

Interview Transcript Years 7-9: Aron Ralston

Enough Rope with Andrew Denton, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Interview Transcript (EXCERPTS)

Aron Ralston

Broadcast: Episode 25, October 2004,
8:30 pm

Interviewer: Andrew Denton



ANDREW DENTON, PRESENTER: I guarantee that you'll be talking about Aron Ralston's story tomorrow morning. You may still be talking about it a year from now. In fact, there's a fair chance it will stay with you for the rest of your life... A little under two years ago, Aron Ralston set out on a solo wilderness adventure in Utah, USA. Disaster struck when a boulder fell on his arm, pinning him to the spot. His only hope of survival, to cut his arm off. The world now knows that he did. But what he went through to reach that moment and what's happened since is as remarkable a story as I've ever heard.

Before we start, some advice - you may want to keep a cushion handy to bury your face in when the going gets tough. From Denver, Colorado, please welcome Aron Ralston.

Aron, welcome to the show.

ARON RALSTON: Hello, Andrew. Thank you for having me.

ANDREW DENTON: It's great to have you. You're a wilderness man, have been for a long time. Tell me, what is 'deep play'?

ARON RALSTON: 'Deep play' is a concept that I use to describe I think what most people would call extreme sports. I just happen to abhor that term. 'Deep play', to me, is the kind of activity where you're out and the risks and rewards are in such a balance that there are extreme consequences to the risks that you take but you're mitigating them and for a reward that really is only internal. So, for instance, with winter solo mountaineering, I am out in an environment that is rather unforgiving as far as avalanche danger, weather dangers. The fact that I'm out in areas that are extremely remote for extended periods of time by myself and that help couldn't get to me even if I was immediately able to signal for it in time to save me from, perhaps, obviously, being buried in an avalanche, but suffering a significant injury.

ANDREW DENTON: You went to Blue John Canyon in Utah solo and you broke

The details of the program broadcasting the interview, interviewer and publishing date and time

Title provides clear topic for the interview

Speakers' names are in capitals, and role is clearly stated (eg. *ANDREW DENTON, PRESENTER:*)

Introduction from interviewer gives **background** on person being interviewed, aiming to **interest** the audience

Greeting from interviewer to signal the start of the interview

Language can be a mix of **formal** and **informal**, depending on the interviewer and the person responding to their questions - this interview is **conversational** in style

Questions are **open** – require detailed

<p>one of the main rules of going to the wilderness - you didn't tell anyone where you were going. Why was that?</p> <p>ARON RALSTON: To me, going into Blue John Canyon, doing what I was doing that day with the 15-mile bike ride and then the 15-mile canyoneering hike was something that was extremely low risk, in my mind, compared to things like climbing the most difficult, highest peaks in Colorado in the middle of the winter-time by myself. This was a vacation from that. I wanted something that was stress free, that didn't involve any risks. And so, for the most part when you go into a canyon, the only thing you're really worried about, especially if it's a low technical grade such as the one that I was in, is the weather. As long as there aren't any thunderstorms forecast for that day, it can be...it's a pretty straightforward experience. It was supposed to be my equivalent of going for a walk on the beach.</p> <p>ANDREW DENTON: How ironic. Can you play out the moment for us when you got trapped beneath the boulder?</p> <p>ARON RALSTON: The place where I got trapped was a part of the canyon formed as a result of flash floods. This canyon in some places was wide open and maybe with 30-foot width and the walls were only 50 feet wide. But as I got into the lower section of the slot - about seven miles into the slot with maybe eight miles left to go - I came up to a series of ledges that would be waterfalls when there was a flood in the canyon. But at the edge of the lip of these dry waterfalls, boulders being carried by floods would roll over the edge of them and get trapped between the walls - they get wedged in place. And so they're called chock stones because they become chocked between the walls.</p> <p>ARON RALSTON: I was at this ledge that was the height of a basketball backboard looking down onto what would be the playing court surface, just the continuing floor of the canyon, and a couple of feet out and down from the ledge was a boulder stuck between the walls just as you'll often see. And they can be used as intermediate steps where you can work your way down to that and then work your way off of it in order to continue down the canyon. I grabbed onto the boulder with my hands, moved my legs off the back side of it. And if you can imagine just climbing off the roof of a house by using the gutter, that's basically what I was doing. I was backing myself over, holding onto the boulder until I was hanging from it. And I moved my hands up to the front of it so that I could get my feet a couple of feet closer to the bottom of the canyon. And I was looking down at my feet and could see that there was still about two feet left to drop. At that moment when I was about ready to let go, the boulder started to shift. I was pulling it, rotating it toward me because of the force that I was applying to the front edge of it. And I knew with this quaking, that I had to let go and get myself out of that...off that boulder, out of that spot as quickly as I could. I only had a fraction of a second</p>	<p>answers, not one or two words</p> <p>Uses present, past and future tenses</p> <p>Contains a variety of long and short sentences</p> <p>Use of '...' indicates pause in response</p> <p>Relevant subject specific vocabulary adds to authenticity of responses (eg. <i>mountaineering, ledge, canyon, avalanche danger</i>)</p> <p>Contractions are used in the answers of the person being interviewed</p>
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to think about it, though. But I let go, dropped, hit the canyon floor. I'm standing on the bottom of the canyon with the walls, one just on my left shoulder and the other just on my right shoulder and I look up and instantly throw my hands up. And as I put my hands up in front of my head and tried to push myself back, the boulder is bouncing back and forth between the two walls and crushes my left hand and then, as I'm pushing against it with my right hand, it rotated slightly and ensnared my arm, drawing it forward. The boulder came to a stop in a new set of constriction points between the two walls where the wall here, just a few inches off my shoulder was holding the boulder and the wall on this side, again, just a few inches off my shoulder was holding the boulder. But my hand was almost halfway into the boulder, into that very narrow gap between the boulder and the wall. My hand was essentially holding the boulder off of the wall.

