





Ian bends down to put a bootie on my foot and I cannot help imagining I am Cinderella, still embarrassed at fleeing the ball. No slippers, glass or otherwise, will slip easily onto my feet.

sole for support.

It is as if we are back in the Bali jungle, Ian deftly spying the black monkeys, leading me through the dense trees. Miraculously, the first one we try an Aqua Bootie, size six fits my left foot.

Standing up, I am sure that the bootie on my left foot will cause my foot to hurt.

He hands me the other bootie. I cannot believe it, but it fits, too. Standing up and walking around, I know, will be the true test. I do not want to injure myself. I keep expecting my right foot, without the support of my shoe, to roll over on its side.

But, again to my surprise, the zipper, the Velcro strap, and the rubber sole keep my foot upright. The neoprene bootie has the right combination of flexibility and support. My knee does not buckle. I do not fall. In the small fitting room, I walk from wall to wall.

floo

I have no idea how to answer.

### **Foaming Over It**

The night before departing for the Grand Canyon, I watch a PBS documentary on  
t the rapids look like on a  
fifteen-inch tel



an adolescent girl with Down syndrome who learns to drive and has a boyfriend. These  
orcoring the  
superiority of the nondisabled body and mind. The writer Joan Tollifson, writing about  
her life with one arm

shows how these stories turn disabled people, who are  
simply leading their lives, into symbols of inspiration, from individuals into abstractions.

love to travel. And like Eli Clare and many other disabled people I, too, carry the myth of  
the supercrip. It is often too difficult for me to separate what I want to do from what I  
cannot do. I am confused by the commingling of my fear with my desire.

*With a velocity like his, he simply foamed over it.* I think about John Wesley  
Powell, one-armed, running the Colorado River in a wooden dory no bigger than a  
rowboat; how Powell climbed up the rocky side of a canyon only to find himself alone on  
a ledge, unable to get down. I think about how once I walked up the Mountain of the  
Lion and the Lamb in the Lake District in England; how I finally made it to the top. With  
my legs and back aching, I barely had the energy to get down. I think about my  
fourteen-mile descent from Glacier Point down into Yosemite Valley. Not realizing it  
would take me so long, I had to navigate the final three miles of the trail limping in the  
dark.

Still no

video: *ortune; to some it would be a disaster, to others  
an excuse.* Looking up, I see my bags ready to go by the front door. I know at the  
bottom of the duffle bag is my wetsuit and my Aqua Booties. Next to my backpack is my  
only pair of shoes.

I remember Ian walking into the fitting room balancing, barely, the tower of boxes  
of wetsuit booties.

I look out the window and realize I have not slept all night. It is already dawn.

## Reciprocal Altruism

colder than I imagined. Since this part of the canyon runs north south, we are not exposed to much sun.

Rafting through the Roaring Twenties, Bob, my boatman, trains us to lean to one maneuver the oars through the spiraling water, allowing us to make it safely through the first set of rapids. I begin to trust him and want to be assigned to his boat each morning.

By the afternoon I am able to relax, absorb the geological information of the stained dark red walls of this part of the canyon. I lose myself in the sheer immensity of a place where a sense of scale and distance easily disappears.

narrow waterfall high on the river right canyon wall, named by Powell after a botanist. Here, everyone gets out of the boat. Guides Ray and Steve carry Hanna, a woman with multiple sclerosis who needs assistance to move, into the flow below the waterfall. The flow, coming from a side canyon, is cold but not fo







We walk back to the boats on the modular plastic strips arranged on the sand in various configurations so wheelchair users can maneuver more easily on the uneven ground. I saw them using these Port-a-floors to even out the ground in the tent and provide paths outside on the lawn. My friend in a wheelchair wanted to make a trip down the river with me. So, the Port-a-floors were adapted for their use. Attention John

Day 9. Late on a clear star-filled night. I sit by the river. With no mirror, with only a flashlight and a small bucket of cold water, I shave for the first time since we launched above Marble Canyon.

As I shave, I think nobody does it. So far, despite our impairments, and because of adaptive uses of such items as the Port-a-floor and the help of the guides, we have been able to do almost everything done by a group without disabled rafters.

Almost everything on the shore is an adaptation: not only the portable flooring but also the makeshift kitchen, the pump system with which we purify our drinking water, outdoor shaving, even the tents,

adaptations that allow as many people as possible to run the river as safely and comfortably as possible.

Here I am, sitting and shaving on the banks of the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. Outside the tents, the three wheelchairs reflect the moonlight. Inside their tents, Daniel, Mark, and Hanna are probably asleep. Sally is still moving around her tent, organizing her gear.

I walk to my tent. Before I go to sleep, I polish my shoes.

## Crossing the River

There are different ways to cross the water.

Day 10, and we have reached Havasu Canyon. Today, my aim is to make it only half a mile up the canyon to sit amid the pink rock and clear aquamarine water of Havasu Creek.

The four yellow oar boats are moored side by side just inside the mouth of the side canyon. To get from our boat to the shore, I have to cross over the other three anchored boats. From the boat closest to shore, I can see that big-riggers Matt and Tim have left the black bag containing my shoes and cane three hundred feet away on the rock ledge, my initial destination. Good thinking. When I reach the ledge, I sit down and change from my wetsuit booties into my shoes. Looking at the uneven path through the

I polished my shoes last night.

As I change into my shoes, another group of adventurers passes by.

-haired woman stops to tell me.

Boatman Dan and his wife Kate, who joined the trip two days ago at Phantom Ranch, will accompany me up the canyon in case I need assistance.

On the rocky trail, I am able to maneuver using only my cane. But as we continue up the canyon, the rocks become larger and larger until the path is almost impassable. A quarter-mile up the canyon, boulders block the way. There is no longer a path on this side of the creek.

How do I cross the water? My choices: (1) I can change back into my wetsuit the crossing myself; (2) I can change back into my wetsuit booties and ask for help across the water; (3) I can ask Dan to carry me across.

Darwin, in *The Descent of Man*, improved, each individual would soon learn that if he aided others he would receive aid







## Kenny Fries

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