

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from
WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC

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Warm-up and Engage: Where you lead, in your family, on the job, in your church, scout troop, or team, *what does your fear look like* – inaction, avoidance, blame-shifting, sweaty palms and knees knocking, or just paralysis and status quo maintenance?

Courage is Not the Absence of Fear

Her hand is trembling slightly on the brake strand of the rappel rope, and I am conscious that she is holding her breath in. She is staring past me and it's clear that "*this does not feel natural.*" We are at the top of Waterfall Mountain, learning to rappel. The physical setting is stunning – behind us the Appalachian mountain landscape falls away into the valley far below, and turkey vultures are soaring above. But she is seeing none of that. She is gripping the rope for all she is worth, and trying desperately to find a way to defy doing what I am asking her to do: "*Lean back, lose your balance, and feel the harness holding you.*" I see her searching for a reason to use to negotiate her way back in from that scary place out at the edge – a reason that she hopes I will accept. She also wants to do the rappel, because she wants my approval, and that of her friends watching, but she is really really scared.

He is facing down the darkening passage called the Commando Crawl in Glade Cave. His boy scout buddies are starting to crawl single file down the hole, and he is at a point of decision. That Challenge by Choice invitation I gave earlier is sounding mighty inviting right now; it would be so easy to back up and sit this one out, but something in him also knows that his self-respect is at stake. I have just offered my mini-lecture on tight places, deep breathing if you feel any "liver shiver" ("*In through the nose, out through the mouth.*"), and micro-movements to get through small squeezes. But even as I introduced the topic, I could see his jaw tighten, his breathing quicken, and his self-conscious glances to each side, and I knew this was the dragon he was going to have to slay today.

Seeing Through the Fog

As an adventure guide, it is never my objective to deliberately terrify people. It is true, however, that we lead in physical settings that inherently invoke some legendary fears – steep, high exposed places, fast water, darkness and constriction. These can be quickly compounded when out in nature. Nothing quite gives beginning

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Lester R. Zook, *WILD GUYde Adventures*
1047 Stuart St., Harrisonburg, VA 22802
(540) 433-1637 lester@wildguyde.com

climbers the heebie-jeebies like being high on the South Peak at Seneca Rocks with the wind blowing through their helmets. One feels exposed, small, vulnerable, and definitely out of the comfort zone. So if that is a reality of my work, can it also be an opportunity for us to learn something about ourselves, what frightens us, how we let fear influence our actions, and what we can do about it?

She completes the rappel, and as she unclips at the bottom, she is almost giddy with delight. I am busy affirming it as the joy of accomplishment, but we both know that some of it is just pent up adrenaline seeking an outlet. He comes through the Commando Crawl with mud on his helmet and a huge smile on his face. He is part relieved, and part unabashedly proud of himself for pushing through a fear. So we talk...

“Anyone willing to admit that at some point during that activity, we felt a little fear?” Several honest hands go up, so we affirm the willingness to acknowledge our weaknesses – not a common trait today, particularly among young men in our culture. I continue...

*“Mark Twain was an American humorist and author, but he was also a rather wise guy. He said this: **‘I have worried about a lot of things in my life, and most of them never happened.’** Any of us experience that? What were you worried about? Did you actually even name it? Did it in fact come to pass? Another way to think about what Twain is saying might be that fear is kind of like a fog – a cloud in front of you that you can’t see through. You can’t see your way to the other side of it. But when you reach out and push against that fog, what happens? Your hand goes **RIGHT THROUGH IT. THERE’S NOTHING THERE.**”*

*“But here’s the thing: you must push against the fog to discover this. If you turn and run from a fear, what happens the next time you face it? It has gotten **BIGGER!**”*

*But often, we let fear do just that – we let a fear stop us. We can’t see through the fog, so we stall, and end up giving up an opportunity to do something great – maybe accomplish some good in the world, or maybe slay some fear dragon in our lives. Moreover, when we let the fog stop us, we might actually be compounding that fear – the dragon grows. So my first encouragement today is, **‘Never let fear keep you from doing something great. Push against the cloud, and watch what happens.’**”*

