

The Old Prospector

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The Old Prospector

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

Hello, desk- hello flickery light, hello tape recorder that's probably already running for some reason- oh, it is *good* to be back.

Statement of unknown, regarding... a childhood experience lost in a mine. Original statement recorded fifteen years ago, July 1st, 2007. Statement begins.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

[Click]

[GRIAN]

Hello, desk- hello flickery light, hello tape recorder that's probably already running for some reason- oh, it is *good* to be back.

You know, I didn't feel right, the whole time I was out. I mean, of course I don't *regret* taking the time to stay with Pearl in the hospital, but I'm just terribly excited to get back to work. We'll be reopening for the public, too, on Monday, so maybe we'll even get some more live statements! So much has happened in the past couple weeks I don't even remember when the last one was. Was it Scott? That feels like forever ago.

In the meantime, though, I'm still working my way through the backlog of paper statements, so I should be well- um, kept busy either way. Let's see, top of the pile- haven't read this one yet.

Statement of unknown, regarding... a childhood experience lost in a mine. Original statement recorded fifteen years ago, July 1st, 2007. Statement begins.

[GRIAN (STATEMENT)]

When I was eight, my family went to go visit my aunt in West Virginia.

I was really excited, at the time. I'd only ever met her once or twice, and I'd never been to America. At the time I thought it would be a grand adventure... and for the first few days, it really was.

My aunt lived up in the mountains, the Appalachians. It was very rural, more than anywhere I'd ever been before, and the landscape just captivated me as soon as I laid eyes on it. I didn't want to do anything but run around exploring. We had a week there, and I wanted to turn over as many stones as I could while I had the chance.

My parents let us wander, but they told my brother and I that if we were going to explore outside we had to always be together, and if anything happened to either one of us the other one needed to run back for help right away. I didn't like having to be babysat, though, and my brother wasn't as interested in poking around the forests and caves as I was. He always wanted to head home long before I did.

So, one day- I think it was around halfway through our trip- I snuck out on my own. I didn't mean to be out too long. I mostly just wanted to go a little deeper into the mountains than my brother would've let me. Our parents had told us to keep far away from the caves, to never go too far in, but I'd heard there were bats living in there, and I wanted to see if I could spot any.

Looking back on it now, I'm lucky I didn't get rabies.

I guess I'm lucky for a lot of reasons.

There was one cave entrance in particular I'd been eyeing. It was set into the rock wall and it had old wooden support beams framing it, which I had figured meant it was probably safe.

I didn't plan on going very far in. I really didn't. I told myself I would never go so far that I couldn't see the light from the entrance. I figured I'd look back over my shoulder every few steps, and if I ever couldn't see the way I'd come, I would turn around and go back right away.

The ceiling was... lower than I'd thought it would be, once I was in. And it was *cold*. I hadn't really expected that, because it was such a warm day, but... of course, when there's rock all around you for miles and miles, it doesn't care at all about the sun. I was in shorts and short sleeves, and within a couple minutes I was shivering.

Before long, I was just about ready to turn around and go home. It wasn't as much of an adventure as I'd thought it would be- it was just cold and wet and dark and scary and smelled bad, like metal and something rotting. The tunnel wasn't that small- I figured out at some point it was a defunct mineshaft- but it still *felt* like it was squeezing in behind me, like the walls could snap shut around me at any time.

And then, I glanced back over my shoulder, and I realized I couldn't see the light from the entrance anymore.

I'd brought a flashlight, so I wasn't completely in the dark, but it wasn't very strong. I could only see a few feet ahead of me before everything dropped off into blackness. I knew I only needed to go back the way I'd come and I'd be fine, but there was just something about... not being able to

see the exit, you know? Not even being able to see any sign of it.

So I turned around and started heading back the other way, but... the light didn't reappear. I couldn't see it, even when I was sure I must've walked far enough that I should've been right back near the exit by then.

I started to wonder if I had gotten turned around somewhere, in the darkness, or I'd gone back down another tunnel by mistake when I tried to retrace my steps, and I was actually only going further down into the mountain. And... I started to panic.