ANDREW DENTON: And what was your reaction?

ARON RALSTON: My reaction was first to try to get my hand out. I thought that - because the pain hadn't totally come over me yet - that I tried jerking my arm and as I did that, I realised that it was really stuck. I totally panicked at that moment. This was just a few seconds after the boulder had fallen and already I was heaving my body against the boulder - trying to pull it toward me, lift it from underneath. I was trying to get my leg and my arm both underneath the boulder at the same time to try to move it. At first I gauged the boulder to only be about 200 pounds and so I was hoping just from brute strength to lift it off of my hand. I spent about 45 minutes working on that and it just...it only left me in a sweat, totally exerted. And...and... The last thing that I did in that panic was I tore off my backpack by undoing one of the straps dropping it around in front of me and reaching in and taking out the only water that I had left, which was a litre in a Nalgene bottle, and I unscrewed the lid and just gulped down almost a third of it. 10 ounces gone like that. And it hit me that I'm in this for the long haul and I just drank a third of my remaining water supply.

ANDREW DENTON: And when you did calm down, what was your appraisal of the situation?

ARON RALSTON: (Laughs) I came up with a couple of options that I could use to get myself out. I thought that first off, I might be able to use my pocketknife that I had in my backpack to chip away enough material from the rock to be able to pull my arm out. The second option that I came up with was that I might be able to use the climbing equipment that I had with me - the ropes, the carabineers, the prussic loops, some webbing - to set up an anchor on the ledge that I'd climbed off of initially and, using something like an improvised pulley system, lift the boulder up off of my arm. The third thing that I came up with was waiting for help to come, either people just happening to come down the canyon, which I was thinking perhaps that

Interviewer responds to aspect of response (eg. *how did Aron react?*)

Reaction in brackets adds to meaning

would happen, knowing that where I was was extremely remote, in an area of Utah that doesn't have electricity, running water. There aren't even any fences because there's nobody who lives out there. There's no houses. You drive through at night and you don't see any lights. It's completely empty landscape. That only a few dozen people might happen through that canyon in a given year...I probably wasn't going to have enough resources to wait for them. So it was looking bleak. With all the other options as well - just not having a knife sharp enough or durable enough to remove the rock to get my hand out, too many losses in friction in the system, the pulley system, to be able to lift the boulder, those things played out very quickly in the scope of my entrapment and I was left with thinking about amputating my arm. I came up with that, at the time, within the first hour that I was trapped. But even then, again, 24 hours into my entrapment, as I held the knife and was preparing to put it into my arm, I came to realise, first off, that the bones were going to stop me dead, literally. I might be able to amputate through the soft tissues but this knife, this pathetic, cheap little knock-off pocket knife was never going to be able to get through the bones. It didn't have a serrated blade. The blades that it did have were worn down from me chipping at the stone. And... And even if I could get myself free...I had what amounted to almost seven to eight hours in front of me before I could get to medical attention, including more canyon, then a 65-foot rappel, and then seven miles of hiking through the desert and finally, an 800-foot hike up out of the canyon to get back to my truck. And then from there, what would be almost two hours of driving on wash-boarded back-country roads to get to medical attention. The options weren't looking good.