Having guided people in scary environments for more than three decades, I have had many clients and students immobilized by the fog. People have sobbed at the top of the rappel, gotten belligerent and demanded to be taken back out of the cave, used earthy language, and exhibited a host of other fearsome and rationalizing behaviors. More than once, a parent has grabbed their child before they are 20 feet inside the cave entrance, turned them abruptly around and declared, *“We are not doing this.”* In these ways, we can even unwittingly bequeath our fears to the next generation. Another approach happens when I am out and about, maybe conversing at a social event, and the discovery is made that I climb mountains and explore caves for a living. *“You’re crazy to go up there/down there!”* (There, now you have an excuse to nurture your fears, because apparently, I am the one who is nuts).

Not What we Feel, but What we Believe

*“So how do we muster the courage to go through something that is scary? Here is another powerful thought: **‘Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the decision to do the hard thing in the presence of fear.’**”*

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that people who do courageous things actually feel courageous. But this is rarely true. Courage is not a feeling – it is a decision in spite of a feeling. The feeling is fear, one that we can all relate to, complete with the attendant dry mouth, shallow breathing, sweaty palms, and whatever other symptoms of choice you experience. But courage is not a feeling, and if you wait to do something great until you feel brave, you will be waiting forever. Courage is not and never will be a feeling. It is an act of the will based upon a conviction -- a stubborn belief. *“I must do it because it is the right thing to do – it is the great thing to do – and I am going to do it in spite of how I feel.”* So what we need in times of fear is simply a reason

to do the thing that we stubbornly believe, and we set this WHY (decision) to work doing battle with our fear (feelings).

Another way of thinking about this is that courage per se does not really exist as an actual quality. Those looking on from outside might say that an act was courageous, but to the doer, there was no courage – there was only a duty to perform, a belief to uphold, a goal to accomplish. Spurgeon said that when tempted, we will never extinguish desire. The only way to win over (illicit) desire is to submit that desire to a larger desire. A moral application might be that my desire to be a faithful husband and father trumps baser desires that might lead me astray. Relevant to the current discussion, my lesser fears fade into the background when placed next to my larger desire to be strong, to protect someone whom I care for, or to uphold a conviction I believe in.

“*Courage is the **decision** to do the hard thing...*” This word *decision* is important, because it places the emphasis squarely where it should be – on the will. This is not a question of ability – some have it and some don’t. The will is simply our agency of choosing to act or not, and this is an option available to us all. Nothing is so freeing from victimhood as remembering that we have a choice.

Are there times other than in outdoor adventures that we allow fear to keep us from doing something great? If you have ever needed to ask a friend’s forgiveness for saying something uncaring or cruel, or seen an opportunity to befriend some outcast when they are spurned by others, you have faced this dragon. And what keeps us stalled – is it not fear, of what others will think, or how we will be perceived or received? But courage is not the absence of fear – courage is the decision to do the hard thing in the presence of fear. My conviction is that I value this friendship, so I must go and apologize. Or I believe that each human being has value, so I must intervene if I see someone being marginalized. And making the will march in formation with our higher convictions and values instead of our feelings is always a growth step toward personal maturity, and ultimately leadership. We will see later that leading is not mastering others, but inspiring and influencing them with our mastery of ourselves.

I have found in leadership that fear is our frequent opponent – fear of failure, of public opinion, of our own weakness, or of an unknown future. As such, I believe that courage, the will to do some great thing in spite of fear, is actually the defining virtue of leadership, because its presence protects the emergence of all the others. We will not exercise creativity or project vision if we are controlled by fear. We will not risk truth-telling or attempt to build a team around shared purpose if we allow doubt to paralyze us. Courage properly cultivates/protects the soil in which all the other qualities of leadership can grow. So some things we must do in spite of our fear. But other things, we must do because of our fear. The things that scare us – that is the very sign that this is something we must march into, or it will become the defining obstacle to our progress.

