

The Ojito Escapades



by Lisa Gill
with stories by Mark, Theo & Tallulah

This book was written after a daytrip to the Ojito Wilderness Preserve on March 10, 2004 turned into an unexpected adventure for Lisa and Mark, as well as his children Theo and Tallulah. The first printing was made the week following our visit to the Ojito and distributed in chapbook form to family and friends. Now, Lu and Theo are practically all grown up, about to enter high school and college.

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Aunt Lisa Stories
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THEO'S PERSPECTIVE

(Written in his blue journal with the blue pen.)



It started when we went to the Ojito Wilderness. First we stopped to rest and stretch our legs at these cool rock formations. They were white and tower shaped.

Then after a bit, we decided to drive on to Lisa's favorite place.

As we were driving on, all of a sudden, the car stopped.

We were stuck in a big soupy trough of mud. Lisa and Papa tried to get the car out of the mud. I helped them try. Plus Lu's feet got stuck in the mud and I rescued her, but her shoe fell off and Lisa had to go get it.

Finally, Lisa and Papa gave up.

Then we had to build a big fire and Lisa called her dad and we had to wait like three hours until they could come and rescue us.

I burned my first cow-patty that day.

Also we had a picnic by the fire and after we got rescued, we scattered the coals and put water on them.

Lu said the fire was black then.

The End of Theo's Version



TALLULAH'S PERSPECTIVE

(As she told it to Lisa who wrote it with the pink pen in Lu's purple journal.)



“My Princess Goes Exploring...”

This is our adventure in the Ojito Wilderness.

First, in the car was me, my brother Theo, plus Lisa and Mark, as well as Groovy Girl and Wild Coyote. I was in my cowgirl costume.

We stopped and explored all these amazing rocks. I explored in the journal area. I climbed the rocks and high on cliffs. And I saved special rocks in my cowgirl hat.

Then we drove down the road and then we got stuck in deep soupy mud. I had an apple and juice while Mark and Lisa tried to dig the car out.

Then it started getting dark. I saw a star but the wind was blowing when we tried to make a fire.

The fire was warm and bright but nobody except us saw it. Lisa and I danced around the fire.

“Popsicles” went to gather wood. I make rain clouds from dust. The wood in the fire made a “T” for Tallulah. We were sitting by the fire and then all of a sudden the rescuers came and brought their dogs.

Theo said, “The coat that got wrapped around Lu was so big that she had no arms—the sleeves were too long. She had to put her hands out through the neck.”

Steve and Sharon pulled Lisa’s car safely out of the muddy valley and we drove back to town.

THE END OF TALLULAH’S STORY

MARK'S PERSPECTIVE

(Written in Lu's journal with the pink pen.)



There were a lot of first experiences for all of us.

It was my first time to get called “Popsicles” by Lu and it was my first time to get a car totally and unequivocally stuck in mud.

Theo and Talulah had their first campfire out under the stars.

And I think this was probably the first time Lisa scavenged for firewood by the light of her cell phone.

And most likely, it was the first time Lisa's parents Steve and Sharon drove from the East Mountains of Albuquerque to the Cabezon turn-off and then followed 17 miles of dirt roads in the dark to tow anybody.

The End Of Mark's Story

LISA'S PERSPECTIVE

(Written in blue ink in her red journal.)

Part 1: The Car Ride

The Ojito Adventure began early afternoon at Mark's house on March 10th, 2004. Tallulah was first in the car and Theo followed, but then he wanted to get back out and take me for a tour of the castle. So I went over to check out the castle in the sand pile. I awed by the moat and drawbridge, the fine architectural design, the beautiful tiles which lead into the imposing brick castle. Plus, the castle had an icon of a seahorse above the entrance—and I love seahorses!

Tallulah called out from inside the car, “Look in from above!”

So I did. And there in the castle dining room, I saw more tiles and on top of those tiles, the crown we'd made from a Russian olive branch the day we walked by the Rio Grande.

Then it was time to go. First though, Theo went and got his painting of a knight on horseback jousting. We folded the brave image and set it right by the gearshift. This way, the knight would lead the way and keep us safe. (He did!)

While Mark drove, Lu dictated a short story about a princess, which I wrote into her journal.

