

York boy spends harrowing night lost in Algonquin Park

BY FRED SIMPSON
Staff Writer

He was "pretty sure" he saw a bear during the 14 hours he was lost in Algonquin Park and that was more than enough adventure for Jeff Brown, 12, of Thornhill.

"That, along with the dark, was the frightening part," said Brown, as he rested at home Wednesday morning after being checked over by a doctor.

He was only a day and a few hours, plus ample mosquito bites, removed from being rescued after he and a companion got lost Monday afternoon while looking for firewood.

"My back has a lot of mosquito bites but other than that I'm OK," said Brown.

He described how he and Ben Michna, 13, of Toronto, were camping with other boys from Camp Tamarack, Bracebridge, when they took a canoe and went down a waterway looking for firewood on the shore.

"We decided to walk into the forest because there's always better wood there than you can find along the shore," explained Brown.

"We were going through the forest and, before we realized it, we had gone too far and had no idea how to get back."

The two spent "all day walking around trying to find our way back," continued Brown. "We ended up walking away from our campsite."

Brown said he and his companion managed to crawl under some fallen trees and use them for shelter when it got dark.

They were only wearing T-shirts and shorts, said Brown.

"Ben's pants were soaked because we tried to walk through some water. We were freezing all night."

The two boys tried to keep as warm as possible



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Jeff Brown, 12, gets a hug from dad Lorne after returning from camp in Algonquin Park. Jeff and another boy were lost for 14 hours.

by holding their legs close to their chest and wrapping their arms around them.

"We basically curled up into a ball to keep as much body heat as possible," said Brown.

It was then the two thought they heard a bear prowling in the woods nearby.

"It was very frightening because it was dark," said Brown. "We were pretty sure we saw a bear at one point because we heard a lot of movement."

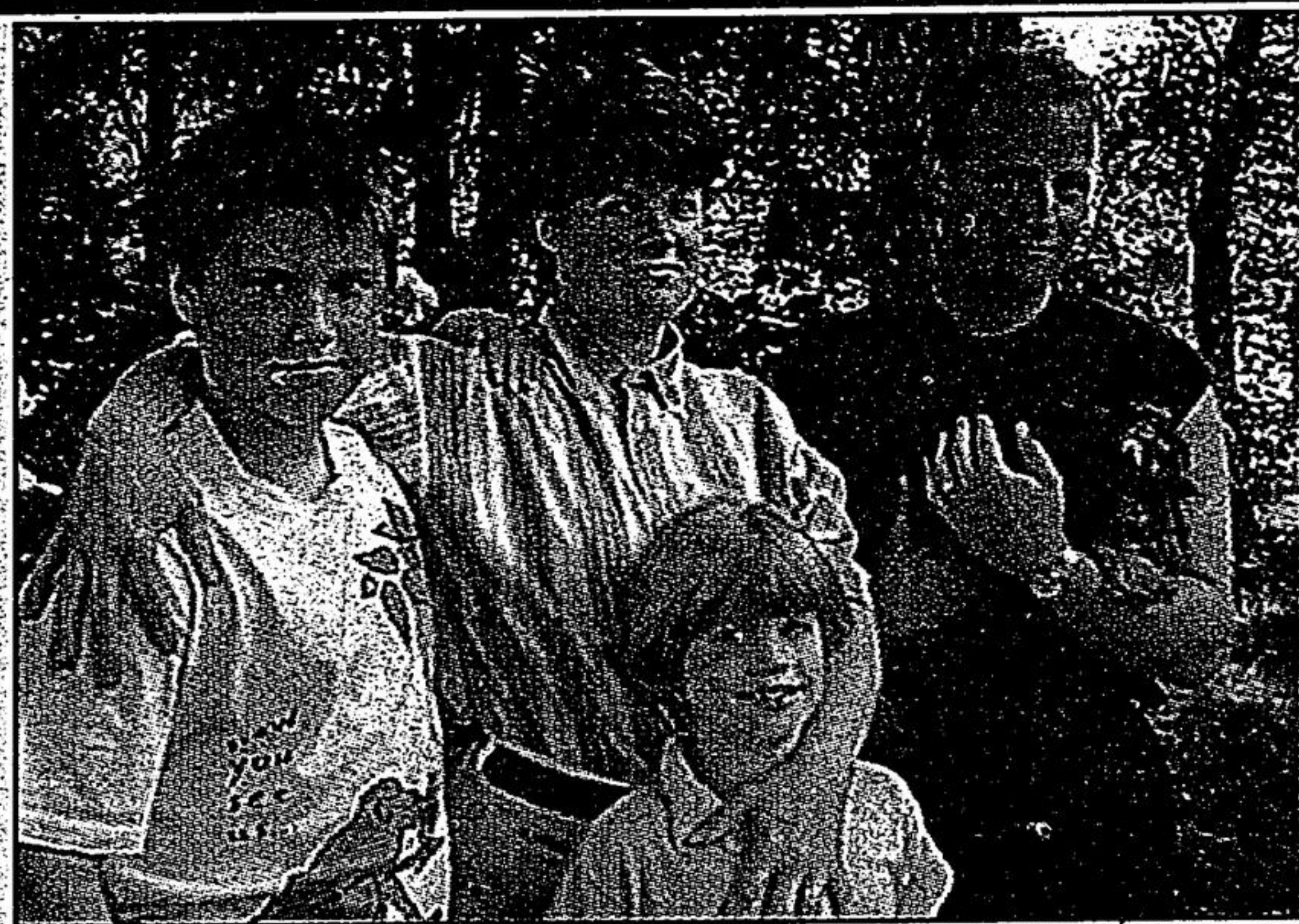
Brown said he thought he was dreaming when he heard the sound of a boat on the water.

