

By Isaac Williams, age 10

# Life of a Lone Black Bear

Bear had a good life. He slept on some moss in the far back wing of his large cave where the wind and cold never reached him. He had found the moss one day when he was out looking for fish and came across it. He tore it up and brought it back to his cave to sleep on. He was the only bear in the forest, so he had no one to compete with for fish, and the berries he liked were in a grove behind his cave. At the time the only entrance to the patch was through a side exit of his cave, because trees prevented the birds from getting them from above.

One day Bear was by the river looking for salmon. The river forked a ways down. One side led to a pond, and on the other side, the river kept flowing. Bear wandered on down to the pond. A big brown toad jumped into it with a splash. Bear wondered why the toad had jumped in. All of the toads were friendly with him because he would never eat them. They tasted slimy. He decided it was a new toad and hadn't met him yet. He caught sight of a fish and was about to grab it, when he heard a noise behind him. He stopped and looked back. He then realized that he hadn't scared the toad. It wasn't him. There were two men with guns in the bushes.

One of the men was big and was wearing a green hat and matching shirt, and the other was small and had on a plaid shirt. Both had on matching tan pants. When Bear saw them, he jumped into the river and started swimming. The men ran to the river bank and shot at him, but Bear had already gotten across and was in the forest on the other side. Bear was safe from the hunters, but they were in between him and his den.

Bear was a smart bear, and he had learned from birds that men slept in brightly colored domes when they were hunting. Bear called down a blue jay and told him that if he would locate and lead him to where the hunters slept, he would give the bird some of his berries.

The blue jay agreed and set off to find the brightly colored domes. In a little while, the blue jay came back and told Bear that he had found it. Bear went with the bird to go to the hunter's sleeping place. As Bear and the bird traveled through the thicket they talked.

"What is your name?" Bear asked.

"Jay," said the bird.

"I'm Bear," said Bear.

Just then they came to an especially thick spot, and Bear had to pull up some bushes to get through.

"Here we are," chirped Jay.

In front of them, there was a bright yellow thing standing in the middle of an open space. Bear lumbered over to the thing and slashed it open. Then he went inside, and he smelled something. Food. Sure enough, it was food, but it wasn't berries or fish. It was a long, round, light brown piece of meat. Bear ate it and thought it was delicious. He found a whole pack of them and ate all of them.

"The hunters are coming," tweeted Jay.

Bear dashed out of the clearing just as the hunters entered it. The first thing the hunters noticed was the big gaping hole.

"There is a hole in the tent!" cried the man with the plaid shirt.

The other man ran into the tent.

"The hot dogs are gone!" the man in the green hat exclaimed.

"I told you to put them in the bear container," said the one in the plaid shirt. "Now we have no dinner."

The men kept arguing, but Bear and Jay had already left. Bear never saw those hunters again.

Once Bear got home, he got some berries for Jay.

“I would give you some more for warning me, but I need them for hibernation. I’ll get you more in the spring,” he promised.

“Thanks, these are delicious,” Jay replied. “My nest is in the tall oak tree by the pond. Come visit me anytime you want.”

After that, Bear went to catch salmon. At first he couldn’t find any salmon, but then he spotted one. He jumped, but missed. Then another, and another. Soon, the whole river seemed to have turned into fish. Bear ate as many as he pleased, then went to find some berries. When he came back, the river was still full of fish. Bear ate some more, then went back to his cave. There, he ate all the berries that were in the grove, and settled down for a nice long nap.

While Bear hibernated, a mild winter came across the land. No snow or ice reached Bear. The area only got about half the snow that normally came. All the animals were surprised by the weather. They had expected a long, hard winter. None of the animals knew that the worst was yet to come.

Bear awoke wondering why there wasn’t the faint twittering of birds like there usually was when he woke up from hibernation. He decided not to worry about it. Just then he heard a growling sound and wondered what it was. Then he smiled; It was his stomach. He was hungry. The berries were always frozen and dead when he woke up, so they were no good. The fish were still in the pond, but Bear would have to break the ice to reach them. He set off to do it.