“*My basic principle is that you don’t make decisions because they are easy, you don’t make them because they are cheap, you don’t make them because they are popular; you make them because they are right. Not distinguishing between rightness and wrongness is where administrators get into trouble.*” (Father Theodore Hesburgh)

Looked at through a spiritual lens, we are really replacing fear with faith – faith in what we believe to be true. These two will always be opposites. Where there is no faith, there is fear. And the answer to fear is always faith – stubborn belief in something we cannot see or give evidence to. Furthermore, the *amount* of faith we have is never the issue – what matters is the *object* of our faith. Is it objectively true, good, and worth our trust – trustworthy? All the faith in the world in a faulty line will not hold you when you fall. But a very little faith in a climbing rope is sufficient, because the objective reality is that the climbing rope can hold 6000 pounds, regardless of how you feel about it, or how skinny it looks. How hard you believe or how much you believe is never the issue; what is important is what it is that you are believing in. Bravery then is simply finding that thing that is more objectively worth your trust than your feelings of fear.

So let's honestly reflect:

1. What am I afraid of? When are times that I allow fear to keep me from doing something hard, or great?
2. In each specific case, can I articulate the core conviction that stands ready to carry me through this fear fog? What is something that I say I believe, and am I ready to put my will to work pushing through the cloud? What is my immediate next step?

Are you coming to Virginia for a family vacation, church group trip, troop event, or escape weekend? Why not experience Virginia adventure with **WILD GUYde Adventures!** WGA offers guided beginner level outdoor adventures and competent instruction in activity fundamentals. We can take you **hiking, rock climbing and rappelling, caving, or canoeing**. We use various activity areas in the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, along Virginia's Blue Ridge, and in the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia. Check out the 2022 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea!

(540-433-1637 or lester@wildguyde.com)

You may also visit www.wildguyde.com

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: 2022 Daytrips with WILD GUYde Adventures, near Harrisonburg, VA

Top-Roping at Hidden Rocks, Virginia: This is the rock climbing trip for the adventurous beginner – you don't have much experience, but you want a great outdoor day with your family or special friends. Thirty minutes west of Harrisonburg, we'll park just inside George Washington National Forest, gear up, and hike a scenic 20 minutes through rhododendron and hemlocks and across some mountain streams to a secluded sandstone cliff. There will be pink and white mountain laurel in June, and wild huckleberries in August. You'll be introduced to harnesses, knots, helmets, and the *belay system*; then we'll try some easy warm-up climbs to remind you that the kid inside you still likes to clamber on things. We can go on to some harder climbing that invites you to try new skills and movements. And we'll finish the day with a rappel – backing over the edge, with nothing between you and the ground below but 60 feet of air and a great view! Closer to Luray or Northern Virginia? We'll visit **Waterfall Mountain** in the Massanutten Range, or **Little Stony Man** on the Blue Ridge for TALL climbing and spectacular Shenandoah Valley panoramas! Closer to Lexington or Roanoke? We'll visit **Goshen Pass** and climb above the gorgeous Maury River!

(Full day \$250 for 1-3 people; \$60 for each additional. ½ day \$175 for 1-3, and \$45 for each additional)



Beginner Climbing at Seneca Rocks, WV: After 90 minutes of curving mountain highway (okay, *country two-lane*), you'll gasp to see a spectacular blade of Tuscarora Sandstone, whose summit sits almost 1000 feet above its North Fork Valley floor. Seneca Rocks is a scenic place for the beginner or family to learn the rock climbing basics, top-roping and rappelling to an awesome West Virginia backdrop. Easy routes guarantee early success, but more challenging climbs also wait to test your skills. Seneca Rocks is an awesome place to climb, just beyond the sign: "*Here ends the realm of the hiker!*"

(Full day \$275 for 1-3 people; \$65 for each additional. ½ day \$200 for 1-3; \$50 each additional)

Multi-Pitch at Seneca Rocks: A little more experienced in climbing? Maybe you tried it at camp or the local rock gym? Ready for the next step? Join me for the multi-pitch experience, seconding the route as we lead-

climb to the top of the fabled South Summit! This is the only technical summit in the U.S. east of the Mississippi. Seneca has routes at all ranges of difficulty, from starters like *Old Ladies Route* (5.2) to mid-range classics (*West Pole* 5.7) to old school hardman routes like *Crack of Dawn* and *Madmen Only* (5.10). Every one of them will give you a new appreciation for the expression “*high and vertical.*” Register your accomplishment and ruminations in the summit journal, wave to tourists way down in the valley, and then head down to *terra firma* via the three-pitch rappel. Finish the day with a splash in the North Fork River swimming hole at “Gravel Beach”; then pick up a cold drink and a West Virginia memento at Harpers General Store before sleeping the ride back to Virginia and “the Burg.”

(Full-day: \$225 1st person; \$150 each addl.)

Instructional Climbing: This is a tutorial for those who have a little exposure to climbing, and want to gain eventual autonomy. Lots of instruction in current best-practice and hands-on trying it for you in rigging top anchors, belaying skills and equipment alternatives, movement coaching, and rappel setup and protection. There will be individualized attention and repetitive practice, as well as some exploration of the historical evolution of climbing equipment and protocol. You will finish the day with a lot more confidence in your basic skills. Bring a partner so you’ll have someone to climb with later.

(\$175 1st person; \$125 each for 2nd and 3rd)

WILD GUYde Adventures offers two other rock climbing options: a **Boy Scout Rock Climbing Merit Badge** tutorial for troops and leaders. We send a booklet to get troops started on their knots and First Aid requirements ahead of time, and then spend two days going through all the climbing, gear spec., and rappelling activity requirements (\$90 each). We also offer the **PCIA (Professional Climbing Instructor Association) Top Rope Climbing Instructor Certification** course and exam. This 3-day course (\$450) and 1 day exam (\$150) is for recreational climbers who want to add an instructor certification on their resume. It’s also very useful for individuals guiding with club, camp, or university outing programs.

Peaceful Paddling: Canoe a ½ day stretch of the **South Fork River**. This Class I and II water is ideal for families with elementary school children – just long enough to be engaging without getting boring. As we wind through pastures in the Shenandoah Valley, you’ll learn basic canoe strokes and maneuvering. Dangle your feet or plunk your head to cool off. And keep watching for blue herons, turtles on logs, and cows in the water!

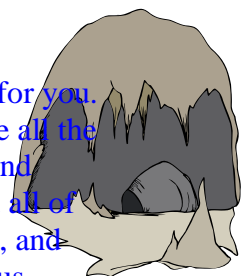
(Half-Day: \$140 1-3 people; \$35 each additional. Full-Day: \$175 1-3 people; \$45 each additional)



Pick-up-the-Pace Paddling: a fuller day of canoeing awaits further down the **South Fork**. This provides a little more excitement for teenagers, adventurous parents, & other paddle pilgrims! A casual start allows a review of canoe strokes and partner teamwork. An amazing rope-swing breaks the quiet – you won’t believe what comes out of your mouth when you let go (“*Geronimo!*?”) More paddling through runs and pools, always under the shadow of Massanutten Mountain. Lunch on the bank and then back into the boats. Finally, at Milepost 17, *Compton’s Rapid* – a great shoot-through with some higher standing waves! Paddlers call it a “Fat II,” but stay wide of Pillow Rock! Below, there’s a jumping rock for another cool-off before paddling the final mile to the take-out. Load the boats and start the drive home – happy, tired, and maybe a little sun-tanned! West Virginia travelers may want to visit the gorgeous “Trough” on the **South Branch of the Potomac**. High and remote mountain walls on each side of the river, and keep your eyes open for bald eagles!

