

Deliverance from Tallulah Gorge

We were 1,000 feet down at the bottom of Tallulah Gorge in north Georgia when the agitated bees attacked my 9-year-old son.

I heard him screaming and crying on the other side of the boulders from where I was positioned on the bank of the winding river that flows through the spectacular canyon. Without hesitation, I scrambled across the large rocks and got to my son as fast as I could.

He was stung twice on the face, on the cheek and above his lip, and he also got tagged on his back and hand. Tears flowed down his swollen face as he agonized in pain. He was not hysterical, and was trying hard to tough it out, but I knew he was hurting.

I peered in the general vicinity where my son, Wages, and his friend had been exploring and saw a few black bees swarming. They looked like hornets or wasps. I cringed at my son's dilemma and wondered how I was going to get him medical attention. We were a good hour's hike to civilization and professional help. *Please don't let him be allergic to bee stings*, I said in my mind.

The first task was to maneuver across the terrain upstream to a place

where about 40 people frolicked around Bridal Veil Falls, a smooth, 20-foot waterfall that is also known as the sliding rock. This is where folks hang out, swim, sunbathe, and play on the popular, slippery rock. I was hoping there might be a doctor in the gorge.

As I considered options, my mind flashed back to the worst experience that I had ever encountered with bees. I was 10 years old, growing up in Atlanta, and climbing to the top of a huge magnolia tree. I accidentally stuck my hand in a hornet's nest and they tore me up from head to toe. I practically fell out of the tree in terror and pain, and sprinted half a mile home crying, where my parents met me, stripped me down naked and put me in the cold bathtub with a box of baking soda.

I calmly relayed this story to my son and it almost instantly eased his anxiety and distress. *If Dad survived, I can make it too*, I saw him thinking.

Thirty years later and the hornets had struck again. This time at Tallulah Gorge State Park, a geological wonder located in the northeast corner of the state in the Blue Ridge Mountains. My son and I have come here every summer since he was 5 to hike the canyon,

play on the sliding rock, and swim in the cool waters.

Carved out over thousands of years by the Tallulah River and stretching two-miles long, everything about Tallulah Gorge is awesome. The breathtaking views. The steep rock cliffs. The rushing whitewater. The five cascading waterfalls, including one that drops nearly 100 feet.

I can never absorb enough of the raw beauty of Tallulah Gorge. I've come to this spot since I was a kid, during my summer camp days. It's one of my favorite places in the world.

Part of the movie "Deliverance" was filmed here. The scene where Jon Voight has to climb up the steep bluff to kill the menacing mountain man was filmed on the cliffs of Tallulah Gorge. One of the lessons learned from James Dickey's classic Southern book, made into a movie, is to never take the wilds of nature for granted. Because you never know what might be on the other side of that rock or tree.

And in my son's case, unfortunately, it was bees.

I told Wages to stick his face in the cold river to soothe his stings while I packed up our bags to hike out of the



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gorge. Several people noticed my boy was struggling with pain and a few came up to offer help. One man said, "I've got exactly what you need. I'll be right back."

Wonderful, I thought, *he must have some bee sting ointment or medicine*. But the man returned with a can of smokeless tobacco and pulled out some Copenhagen pouches. I grabbed two and placed them on my son's welts.

And wouldn't you know, it did the trick. Within 30 minutes, the swelling had almost completely gone down and he was feeling much better. How ironic. The redeeming quality of tobacco saved my boy.