Then, Theo and I spelled words forwards and backwards. Finally, he spelled the whole sentence "See spot run" backwards. That was impressive!

After that I got a Spanish lesson. Then we played variations of rock/ paper/ scissors where Lu got to judge the special hand shapes Theo and I made and decide which she preferred.

The drive was fun, but when we hit the turn for Cabezon, the real excitement began.



Part 2: Entering the Ojito

Right when you turn towards Cabezon, there's a Y in the road and you have to pick which way to turn. The road we didn't take leads to the gypsum mines. Theo wanted to know what gypsum was. Mark answered by telling a long story about how he uses gypsum to make fancy plaster walls, including some of the walls in their mother's house, as well as the bright new walls in the kids' bedroom at his house.

Tallulah just instinctively knew that where there's gypsum, there must be gypsies. She and I tried to catch a glimpse of them hiding in all the nooks and crannies of the cliffs. We couldn't quite spot them.

Nonetheless, we figured that all the bright dresses the gypsies wear could easily have been inspired by all the different colors in the rocks.

Theo started getting really excited by the intense landscape. So did I. We could all barely wait to jump out of the car and go exploring.

When we passed a cool looking spot with a white spire and colorful cliffs, we parked, jumped out, and began running back into the wild cliffs. At first on some steep downhills, Lu was a little nervous so I carried her. Then she remembered she was wearing her teenage shoes and got really brave. She started clambering up the next group of rocks so fast that I could hardly keep up!

Theo came behind us, slower, because he kept hunkering down to check out all the good rocks on the ground.



Soon Mark was with all of us at the big spire and it was beautiful. I went off to gather more rocks. Then, since my legs weren't strong that day, I sat in the shade of a juniper. From where I rested, I could watch Theo and Tallulah and Mark run. They looked like crazy silhouettes on the high ridges.

Then came time to drive on. The whole long road had been bone dry. Theo and I had actually looked for puddles. We finally saw one puddle a foot wide on the side of the road.

That was our only warning of what we were about to get ourselves (and my car) into.

Part 3: Stuck

When I saw the steep valley, I knew we were almost at my favorite formations. Towards the bottom of the ravine, Mark and I noticed deep ruts in the road. Before we could even brake, we plunged my car right down into one of the biggest mud holes the desert has ever seen.

My car just sank.

Picture wheels spinning and mud flying.

Mark and I got out to survey the damage: it was bad. We set to work. Then Theo and Lu got out. Lu took two steps and the mud grabbed her by the ankles so hard that she gasped.

I was lying in the dirt under the car trying to dig when I heard Lu's cry. I looked up and was instantly awestruck. Lu was getting shorter by the second. She was sinking. I thought the earth was going to swallow her whole.

Luckily, Theo was quick thinking and pulled her out. However, one of her shoes stayed buried in the sticky mud. When I went to claim it back from the mud, I had to pull hard. "Search for high ground," became the battle cry.

Both Lu and Theo were very patient and helpful while Mark and I tried everything we could think of to get my car out of the mud.

We tried digging. We tried putting branches and logs and brush under the wheels. We tried jacking up the car. We tried pushing it and pulling it. We even tried adding the cat litter I kept in my car in case of ice on the road. We thought maybe that would help us get traction.

Finally, Tallulah yelled out, “*The cat litter isn’t helping!!!*”

Mark and I looked at each other and nodded. We knew she spoke the truth. Nothing was helping.

We were truly stuck.

That's when I started climbing to see if I could get a cell phone signal.



When I got high enough—VERY HIGH--I was finally able to call my mom and stepfather for help. After they said they'd come tow us, I went back down and began gathering firewood with Mark and the kids.

Soon, Theo and Mark managed to get the fire going. Lu and I were so happy that we danced around it.

The fire was burning what wood we could find quickly, so fast that we had to keep wandering off farther and farther to search for more wood. We developed a signal to stay in touch in the dark—a double whistle.

Sometimes our whistles sounded like wind—“whoosh.” Sometimes our whistles sounded like strange birds—“twill twill.” No matter what our whistles sounded like, we always managed to find our way back to each other and to the fire.

Part 4: The Rescue!!!