"I didn't think it was real," he said. "Then we started yelling and waving our hands."

Jeff's father, Lorne, said he was told his son was missing at 11:30 p.m. Monday.

"I didn't sleep that night and when I was told in the morning that Jeff had been found, I just broke down and cried," he said.

York Region Carrier of the Week



Ben Diplock's mom knew something was wrong--her always healthy and full-of-life eight-year-old developed headaches; started to stumble; his hands developed a tremor and his usually neat and accurate hand writing turned into illegible chicken scratches. His teacher at Eva L. Dennis Public School expressed a marked concern.

Maureen took Ben to the family doctor who, in turn, sent him to a neurologist. A battery of tests, including a biopsy was carried out. When the results were in, Maureen and her husband Kevin were notified.

The news was devastating: Ben had a brain tumor. It was large, in a dangerous spot and because it was encased with fluid, it called for major surgery.

"Going through this kind of experience is very hard to describe as there are no manuals or good parenting guides to help you through such an upset," said Kevin.

While Maureen and Kevin paced the floor in a Hospital for Sick Children's hospital waiting room in June of '98, a surgical team removed 95 per cent of the invasive tumor, leaving Ben with some partial blindness and physical limitations affecting, in particular, one leg and one arm.

During the entire ordeal, the Diplock family received comfort from other family members, friends and neighbours. And, in particular, the Diplocks received tremendous support from members of the Brainchild Association.

"Brainchild came into the picture once Ben was diagnosed," said Kevin. "Brainchild is an organization started by families who have suffered similar situations or losses due to pediatric brain tumor. Brainchild has grown to a point where it works hand in hand with Sick Kids. It's people are wonderful. I don't know what we'd have done without Brainchild."

Brainchild volunteers are focused on "helping families go through the motions and the procedures from registration to release," explained Maureen.

Not all children survive brain tumors. Despite medical advancement, some children simply don't make it. No one knows this better than members of Brainchild.

"Brainchild has a great depth in dealing with bereavement and family losses. In short, this organization deserves a lot of recognition and support," said Maureen.

With time, family encouragement and extensive follow-up therapy, Ben's health improved.

What the medical tests didn't show was Ben's spunk and his ardent ability to make the best of life. Ben loves life. Despite sight problems and other physical limitations, Ben rides his bike, plays soccer in the back yard and with the help of a teaching assistant, he keeps his grades up at the local school. He's entering Grade 5 and fully expects to do the very best he can. Last year, Ben pulled off an impressive achievement. He won an award in a Canada-wide, map-making competition.

Meanwhile, in partnership with his sister, Ben fulfills the responsibilities of a newspaper route, delivering the King Tribune to about 35 customers in hometown King City.

The duel paper route works for this family. Because Ben has some limitations, seven-year-old Dana helps her brother place the flyers inside the paper for delivery.

"Dana rolls the papers and puts the elastics on," Kevin said. Dana thinks her big brother is a pretty swell guy. "I help him if he has trouble doing things," Dana said.

Because Dana is so young and because Ben has special needs, the parents accompany them during the newspaper delivery. "We're out there with them. It keeps them safe," said Kevin.

Ben doesn't pull any punches. He admits to liking the money earned from the paper route. "I like seeing the money build up in the bank account," said Ben.

A special message has just been issued for Ben's customers: If you spot Ben on the street, don't be alarmed. Yes, he's bald but he's not sick. In fact, if you look at the other Diplock family members, you'll see a striking similarity. Ben's mother is bald, his dad is bald and, yes, his little sister is bald.

A few days ago, the Diplocks family shaved their heads as a fundraiser for Brainchild. "They did so much for us. This is our way of saying thank you," said Kevin.

Anyone interested in making a donation, cheques can be made payable to Brainchild, in care of the Diplock Family. Donations can be dropped off or mailed to the Toronto Dominion Bank at 2900 King Sideroad, King City. Postal Code L7B 176. Donations are being accepted until August 25th.

As well, Brainchild is holding its sixth annual Summerfest 2000 at the Markham Fairgrounds on Markham Road on Aug. 12 from noon to 8 p.m. The family fun includes great music, a hot rod car show, helicopter rides, a silent auction, a corn roast and much more. Admission is \$5. If you spot a bald family, you'll know it's the Diplocks. Say "Hi."

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Minor Hockey Association**
P.O. Box 976, Stouffville, Ontario L4A 8A1

Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association FINAL REGISTRATION

Thursday, August 10, 2000 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 15, 2000 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Registrations will be accepted at our new Hockey Office at the Recreation Centre. Registrations will also be accepted during regular hours from 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Monday to Friday.

New registrants who have not played in Stouffville must provide a copy of a birth certificate.

Any registrations received after August 15, 2000 will be subject to a late fee (No exceptions). All players must be present to sign registration cards.

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