(Half-Day: \$140 1-3 people, \$35 each additional; Full-Day: \$175 1-3 people; \$45 each additional)

Half-Day Caving: The underground sidewalk and the tourist cave light show are not for you. You want to see it the way it was before the electrician got there. Primitive caves have all the features of the subterranean world – *speleothems* (stalactites, flowstone, soda straws, and columns), *lots of real mud*, and sometimes even *bats* (but most of them are asleep, and all of them are harmless). Pull on your coveralls, clip on your helmet, adjust your headlamp, and down we go. There are squeezes if you want them, and belly crawls for the adventurous ---



but there are also corridor ceilings higher than your house, and large cavern rooms for the claustrophobic. Learn cave travel safety, underground navigation, and some “total body movement.” Find out what the year-round underground temperature is, and then finally emerge back into sunlight with a new appreciation for what happens underneath Virginia when limestone and groundwater meet. The gleam of your smile might be the only thing shining through the mud on your face! Caving trips can be *Beginner Caving* (mostly horizontal movement – walking, stooping, or crawling) or *Intermediate Caving* (for folks fit enough to handle strenuous vertical moves, and more sustained physical effort). Various locations are available in both Virginia (20 minutes from Harrisonburg), and West Virginia (between Franklin and Elkins). *Caving trips are not advised for individuals who might be unfit, excessively overweight, or who live an extremely sedentary lifestyle, or for very young children.*

(\$125 for 1-3 people; \$25 for each additional)



Design Your Own Adventure: Numerous other options exist, including hiking and climbing guiding along **Virginia’s Blue Ridge** or at the **NROCKS (WV)**, group orienteering challenges in the National Forest, a climbing self-rescue clinic, outdoor fitness training, and flatwater paddling instruction for beginners and children. We can customize to meet the interests of your family, scout troop, or youth group. Call to talk about your needs.

Things you oughta know:

- **Lester R. Zook** is the **WILD GUYde**. He is a *Wilderness First Responder*, and is a certified member of the *American Mountain Guides Association (Single Pitch Instructor)*. He has been leading wilderness adventures and training camping leaders for 30 years, and loves to take people outdoors! **Ethan Zook** has been a camp counselor and adventure leader at numerous camps. He is a *Red Cross Lifeguard* and a *Virginia Paramedic*. **Aaron Zook** is a climber, caver, and paddler, a *Red Cross Lifeguard*, and has been through *Wilderness First Aid*. **Mary Tapolyai** is a *WFR*, and a *Leave No Trace Master Educator*. Together, we are a small family business that strives to provide exceptional service, and create value in the lives of our guests.
- More detail on activity possibilities is available by visiting www.wildguyde.com. Call or e-mail to ask questions and to arrange dates, rates, and meeting points:



(540) 433-1637 or lester@wildguyde.com

- **WGA’s** guiding season is 7 days a week. Rock climbing is March through October, paddling is best in the spring and summer, and wild caving is year-round. Call early to reserve; weekends in particular can fill quickly.
- **WILD GUYde** will provide all technical equipment (ropes, harnesses, helmets, etc.). A personal *things-to-bring list* (clothing, water, lunch, etc.) will be provided.
- We can also help with **lodging ideas**. We can recommend from *primitive* to *posh* – National Forest campgrounds, drive-up motels, and some delightful Bed and Breakfast inns!
- For groups of 10 or larger, we disregard the starter fee and simply bill the per-person rate.
- Payment is by cash or check, payable to WGA; unfortunately, credit cards cannot be accepted at this time. Gratuities are never expected, and always appreciated!
- Some activities have inherent risks – that’s the meaning of the word *adventure*. Participants will be asked to fill out a *Medical Form*, and sign a *Participant Agreement* acknowledging certain dangers. Some activities are physically strenuous, emotionally demanding, or require sustained cognitive attention to task and detail. We make every effort to create a great day, but **WGA** guides do reserve the prerogative to deny access/participation if, in our judgment, the client is not likely to be successful, or might pose undue hazard. Clients also may not be “under the influence” or “feeling the effects” of alcohol or recreational drugs at the time of the event.