ANDREW DENTON: You still had a long way to go. The night times were extremely cold. What were they like for you?

ARON RALSTON: It was horror and torture...the nights, because of knowing that I didn't want to get myself free at night, because I didn't want to even...I don't know, I just told myself that I don't want to be walking through this canyon in the dark. I don't want to then fall over something, drop myself over the rappel accidentally. That I wanted to...if I was going to get free, that I was going to do it at daytime. So I didn't work at night, trying to get myself out anymore. After the second night, the third night, the fourth night, the fifth night that I was there - each of them my body having been degraded by the conditions in the canyon, I was decaying and deteriorating all at the same time. It went by extremely slowly, every single one. It was nine hours - from about 9:00 in the evening till 6:00am - and during that time I just broke it into 1.5 hours - "If I can make it through this 1.5 hours, I'll take a very small sip of water." And I would do that as long as the water lasted, which was the first, uh, it would be until through the third night, and then finally the water...I ran out. After that, I...I was drinking my own urine, and would still use it to motivate myself - "I'll make it a little bit longer and then I'll drink a little bit more." Although it wasn't really so much a reward at that point.

Informal language from interviewee personalises the response

Statement made by interviewer – appropriate way to begin question

[interview continues – for full transcript see link below]

ANDREW DENTON: You refer to 'deep play', Aron, and you've gone deeper than most people ever will. What's changed for you now?

ARON RALSTON: I think what's changed for me in my personality is that I've developed a greater sense of patience. What's changed for me psychologically is a deeper appreciation for my friends and my family. I think what's changed for me physically has been...in some ways, a greater ability to tackle activities, sports, day-to-day chores, than what I ever had before because I have the confidence to know that I can overcome obstacles in my life. If anything, this experience showed me that I have a courage and a resourcefulness and a perseverance that I had no concept that I was capable of before the accident. I have this sense of purpose about what I went through, that it was a miracle. It was a miracle that I survived six days on so little water. It was a miracle that I was able to cut my arm off without passing out from the pain and then bleeding to death. It was a miracle that I got myself down the rappel that I had to do, and then hike seven miles afterwards making it in time for a rendezvous with a helicopter that, had I been half an hour later or earlier, again, I would have bled to death before getting to medical attention, that I survived a bone infection that came along after. And the doctors said that at this point I probably had about a 50/50 chance of living. And that's after I've already had all of these surgeries. And I'm thinking that, really, I just want to have my life back and then maybe I won't. All of these things, adding up to the fact that I think I went through this miracle, so that I can show others that they have the courage, the faith, the perseverance to do what they think is impossible in their lives. And that is a huge change for me, to feel that I'm now doing something immensely important and positive to take this message out to people, to share that in a book that I feel is now my legacy for the world. And I want them to see that they can do it, that they have to believe in themselves, but that they can do what they think is impossible.

ANDREW DENTON: Well, Aron, it is quite a legacy, or perhaps more correctly, an armacy. Thank you very much. For me personally, I don't think I'm going to leave the house after hearing your story. It's quite extraordinary. When you come to Australia I hope you enjoy our country and the wilderness we have to offer as well. Aron Ralston, thank you.

ARON RALSTON: Thank you very much, Andrew.

Final question from interviewer brings experiences together as a reflection and links to future

Use of humour shows interviewer's style (eg. 'armacy')

Concluding comments and thank you provided signals close of interview

Full Transcript Available From: Enough Rope, [Aron Ralston](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1227885.htm), Episode 25, 25 October 2004. Retrieved 20/11/14, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1227885.htm>