

## **St. Bernard's Search in Snow**

Heinz was taking his son Helms on a special, long skiing trip in the alps. They had prepared for this for many months. Fit and dressed well, they set off on their much anticipated expedition.

Heinz looked at the weather and wondered how they would fare. But with everything else ready, they took the step to set off for the white and cold trip.

The mountain air was invigorating and ever so cold. But these mountaineers were strong, and had been on skis just about as long as they knew how to walk.

It came easy for them to manoeuvre themselves on the silky and smooth snow—unless some sudden dip on the pass caused them to speed up too much.

If they went faster than they could control themselves, it would plunge them where they didn't want to land.

With a warm drink in their thermoses, and stout hearts, this team was determined to make the best of their trip. They liked to stay fit and skilled, and wished to one day be able to rescue others who got into trouble in this area.

Snow, deep snow, constant falling snow could make a formidable challenge for just about anyone who was not prepared and well protected from the cold. —And speed!

The speed one could accidentally begin to go when happening into certain steep passes, would take many by surprise.

This father and son team wished to learn the art of mountain rescue in even the coldest and darkest winter months.

The first few hours of their trip on this day caused them to work up quite a sweat skiing vigorously, as they swiftly moved up and down, and across the rugged and white terrain.

Heinz and Helms stopped for some time to rest and take in the beauty of the moment. They sipped their still-warm drinks, and took off their ski glasses for while to see everything in its proper colour and brilliance.

What a difference snow made on these mountains. Heinz remembered what it was like to hike around here, when there was ground and greenery to be seen.

They knew this mountain area well, no matter what colour the ground took on.

That was Heinz and his son's goal—to know every part of it well, and to have the physical strength and knowledge to tackle skilfully any rescue situation.

They had put much time into training, and being fit in every way.

Back at home they had another team they were training to be able to assist them as well: A family of St. Bernard dogs.

The mother and puppies were healthy and growing strong. They were given the best food for their breed. Heinz would help to train the young pups just as he had their mother and father.

These types of dogs could also manage the cold and snowy weather, and seemed to enjoy the thrill of helping to find and rescue people stranded in the cold.

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It was some weeks later, when Heinz were home eating a light midday meal with his family, that he noticed the adult male dog of the St. Bernard family acting restless.

This dog begin to whimper and yap, and pace around—as if something was troubling him.

Sometimes these dogs seemed to know, even before the humans, when someone was in trouble.

Heinz learned to be sensitive to the cues of these caring

canine creatures.

He turned on his radio to listen in for any local news of those who may have been reported as lost and in need of assistance.

*“A team of two skiers went missing about 4:00 PM yesterday. A search party has been sent out since early this morning, but so far no signs of them ...”*

The radio spoke out.

“What should we do, Dad?” Helms wondered if they were to take part in this rescue operation.

“The first thing we are going to do is pray for them,” his father replied.

“We know how the chances of survival are slim in these weather conditions—not to speak of the dangers of the cliffs, and falling and being injured.”

So the family paused to commit the situation to the one who could take care of it better than anyone, no matter how skilled and wise and well-trained they felt they were.

After this, something began moving—both in the heart of Heinz and his son, as well as in the minds of the two adult dogs.

“Let’s go take a spin around the parts of the mountain that we know well,” said Heinz to his son. “And if the dogs are keen to go along with us, they will be a great help.

Mother Helda helped to strap on to each of the dogs a small keg of drink that sometimes was used in these situations. If the dog found the lost person first, this could help them to hold on a bit longer until better help could come.

Mother Helda would look after the puppies, and give them warm milk to drink in a bowl, and do her part by praying both for those lost and for those looking.

Heinz summoned the help of his neighbours to come along on this search and rescue mission. Mrs. Gulda and her adult son

were just as, if not more, adept in travel through the mountain here.

They too had heard of the lost personal, and were themselves wondering if they were to play a part in the rescue operation. They both agree to go. Each team would take one of the dogs with them.

Before too long they set off from their mountain cabins, each in a different directions. They knew these places well, and were well equipped for the occasion.

Both St. Bernard dogs were keen to get going, and soon took off with a run, following the team they were helping.

After about an hour, with no success yet, the dogs seemed to have gone missing. Of course they weren't lost, as that was a clever skill they had—to find their way around.

Rather than being lost, these dogs had both found the missing personnel!

Together the two St. Bernard dogs had approached the very cold, and half-aware skiers. They licked some snow off their faces, then barked as loudly as they could and nudged the stranded ones to get up.

Realising that it wasn't a dream, the two very thankful skiers sat up and gratefully received the drinks that were made available to them on the collars of the dogs.

Mrs. Gulda and her son Gutten knew the dogs was on to something when he had taken off with a run at one point. They followed in the direction of the foot prints, by foot, for it was not an easy place to ski.

There were many boulders in the way and trees to wend between. At last they had found the team—the dogs with the people they had found. They were very grateful to see that everyone was all right.

Meanwhile, Heinz and his son pulled out their monitoring

device. It gave an indication as to where the dogs were, as their collars had a tracking device.

“I see they are both over to the right, in the forest area. Let’s go. They might have found something.”

Helms had a look at the monitor, took a drink, and was ready to continue. It wasn’t too long before they also arrived on the scene, to survey the needs.

“Good boy! Good girl!” Helms complimented the dogs and gave them pats, and a treat to eat that he’d carried in his backpack.

Mrs. Gulda had already radioed back to her home, where her husband could pick it up. He had been incapacitated for a few months, due to a skiing accident himself. But he could send and receive messages to his wife and son, and others.

Mr. Gulda had already passed on the good message to the rescue centre that was leading the search.

With the two lost skiers now gaining strength from the food these mountain dwellers brought, and the drinks the dogs had offered, slowly they got up and began to make their way out of there.

Each of the teams took one of them, supporting them on each side, as they made their way slowly along. After a while they felt well enough to get back on their skies.

Heinz and his son suggested a short cut they knew, a way to get back to their cabin a quicker way. The search had taken them around a long way.

So by and by, after only a bit more than an hour, these cold and weary ones were escorted to the cabins.

First they visited the cabin where Mother Helda was. The puppies were very glad to see their dog parents again. The people were glad to sit by the fire and warm up, with kindness and joy and a warm drink.

The skiers went to spend the rest of the day and the night in Mr. and Mrs. Gulda's cabin. They had a loft where visitors were welcome to stay.

When days were short and nights were long, it was best to have a place where people could stay, since travel home in the dark wouldn't be easy nor safe.

The next day their family members, staying in the village below, would come up to see them and bring them back.

As Helms sat by the fire awhile longer, in the quietness, surround by sleeping dogs. He was glad now for all the vigorous training that he and his father had taken the time for. It was for a time like now.

He would start tomorrow, in some simple way, to begin the training program for the this batch of St. Bernard puppies, who were getting bigger and stronger every day.

"Perhaps I should learn more about these amazing dogs, that are clever at being a help to humans," Helms thought.

Helms picked a book off the shelf, and began to read about them.

Some of the things he learned were: