

**SCOPE**  
SHORT  
FICTION

FIRST-  
LINE  
CONTEST  
WINNER!

# PEOPLE

WHEN THATCHER  
GETS LOST IN  
THE WOODS, HIS  
COURAGE WILL  
BE PUT TO THE  
ULTIMATE TEST

# CALL

# ME

BY AWARD-  
WINNING AUTHOR

GARY  
PAULSEN

# CRAZY

PAGES 14-15: BOOMER JERRITT/ALL CANADA PHOTOS/CORBIS (BACKGROUND);  
ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (FEET); COURTESY OF CAMPBELL FAMILY (CAMPBELL)




**AS YOU READ,  
THINK ABOUT:**

What is the main conflict of this story?

**P**eople call me crazy, but I call it having a sense of adventure. It hasn't always been that way though. There was a time when I wasn't very adventurous. There was a time when I was afraid.

**I was nervous the moment I stepped off the bus at Camp Lakewood.**

I heard the rushing of the river and smelled the breeze coming off the lake. The air was muggy and hot, but I was filled with icy cold terror.

Mom and Dad had signed me up for Camp Lakewood even though it was the last place in the world I wanted to spend my summer break. It wasn't that I didn't like the outdoors. It's just that I hated water. And Camp Lakewood was nothing but water. Not only was the camp set on the shores of a lake, but there was also a river running through the middle of the property, and all the activities seemed to be swimming or waterskiing or canoeing or sailing or kayaking or fishing. Even the volleyball net was in the lake.

Which is why, on the third day of camp, I found myself on a hike. It was on dry land, and that was all I cared about.

About 20 of us campers started out in the afternoon. Right away we came to a bridge over the river. Before crossing, our counselor, Bobby, pointed down at the water. "Remember, the river is off limits without counselor supervision," he said. "The current is surprisingly strong."

I hung back, watching the others trot across the bridge like a bunch of happy monkeys. I shuffled to the first plank and froze.

"What's up, Thatcher?"

This guy Richie from my cabin had turned around and was watching me curiously.

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

"Scared?" he asked.

I nodded, feeling crazy.

"Come on," he said, walking back toward me.

I focused on the trees up ahead as we walked over the bridge. My chest tightened, and my shirt darkened with



**Congratulations to First-Line Contest Winner Catilyn Campbell, from Damascus Middle School in Virginia.**



sweat. The sound of the water below my feet seemed to get louder with every step.

This was the worst day of my life.

“Dude, you OK? You kind of look like you’re about to throw up.”

I tried to laugh it off, but Richie didn’t seem convinced.

**O**nce we made it to safe ground and the sound of the river died away, I started to really enjoy the hike. The dirt trail snaked through the trees, which were so thick and tall in places that we couldn’t see the sun. It was quiet too, except for the chatter of the other campers. For the first time since I’d arrived at camp, things felt OK.

As the day went on, Richie and I found ourselves lagging behind the others. Bobby kept barking at us to keep up, but we were too exhausted—especially Richie, who said he’d never been outside this long, ever.

“Hold up,” Richie said finally, his face **watermelon red** from the exertion. He pulled out his water bottle and took a swig. “What I would give to be in air-conditioning right now.”

I sat on a rock, wiping the sweat off my face with the tail of my T-shirt.

“So what was up with you and the bridge?” Richie asked after a few moments.

“Nothing,” I shrugged.

“Come on, man. Distract me from the misery I’m feeling right now. I’m pretty sure my toe is nursing a blister the size of Texas.”

“It’s just . . . I used to love the water. But then . . .”

I trailed off.

“Then what?” he pressed.

It wasn’t something I liked to talk about. I sighed.

“A few summers ago, some of my older brother’s friends dared me to swim underneath this floating diving raft. It was dark and I’d never done it before. I got tangled up in the anchor chain underwater and kind of freaked out. My older brother sort of had to jump in and save me.”

**Richie nodded in a way that made me feel like maybe I wasn’t such a loser.**

“After that, I don’t know. I just couldn’t go in the water anymore. Honestly, I think my parents picked Camp Lakewood to help me get over it.”

**S**uddenly, Richie jumped up. “Where’s the group?”

I looked up the path. We must have lost track of time, because everyone was gone. We were completely alone.

“They can’t be that far,” I said with more confidence than I felt.

We hustled ahead until we came to a fork in the trail.

Richie and I looked at each other, stumped. “I think the ground looks more trampled in this direction,” I ventured, pointing to the right. Richie studied the ground, doubt all over his face, before nodding reluctantly. We went right, walking faster, straining to hear some noise from the other campers or find some evidence that they’d passed this way.

The trail led us deeper into the woods. Minutes went by. Or was it hours? Everything looked the same. The bushes, the gray tree bark, the turns and bends as the trail rose and fell with the hilly terrain.

“I think we picked the wrong fork,” Richie said.



Great imagery!  
What does this  
description  
suggest about  
Richie?

Rather than  
describing  
Richie’s nod  
directly, Paulsen  
describes how  
the nod makes  
Thatcher feel  
and lets the  
reader imagine it.  
Nice.

We doubled back, plodding on until we came to another fork—a different one. Neither of us remembered seeing it before. We stood there, frustrated and confused, arguing about which way to go.