- **WILD GUYde Adventures** incorporated in Virginia in 2004, and is fully insured. **WGA** is a permittee with the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, and along Virginia's Blue Ridge. **WGA** is an equal opportunity provider and employer. **WGA** practices environmental stewardship, and is a member of the *Access Fund*, the *National Speleological Society*, the *Virginia Tourism Corp.*, the *Christian Adventure Association*, the *Shenandoah Valley Travel Assoc.*, and the *Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce*.

How was your trip with the *WILD GUYde*?!

Thanks again for guiding us – the trip was awesome! I'm a little sore and bruised today but it makes me happy because it reminds me of everything we did. The info was clear and the location appropriate. I also really enjoyed how you incorporated learning and team building elements into our trip. (Sarah, 2012)

We arrived back in Florida late Thursday night. We had a wonderful time on our adventure with you and we have all been raving to everyone about how great the trip was! Your professionalism and encouragement allowed us to continue on even when some of us were reluctant to try (me, of course)! The boys raved about the caving and the fact that it looked scary, but once you got through it, it wasn't as difficult or scary as you thought it would be. Todd and I were both thrilled with the learning experience for the kids and feel that we have all grown as a result of facing our fears. Everyone talked about what a great guide you were for us! Overall, our adventure was a wonderful experience and the highlight of our trip to VA! (Christine, 2012)

We had a blast, everything was perfect, and you did an amazing job! The pictures are AWESOME! We would recommend you to any outdoor lover! We agreed that we learned so much from you. (Nina, 2012)

Thank you so very much for a wonderful adventure rock climbing last week. It was wonderful to share the time with my daughter. We both really appreciated your teaching style and the knowledge you imparted. I found a whole bucket-full of sermon illustrations. The location was excellent. We appreciated the fact that we were alone on the climb (except for the beautiful hawk). The photos you took came out well, and we showed them to my wife who appreciated our joy, but was thankful that she chose a more Hobbitish way to spend the day (reading). (Pastor Chris, 2012)

Your customer service was outstanding. Despite my late contact, you found a way to get us in on an adventure. The experience was excellent. The kids had a blast but you were appropriately serious in your approach. Safety was a clear priority as it must be. The experience was well structured and presented a number of great challenges. (Mark, 2012)

Our 3 children (25, 21, 16) went on a rock climbing adventure with Lester. They were beginners and Lester was an excellent guide. He was knowledgeable, safety and detail oriented, and an excellent teacher. They came back smiling and a little sore. Our family isn't the outdoorsy type, but they all said they would definitely do it again! Well worth the drive and the time. (Meredith, 2021)

This was my and my husband's first time rock-climbing. All I can say is that it was an amazing experience. We have done activities from zip-lining and parasailing to sky-diving and I can say this is right up there with all of those activities. I was a bit nervous to start my repel over the edge but Lester makes sure you are confident that your equipment is holding you. Now that I have experienced it, I want to go back and do it again and again. This was a great learning experience and Lester was full of knowledge about rock climbing, repelling, nature, and just life in general. Would recommend to anyone looking for some adventure! (Krysten, 2021)

Lester, we absolutely loved climbing with you! We will be climbing more – that was so fun and challenging yet doable with an incredible adrenaline rush and boost of confidence. Things we learned: How to tie a strong knot; Small footholds do a lot for you; Look down! The harness is holding me; Screaming helps; The hike is not the hard part; You will get giant leg bruises after rock climbing; Don't give up cuz you can make it; Safety, positivity, and being good to nature; Talking with people makes hikes less exhausting; It is quite thrilling to climb 70 feet without falling knowing that you could've done it without a rope. (Haley and Sam, 2021)