

Salvation Canyon: A True Story of Desert Survival in Joshua Tree

Ed Rosenthal

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Ed Rosenthal's gripping *Salvation Canyon* is about a desert hike gone wrong and a transformative, face-to-face confrontation with death.

Rosenthal, a sixty-four-year-old real estate broker and poet, was no newbie to solitary desert hikes—they were the customary way the heart attack and quadruple bypass survivor celebrated closing a big real estate deal. “I’d done this same desert escape ten to fifteen times,” he writes. “Aside from a three-hour hike, I’d spend most of my time lounging around the motel getting stoned, writing poetry, and reading.” For the hike in question, he, as usual, kept his itinerary secret and allowed no one to contact him while he was away.

But this hike proved different. Rosenthal is humble in admitting to some serious lapses in judgement—ignoring his wife’s warning of the epic heat wave, and leaving vital supplies behind, including extra food and water. Rosenthal became disoriented after a wrong turn, and his comfortable trek turned into seven days wandering the Mojave Desert, with its searing daytime heat and icy cold nights. He was assailed by visions, hallucinations, and flashbacks to his unhappy childhood.

The narrative is poignant as it reveals the clash between Rosenthal’s longing to merge with the beauty he saw around him, including the daytime landscape brushed with glowing color and clear night skies awash with stars, with nature’s indifference to his plight. With death near, Rosenthal wrote loving notes to his wife and daughter. Lonely, he allowed a lowly fly to befriend him. He prayed. A light rain fell. And, on the seventh day, he heard a helicopter and rejoiced.

Intimate and moving, Ed Rosenthal’s memoir shows how the desert that almost took his life also laid claim to his heart.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2020)

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