"I think we've been veering right the whole time, so we should keep going left to retrace our steps," I gasped, resting my hands on my knees and trying to catch my breath.

"You were wrong the last time," Richie snapped. He pulled out his water bottle only to find that it was empty.

**We hadn't known each other long enough to trust each other yet,**

and neither one of us was familiar with the camp or the woods. Panic started to set in. We were hopelessly lost. I'd thought the hike would be safe, but it seemed I was wrong. I hoped I wasn't also wrong about Richie being a good guy; he seemed kind of crabby and **blamey** all of a sudden. I hoped it was just the stress of being lost and not his true personality coming out.

"Listen!" Richie bellowed. "Do you hear that? It's the river!" He took off down a steep incline, darting around the trees with more energy than he'd shown all day. I followed more slowly.

By the time I caught up with him, he was pacing the riverbank, studying the water trying to get a sense of which way to head. The bridge we'd crossed earlier was nowhere in sight.

"All we have to do is cross it!" Richie shouted over the roar.

The water was deep enough that we couldn't see the bottom. That meant we couldn't wade across, which I wouldn't have enjoyed—but walking through water wouldn't have bothered me anywhere near as much as not being able to touch bottom.

"Swimming probably isn't a great idea," Richie said, earning buddy points in my mind.

"Remember what Bobby said about the current?"

I was about to suggest getting back on the trail, but it was starting to get dark and I knew we only had a little daylight left before we'd be stuck in the woods overnight.

Suddenly Richie starting yelling. "Look! Look! Look!"

I followed his gaze upstream a few dozen yards to a place where the river narrowed. A fallen tree reached from bank to bank, about six feet above the water.

"We can walk on that." Richie had just lost every buddy point he ever had with me. Because the only thing worse than getting in the water on purpose would be falling in after the termite-ridden log you were standing on collapsed.

"Um, can't we just keep following the river on this side of the water until we find the real bridge?" I suggested.

Richie either didn't hear me or he ignored me, because he hopped up onto the fallen tree and started to edge across.

My heart pounded as I watched him. I saw the log give slightly under his weight, and I crossed my fingers that it wouldn't crack in half beneath him. I squinted, trying to see if the log was firmly anchored on each bank, fearful it would slide into the water and take Richie with it. He was doing fine, though, moving slowly and keeping his balance, his eyes on his feet, until he got about halfway across.

He looked back at me and flashed a thumbs-up, whooping like he was the king of the world. And that's when he tripped and stumbled.

I watched him fall into the river, **frame by horrible frame**. Even his shouting

This isn't a word you'd find in a dictionary, but surely everyone can imagine what it might mean to be "blamey."



A movie is a series of images, or frames, shown really fast. The standard speed for a movie is 24 frames per second. Watching a movie one frame at a time would take FOREVER. What does this phrase tell you about Thatcher in this moment?







Why might Paulsen portray Thatcher's struggle in the river this way?

What do you think? Is rescue work crazy or ... something else?



sounded warped. The current swept him, flailing and screaming against its fierce pull, a few feet downstream. He was stopped when his shirt snagged on a low-hanging branch.

The water beat at him relentlessly, filling his mouth. He tried to unhook his shirt, but he wasn't strong enough to untangle it and keep his mouth and nose above the water.

"Richie!" I hollered. "Take off the shirt and kick to the shore. You're only a few feet away!"

But he couldn't hear me over the thundering of the water. He was panicking and using valuable energy bellowing and struggling. If he lost his strength before he got free, the current would suck him under.

Without another thought, I hurled myself into the water. The shock of the cold threw me into hyperdrive. Everything was happening faster than I could process, but I just kept kicking toward Richie, fueled by willpower and adrenaline.

I slammed into Richie, no time to be gentle.

"Grab hold of me!" I shouted in his terrified face.

He clutched my belt, and I yanked his shirt free of the branch. We were immediately dragged down the river, clinging to each other's arms as the trees on either side rushed past. Somehow I managed to turn toward the riverbank and kick, inching us toward shallow waters. I was fighting the current, Richie, and my own waning strength.

**Just when I thought the river would win**, I felt my toe catch on something and realized we were close enough to the water's edge to stand. I staggered to my feet, hauling Richie upright and shoving him in front of me toward dry ground. We were both coughing and shaking as we climbed out of the river and threw ourselves on the bank.

My heart was pounding, but it wasn't from fear.

"You're crazy!" Richie said, choking up a mouthful of water. "I can't believe you did that!"

I patted him on the back.

"I mean . . . thank you," he said.

"Come on," I said. "Let's go back to camp."

**I**t's been many years since that day in the river. But I still think about it. I think about it when I'm dangling from a helicopter, being lowered into turbulent waters. I think about it in that final moment before I let go of the rescue hoist and swim out toward the victim. I think about it when I feel a sudden rush of fear.

Everyone who works in **search and rescue** has a story about why they do what they do. People tell us we're crazy all the time.

But that's not the way I see it. ●

## WRITING CONTEST

Great stories often have more than one conflict. What are the conflicts in this story? How are the conflicts resolved? Answer both questions in two to three paragraphs. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas. Send your response to **CALL ME CRAZY CONTEST**. Five winners will each receive Gary Paulsen's wonderful novel *Woods Runner*.



GET THIS  
ACTIVITY  
ONLINE