I couldn't tell if I was going the right way or not. I didn't want to turn around again, because then I felt like I'd be really truly lost, but I also felt like I couldn't *possibly* be going the right way, I'd been going for *far* too long-

I tripped. I'd been starting to hurry faster and faster as I got more and more desperate to get out, and my foot caught on an uneven bit of the ground and I just went sprawling. I skinned both my knees and my light hit the ground and- it didn't go out completely, but something cracked, and it went all dim and flickery and basically useless, and then it was just me there with a tiny puddle of light, and absolutely nothing and no one else around.

I picked myself up again, but once I did, I realized I had no idea which way I'd even been going.

All my energy went out. I think I just started to cry. I remember it sounded almost muffled in the tunnel, like the rock was just... *eating* all the sound. I sat down and curled up with my face in my knees and just... waited. I don't know what I was waiting for. For someone to come find me, I guess, but I don't know how much hope for that I even had. It felt like by then I must have been miles down into the mountain, and I didn't even know if my parents had realized I was missing yet.

I wanted my mom.

I don't know how long I sat there, but it felt like hours, at least. I felt so small, buried under all the darkness and rock. I thought about how if I died down there, maybe nobody would ever find me. I'd never get to do any of the things I wanted to do with my life. My parents would never know what happened to me.

And then I heard something else.

It was like a... *step, clank, step, clank*, back and forth, distant but getting closer. And another sound, too, low and almost reassuring. Like... humming. It almost felt like it rumbled through the rock, turning the air a little warmer around me. I caught my breath and waited.

And then, coming around the corner, I saw a light.

It was low and flickery, but it was the best thing I'd ever seen.

I found my voice, finally, and shouted for help. The steps paused for a moment, and then started again, coming straight toward me.

The man who came out of the tunnel was carrying a lantern in one hand, and a battered old pickaxe in the other. I couldn't get a perfect look at him, in the low light, but he was dressed like a miner, with suspenders and a helmet. One of his feet was in a heavy boot, and where the other one should've been was a metal peg-leg.

He knelt down in front of me, and asked me if I was lost. I couldn't see much of his face- most of it

was taken up by a big fluffy white beard- but his eyes were nice. Kind.

I said I was, that I'd only meant to explore a little ways in but I'd gotten turned around and now I couldn't find my way out, and he said that wouldn't do at all, and offered me his hand and pulled me to my feet.

His hand was rough and worn, but it was warm. I held onto it with both of mine.

He told me little stories as we walked, about how the town down the mountain had been another town once that was wiped away when the river swelled one spring, about how when the first unionization efforts started there was fighting in the streets, about how once upon a time the mines here were so rich you'd stub your toe on lumps of iron ore. I forgot to even be scared, listening to him.

And then, before I knew it, I was out.

I was standing in the entrance of the mine with the sun on my face, blinking against the light. The old miner squeezed my shoulder and told me to hurry home.

I turned around to thank him, and he was gone. Like he'd never been there.

I stumbled back to my aunt's house. One of my ankles was twisted, I found out later; I hadn't even felt it at the time. My parents were in hysterics. I'd been gone nearly an entire day. My mom grabbed me in a hug and didn't let go.

I didn't tell them about the old miner, when they asked me what happened. It didn't feel right. I didn't want people to go bothering him. He'd saved me. That was enough. I wouldn't ask any more of him.

I do still think about him, though. I just hope he's not lonely, down there in those old mines.

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[GRIAN]

Despite the fact that the author's name on this statement was lost, there *is* a good deal of support for it in the regional folklore. Apparently there have been a fair deal of reported sightings in the more mountainous areas of West Virginia of an old man in miner's garb who guides lost people out of dangerous caves and tunnels, stretching back to the 1920s.

There have been a few different names given to this apparition, but apparently most just call him either 'The Hermit' or 'The Old Prospector.' Regardless... if he is real, he certainly doesn't seem to be harming anyone. I don't think any further follow-up is necessary, here.

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this is one i wasn't originally planning to write, partly because i felt like i didn't have any ideas that hadn't already been done and, more, that i wasn't really comfortable writing a horror story involving someone who recently passed.

however, this idea struck me and i felt i had to write it. it's a bit of an interlude in the series, but i just wanted to create my own little memorial. we'll be back to the story stuff next time. thank you for reading <3

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