Tallulah and I were sitting on the top of the hill by the fire when we saw the headlights coming towards us from the distance. We were so relieved! We jumped up and called out, “They’re here!”

Mark and Theo were down the road towards the car gathering more firewood. They heard us and dropped their bundles and starting running back up the hill to greet our rescuers.

As soon as my folks arrived, my stepfather Steve went with Mark to see the car. They surveyed the damage. When Steve saw that my car was into the mud up to the axles, he just said, “Yep, you really got it in there.”

Then, he let their dogs Hyde and Chopin, out of the back of the truck, got out a chain, and started preparing to tow my car out.

Meanwhile, my mom climbed out of the truck and started trying to make sure Theo and Tallulah were okay, asking if they needed anything to eat or drink. They didn't need anything because we'd had a picnic. My mom insisted on bundling them both up in oversized jackets and sweatshirts—just to make sure they didn't get too cold!

Then came the miracle: the big blue truck pulled the little blue car out of the mud!

Tallulah, Theo, Mark and I kept saying, “Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

The dogs ran around and around.

In short order, we put out our signal fire, packed everything back into the car, and finally started driving home. Mom and Steve followed to be sure my car was driving ok.

Mark and I kept whispering, “Phew, that was lucky.”

Theo was also relieved to be heading home and Lu happily sank into a deep sleep in carseat. We’d had fun, and most importantly, made it out safely.

The End of Lisa’s Story

POSTSCRIPT: When I next returned to the Ojito, I discovered that the road was fixed. We had made such a mess of the road, crews actually fixed it. Really fixed it. They elevated the road with a bridge so it crossed over the gulley safely! That’s one way to make improvements happen!

After-Words

When we finally made it back to the Albuquerque restaurant where Theo and Tallulah's mother worked, she was very happy to see everyone safely home. Tallulah was asleep in her car-seat. Theo was tired but excited and full of stories. He told his mother that he'd built a campfire and then he gave her a special rock from his the collection he'd gathered. (He searched for ten minutes in the blue pan where we'd put all the rocks to find a special one to give her.) His mother loved it.

She asked if my car was ok. I said, "I think so." Then, she gave Mark the key he needed to drop the kids off at her house.

We took his two sleepy “squids” to their beds and babysitter. Even though it wasn’t really that late, we were all exhausted from our long day’s adventure.

The next day my mom called me and said, “Wow, Theo and Tallulah were really brave! I’d expected them to be crying and afraid, but when we got there, they were happy and excited. Those are two courageous kids!”

Later in the week Theo and Tallulah pored over the new rocks trying to decide which ones to tumble and shine.

Then on Sunday, Mark made everyone fried catfish at my folk's house because Steve likes his "cat!" Making a special dinner for everyone was a yummy way to tell my mom and Steve, "Thank you for rescuing us!"

Even the dogs were happy. Hyde and Chopin thought Theo and Tallulah came out to their yard just to play with them! Perhaps they did...



The Myths We Made That Day

How Tallulah Found the Heart of the Ojito

When Lu was hiking, she found a heart-shaped rock. The land liked her so much that it offered up the very heart of the Ojito to her hands. Gravity eventually pulled the heart back to the earth because the heart needed to stay there. Then, the Ojito rewarded Lu the Wilderness Princess with a crown rock.

When Theo Got Visited by the Spirit of an Eagle

Theo is tall and his head is way up on top of his shoulders, but that day he was granted eagle-eyed vision and could spot every amazing rock on the ground no matter how small it was. He swooped down on the stones like a bird and treated all the rocks with respect, only gathering a few of each kind.

How Mark Moved the Whole Earth

When Mark put a jack under the front end of my car and cranked it up, my car didn't move at all. Instead, the earth moved down. On the other side of the planet, someone felt a little boost right then.

How the Cliffs Blessed Lisa's Cell Phone with a Signal

At first, Lisa couldn't get a connection on her cell phone to call for help. She started climbing higher and higher among boulders until she was so close to the stars, they listened—and let there be signal.

What Made the Constellations Come Out

At first only one really bright star came out over Tallulah's smiling face. No more would come out until Mark and Theo got the campfire going. Then, the whole sky lit up with stars.