained his bearings and saw that the plane had landed in the pond and was sinking at a rapid pace. He then clawed out of the front window and swam upwards to the surface. Complete silence filled Brian's ears as he crawled onto shore, but he knew there was pain, sharp pain that caused him to fall into the sand and into a deep sleep.

As Brian awoke, he fought to overcome pain, exhaustion, shock and nature. He knew no one was coming for him now, and he had to start planning how he would survive. He assessed what he was left with and what resources he had to help him, his hatchet being his best friend now. He discovers berry's first and explains that the hunger was so intense he could not eat enough if he tried. He struggled for the first few days, but eventually decided to settle himself saying, "crying won't help, crying won't solve any of my issues, it's just a waste of time and won't save me" (Paulsen, pg 56). This shifted Brian's mindset and he began thinking more positively. With each day passing Brian learned something new about himself. First it was how to survive for one day, and then it was how to hunt, where to hunt, and how to store his food for later.

Several days in the northern forests of Canada led Brian to focus on nothing but survival, he had to think back on what he's learned from movies, school, and books. As time went on, Brian lost track of it and was only concerned with what he would eat and how he would start the fire that day. He created a bond with nature and overcame boundaries and fears he never thought he would have to. Right as Brian was getting comfortable in his environment or getting the hang of survival he would get caught face to face with a bear or under a moose's antlers. He felt as

though he couldn't win, yet every small win was a huge victory that allowed him to keep going. Brian became so good at letting go of the past and relying on his memory for tactics that he never fully realized how much time had passed since the crash. Perhaps the longest two months of Brian's life had come to an end, Brian finally hears a noise from above.

Evaluation

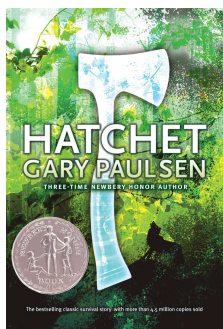
I found this book to be extremely appealing not only because I'm big on camping and the outdoors, but because the author did a fantastic job pulling the entire story together from start to finish. It is difficult to narrow down this book to just a few solid points, but if I must, I'd like to talk about the descriptive language the author was able to use and the involvement the text made me feel I was a part of. The book cover features one of two designs, either a green, forestry background with a hatchet in the forefront, or a faded color water picture of Brian's face with mountains in the distance and a faded outline of his hatchet overlaying the whole scene. This book's genre falls under Young adult Nature writing and is a fantastic novel for anyone looking for a suspenseful read that keeps the reader engaged and guessing what Brian will do at his every turn.

Throughout the book I never found myself questioning what the author meant in a sentence. There were always just enough descriptive words to make it clear, but also keep it clean. I thought Gary Paulsen was able to engage me in the plot by setting the foundation and making it clear what the scene was during the time this story took place. The author was able to skip the entire background of the main character "Brian" by using small flashbacks throughout the story to give the reader a better idea of why he was feeling or doing what he was. The language the author used was a key part in understanding every problem Brian was faced with

and also what he did to solve the issue. Description leads to imagination, and as I was reading the book that imagination allowed me to put myself in Brian's shoes and see the world how he saw it.

Through the author's use of descriptive words and clear cut language he was able to invoke emotions in me that Brian was also feeling. When something suspenseful was arising and Brian was scared, I felt that with him, and when Brian was defeated and didn't know where to turn I felt his pain. This kept me engaged as if I were actually stranded in the woods with Brian and fighting to survive. I felt like I was helping Brian problem solve through every night and day, hoping for a plane to fly over top of the camp. To me, this speaks to sensations and feelings that can come with effective writing and how important it is when trying to get the reader to understand what the characters are faced with.

This book was one of the very first in its time to introduce a true survival novel and still to this day it is one of the greatest stories on survival. This book offers an invigorating survival experience to all readers who are looking for an addictive experience that gets better with every flipped page.



Gary Paulsen

Hatchet

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 192 pages, \$6.00 - \$12.00