When Bear came out of his cave, he was surprised to see a light drift of snow falling. Bear didn't mind the snow and cold; his thick fur coat kept him warm and dry, but snow normally only kept falling after he woke up when it had been an unusually hard winter. He was even more surprised to see that the berries had not frozen at all. Once he reached the pond and saw that it wasn't frozen, he began to think that something was different about this winter from any other he had ever experienced. He was glad he didn't have to break the ice, but he couldn't fish in the pond without ice to walk on, so he went to the river to catch some. Bear found more fish than he ever found in the pond in the winter. Bear remembered that there had been more fish when he was starting hibernation. Bear didn't care. He liked it. After Bear had finished eating he decided to go find Jay to ask him about the weather.

Bear lumbered off to the pond to find Jay. The wind had gotten harder as Bear walked, and suddenly a huge gust of snow blew right at him.

Bear had never been in a blizzard before and his only thought was to get back to his den where it was safe and warm, but the wind had come from the direction of his den.

Bear tried to get back to his den, but it was no use. The wind was too powerful. Bear knew it was useless to fight it. He did the only thing he could think of. He jumped into the pond.

In the pond Bear was safe from the wind and snow, but he was running out of air. Bear had to get back to the surface. He swam back to the top to get a breath of air, but the wind was blowing super hard and he barely had time to take a breath before having to dive again. Bear knew that staying in the pond was hopeless. He swam to shore. The moment he got out of the water the wind and snow blew as hard as ever.

"How am I going to get back to my den?" he wondered.

Then he realized he didn't need his den, just some type of shelter.

A snow cave would work well, so he found a snow drift, and dug. He dug until he had made a nice snow cave that would fit him well, but that would also keep him warm. He crawled in. He lay down; he was safe from the storm. He soon fell asleep.

Bear woke up from his nap, and wondered where he was. Then he remembered all that had happened. He had been in a blizzard and he made a snow cave. Bear needed to check on his den. He crawled out of his snow cave. This proved to be harder than he had expected. The snow had covered everything and he didn't know where he was. He set off in a direction that looked right, but it proved not to be. Bear tried to get home, but he couldn't find his way back. Luckily, he ran into the pond and set off toward his den. Even though the snow covered everything, Bear could find his way home from the pond easily.

When Bear found his den, he had the surprise of a lifetime. His den was ruined. A tree had fallen on top of it, and another tree had fallen in front of the doorway. Snow covered everything. Bear frantically dug at the snow trying to dig out his door. He got inside, but he wasn't able to go in far, because the roof had caved in. The only other entrance was through the berry patch. Last fall Bear had made another entrance to the patch from outside the cave. He had put a heavy rock in front of it, so only he could get in. Bear now went to this entrance and moved the rock aside. Carefully replacing it, he lumbered off down the path.

Bear came to the patch, and went inside his cave. A little ways in, the roof had caved in again, but he was able to get around it. Bear came to his bedroom. He sighed. The corner had fallen in leaving a big gaping hole that let cold air in.

“This will never do,” he thought. “The snow and wind will come in through the hole, and I will be cold.”

Bear couldn't live in this cave again.

Bear walked out of his home. He looked at the dead berries that he wouldn't be able to eat again. Bear would always remember these berries. He went back up the path and moved the stone. Just then Jay showed up.

“Hi Bear,” he said sadly.

“Why are you sad?” Bear asked.

“My nest fell down,” he said.

“The tree too?” Bear wondered.

“Yes,” Jay replied glumly. “I came to ask your input on what I should do.”

“My cave is wrecked. I'm going to find a new one. You can come too,” Bear said confidently. “But first tell all the birds that you can find that we are leaving, and that if they go to the big rock by my cave, there is a path to my berries and they are welcome to have some.”

Jay was about to fly off, but Bear called, “Don't tell the crows.”

The crows would eat all the berries and wouldn't leave any for the rest of the birds. Jay flew off to tell the birds. While Jay was gone, Bear chose their direction. He decided that they should travel along the river, so he would have salmon to eat. Jay came back, and Bear told him his plan. Jay thought it was a good one.

“I would go through a freezing river to find a home as nice as this,” Bear commented.

“And I would rather have to fly through a dozen eagles than lose my nest,” Jay added.

“We can’t change what already happened,” Bear said. “So let’s make the best of what we have.”

So they set off to find new homes.