

The Heroic and Tragic Diary of Barnaby Plum

Being the Final Words of a Brave Boy Lost at Sea (please give this diary to my mum, and also tell my sister she can NOT have my bike)

Day 1 — MAROONED

To Whoever Finds This,

My name is Barnaby Plum. I am nine years old. I have been shipwrecked upon a deserted island and I will probably not survive, so I am writing everything down for HISTORY.

Here is how the disaster occurred.

I was floating in the sea on an inflatable pink flamingo. There was a current. Or possibly a wind. Something maritime, anyway, and it was very strong and I was helpless before it.

I paddled with the strength of ten men. It was not enough. The cruel sea bore me away.

Then I hit an island.

I have named it Plum Island, after me, because I discovered it. I have planted a flag, which is my swimming shorts on a stick. I am now wearing my towel as a toga, which I feel gives me the look of a serious explorer.

My only companion is the flamingo. She has been through so much with me. I have named her Deborah.

Deborah does not say much.

DAYS SURVIVED: 1

Day 2 — MY FIRST HARDSHIP

Dear Diary,

Water. The great enemy of the castaway.

I have read an entire book about survival (it was called *Survive Anything!* and I read most of the pictures) and I know that a man can go three weeks without food but only three days without water.

I have therefore begun rationing. Half a bottle a day, no more.

Yes, I have a bottle. It was in my backpack. Along with: - one towel (now toga) - one bottle of orange squash - one banana - one pair of goggles - sun cream - a whistle - eleven pounds forty in coins - a small plastic dinosaur named Gregory

Eleven pounds forty is, I now realise, useless on a deserted island. This is the sort of cruel lesson the wilderness teaches you.

Gregory, however, is priceless.

DAYS SURVIVED: 2

Day 3 — THE HUNT

Dear Diary,

Today I hunted.

A castaway cannot live on squash and one banana. (The banana is gone. I ate it on Day 1 approximately four minutes after arriving. In hindsight I should have rationed the banana.)

I fashioned a spear from a stick. I sharpened it on a rock for a long time until it was slightly less blunt than before. Then I waded into the shallows and stood extremely still, like a heron, for what felt like several hours.

I speared: nothing.

I did, however, spear my own foot. Only a bit. It didn't even bleed, but I limped back to camp anyway because you should always take an injury seriously.

Then a seagull landed near me, and we made eye contact, and I understood that this bird was my rival.

His name is Kevin. He has one white feather sticking up on his head like an antenna and the expression of someone who has never once been told "no."

I do not trust Kevin.

DAYS SURVIVED: 3

Day 4 — BETRAYAL

Dear Diary,

Kevin stole my sun cream.

I want that on the record. He waddled into my camp in broad daylight, picked up the tube in his beak, and left. He did not run. He STROLLED. He made eye contact the entire time.

What is a seagull going to do with sun cream? He is COVERED IN FEATHERS. He has no skin to protect. He took it purely to hurt me.

I chased him for forty metres and then had to stop because my toga fell off, which I will not be writing about further.

I am now sunburnt on my shoulders and my nose. Kevin has done this. Let the record show.

DAYS SURVIVED: 4 ENEMIES MADE: 1 (Kevin)

Day 5 — I BUILD A SHELTER

Dear Diary,

Every castaway needs a shelter. I have built one.

It is a lean-to made of driftwood and palm fronds, constructed entirely with my bare hands and my incredible natural instincts.

Please note the following, purely for HISTORICAL ACCURACY: - It fell down once while I was building it. - It fell down a second time while I was inside it. - It is currently held up by Deborah, wedged underneath as a structural support.

So really, it is a flamingo-based shelter. I believe I may be the first person in history to invent this. When I am rescued I expect there will be some interest from architects.

Last night I slept in it and it did not fall down at all, except at about four in the morning, once, on my head.

DAYS SURVIVED: 5

Day 6 — FIRE (AN ATTEMPT)

Dear Diary,

I tried to make fire by rubbing two sticks together.

I rubbed those sticks for approximately nine hours (Gregory can confirm).
Results:

- Smoke: none
- Sparks: none
- Fire: none
- Blisters: two
- Sticks destroyed: four
- Times I shouted “COME ON” at a stick: many

I have concluded that fire is a myth spread by survival books to make children feel bad.

I did try the trick with the goggles and the sunlight, but goggles are the wrong shape and all I did was make a small warm dot on my own leg, which I noticed only when it started to hurt.

Dinner was seaweed. I would like to describe the taste of raw seaweed for the historical record: imagine a wet envelope. Now imagine the envelope is salty and slightly alive.

I ate three pieces to keep my strength up and then I lay down and thought about pizza for a while.

DAYS SURVIVED: 6 FIRE: STILL NO

Day 7 — THE MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Dear Diary,

Today I did something clever, which I would like noted.

