

The Walley family camping trip turns very bad in remote Alaska location - No cell phone, both father and son with serious injuries. This is how the story unfolded as told by wife and mother - Ashley Walley

This story points out how a satellite phone is essential when traveling in remote territory with no cell phone connectivity. *It can save your life!*

Dear Satellite West.

In June of 2019 my husband came home very excited with an Iridium Satellite phone with a Pivotal phone plan. The phone was a gift from Satellite West's owner Harold Whittlesy. Harold had insisted that his long-time friend, Perry Walley take a sat phone to their next camping trip where cell phones don't work. Of course, I was less thrilled and had told him that we would never need it as we only make a handful of camping trips over a summer. He stated you never know when you will need it and you can make a phone call from anywhere in the world! He was so excited to have his new satellite phone. Still, I was not impressed. But my opinion on his Satellite phone all changed the following summer.

On August 23, 2020, our satellite phone went from being a piece of equipment I thought we'd never need, to a piece of equipment our family will never go without. We'd had a fun and exciting weekend in the White Mountains off of the Old Steese Highway 67 miles out of Fairbanks, Alaska. One of our favorite places to go but has no cell service from the local carriers. The weekend was filled with four wheeling trips, card games, and of course, the roasting of s'mores. All of the girls left early to get a head start on showers, laundry, and meal prep for the following week and the boys just wanted to soak up a couple more hours of sunshine and fresh air with the chance of staying an additional night if the weather held up.

I'd had the satellite phone number saved in my phone and didn't think much when "SAT Phone" popped up on the screen thinking he'd decided to stay an extra day or something. However, when I answered the phone, my whole world fell apart.

"Call the ambulance! Tell them to get here! Now! I'm driving that way. There was an accident."

"Who's hurt?" I yelled.

"Just send them! Now!" and he hung up.

I called 911 and explained that my husband had called on the satellite phone from the White Mountains frantic saying there was an accident, but that I didn't have any more details. I told them that it was only him and my six-year-old out that way and that they would be driving a class C RV back towards Fairbanks and that he demanded an ambulance and that my husband doesn't take that stuff lightly. I didn't know who was hurt, but I couldn't hear my son crying, and this really scared me.

So many thoughts went through my head as I grabbed our 2-year-old and our 16-year-old and ran to the car to meet the ambulance at the hospital. A couple more calls from the SAT phone came in as I went back and forth with dispatch explaining where we were camping and what our RV looked like, every time I answered, he yelled "Send the ambulance!" and would try to holler what mile marker they'd just passed.

When the ambulance arrived, I saw my husband step out covered from head to toe in blood. Then I saw our son on a stretcher as they lowered him from the ambulance as the bay doors closed.

A nurse friend retrieved me from the lobby and stopped me to warn me, "Ash, it's bad. It's really bad. Take some deep breaths and prepare yourself." I did, and I walked in to see so many doctors and nurses and additional emergency personnel from the ambulance surrounding my little boy. As they parted, there he was, covered in blood from head to toe. He was alert, but he wasn't crying, which was scarier to me because there was no way he wasn't in pain and thus had to have been in shock. His head was wrapped

tightly with gauze bandages and his neck was in a brace. I moved closer and put a brave face on for my little boy. The nurses informed me they needed to change the gauze as it was soaking through and that I might want to look away, but I didn't. As they moved the gauze, there was his skull and it was obvious he'd been scalped all the way from his left eyebrow narrowly missing his eye to the middle of the top of his head. They replaced fresh gauze and informed me they needed to get him in for scans to determine the extent of the damage to his back, neck, and brain. As they wheeled him away, I nearly passed out. I went in search for my husband.

Perry was a mess. He had a huge laceration to his forehead and his shoes were on the floor literally filled with blood. His speech was slurred and they explained that he likely had a concussion and was also in shock. He told me that the four-wheeler had flipped at the bottom of a gravel pit we'd been playing on. He said it was in slow motion to the point that he thought there was no way anyone was hurt, but then he saw our boy. He immediately pulled the shirt off of his back and wrapped Jaxton's head creating a tourniquet. He tried to flip the machine back over as they were about a mile from camp, but couldn't do it. So, he picked Jaxton up and carried him back to the RV where he rushed to disconnect the trailer from the RV and buckled Jaxton into the passenger seat next to him and sped away. He reached for the satellite phone and called me knowing that I would be able to explain where we had been camping and I would be able to give them the details of the RV.

The doctor returned and announced that our son was done with his scans and it was time for Perry's scans. I returned to Jaxton's room where we spoon fed him ice chips because he was thirsty, but did need a surgery. We waited to hear the extent of his injuries to determine if our local hospital could handle it, or if he would need to be medevacked to Anchorage. Word came quickly that somehow, some way, there were no internal injuries to his back, neck, spine, or even his brain. They removed the neck brace to reveal an additional laceration on his lower cheek and near his ear. They called the surgeon to update him on the additional lacerations and he said they would just need to see it during surgery because they needed to get in and get all of the dirt and debris removed quickly to decrease his risk for any major infections.

Four hours and 102 stitches later I received the update that it had gone as well as could be expected and it would be a short period of time before I could meet him in the recovery room. During this time, we learned that Perry had broken his back in two places as well as had broken two ribs. He was discharged with many medications and an appointment with a specialist to determine if he would require an extensive back surgery.

How did my husband carry our six-year-old son a whole mile back to camp in his condition? How did he remove a flatbed trailer on his own from the RV? How did he manage to drive half way to town before the ambulance reached them while begging for my son to stay awake? How did he manage to dial my number on the satellite phone, that satellite phone that saved our sons life?

Ashley Walley
A thankful Mother and Wife
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