I wrote a message, put it in my squash bottle, and threw it into the sea. The message said:

HELP. I AM BARNABY PLUM AGE 9 AND I AM MAROONED
UPON PLUM ISLAND WHICH I DISCOVERED. PLEASE SEND
A BOAT AND ALSO PIZZA. THERE IS A SEAGULL HERE
CALLED KEVIN, DO NOT TRUST HIM.

I threw it as hard as I could. It went about four metres.

Then the sea brought it back.

I threw it again. The sea brought it back again.

We did this eleven times. The eleventh time, the bottle hit me on the shoulder, which I feel was unnecessary.

I have decided the ocean is not on my side and I will be finding another way home.

DAYS SURVIVED: 7 ENEMIES MADE: 2 (Kevin, the sea)

Day 8 — I NAME MY KINGDOM

Dear Diary,

I have been here over a week now and I feel I have changed. I am not the boy I was. I am rugged. I am weathered. I have a small beard, probably.

Today I walked the whole perimeter of my island to survey my kingdom.

It took four minutes.

I did it again in case I'd rushed it. Still four minutes. It is, if I am honest, less of an island and more of a large sandy lump with three trees on it. But it is MY large sandy lump, and I have named its landmarks:

- **Mount Barnaby** (a rock, knee height)
- **The Great Forest** (three trees)
- **Fort Deborah** (the lean-to)
- **Kevin's Domain** (everywhere else, unfortunately)

At sunset I stood on Mount Barnaby with my hands on my hips and looked out at the endless sea, thinking noble thoughts about survival and destiny.

Then I turned around and looked the other way, which I hadn't really done before, because the other way is where the pointy headland is.

Right. Well.

I'll write about that tomorrow. I need to think.

DAYS SURVIVED: 8

Day 9 — CERTAIN DISCOVERIES

Dear Diary,

I am going to describe what I saw from Mount Barnaby, when I looked past the pointy headland, and I would ask that nobody makes a big thing of it.

I saw a hotel.

I saw the hotel we are staying in. I saw the yellow umbrellas on the beach. I saw the water slide. I could hear, faintly, the man who does the poolside announcements, who I have heard every single day of this holiday.

I would estimate the distance at two hundred metres. Possibly less. There is a sandbar. You could WADE it. At low tide you could wade it while eating a sandwich.

Now. Before anyone says anything. In my defence:

1. I never looked that way. Why would I? The dramatic view is the OTHER way.
2. Fort Deborah faces out to sea, so I have been sleeping with my back to civilisation this entire time.
3. Nobody told me.

DAYS SURVIVED: 9 (approximately 200 metres from a buffet)

Day 10 — RESCUE

Dear Diary,

I waded home.

It took nine minutes and the water never went above my chest, except one bit where I had to hold Gregory over my head.

I walked up the beach past the yellow umbrellas in my towel toga, sunburnt, carrying a pink flamingo and a plastic dinosaur, and I want to say that I expected a hero's welcome.

My mum was on a sunlounger. She lowered her book. She looked at me for a long moment.

She said: “Barnaby. Where have you been all morning?”

ALL MORNING.

Diary, I have to tell you something and I need you to sit down. Nobody had noticed. Not one person. It had been, by the hotel’s reckoning, about three and a half hours. I had gone out on the flamingo after breakfast and come back before lunch.

I said, “Mum, I have been marooned for nine days.”

She said, “You’ve been gone since ten.”

And I said — and I am proud of this — “That is exactly what a person who wasn’t there would say.”

My sister has read this diary. She has laughed so hard she got hiccups and had to lie on the floor. She has started calling me Captain Plum. She says the beard was “sunburn and one bit of sand.”

Fine.

DAYS SURVIVED: 9 (I stand by this)

Day 11 — AFTERWORD, BY THE SURVIVOR HIMSELF

Dear Diary,

Some final thoughts now that I am safely home and have had four pizzas.

Yes, all right. It was three and a half hours. Yes, the island was a sandbar. Yes, I could see a water slide from my kingdom.

But consider:

- I built a shelter. It stood up for nearly a whole night.
- I hunted. Unsuccessfully, but with tremendous commitment.
- I ate seaweed ON PURPOSE.
- I made an enemy of a seagull and I have no regrets.
- I did not panic. Not once. I just assumed I lived there now and got on with it.

Mum has framed the flag (my swimming shorts). She says it’s ironic. I have chosen to take it as an honour.

And yesterday at the beach a seagull landed near our towels and looked at me. One white feather, sticking up like an antenna.

He knows what he did.

This is not over, Kevin.

THE END

*Barnaby Plum, explorer, survivor, discoverer of Plum Island (200m, sandbar,
low tide, bring shoes)*