

Joe Bruner  
Childhood Then and Now

*This is stupid. I hate this. Can't we just leave?* But noooo, my family had to stop every few minutes and read *every* sign. Oh, look, there's the sign we were near when that boulder came crashing over us. What? We have to read this one too? Arrrrgh. I looked over the edge at the river way down below. It didn't *look* much like a river. I thought water was blue. And I thought this was supposed to be the *Grand* Canyon. Well... it doesn't seem very grand to me. Hmmph. I stared up at the sun. Why did it have to be so hot? I wiped the sweat from my eyebrows. Then I smeared the sweat on my shorts.

"Can we hurry up?" I bounced rapidly.

"One minute," my mom said, still reading the sign. "Ok."

We continued climbing. At a snail's pace.

"Uggh." Another sign was coming up. "Can we just keep going?"

"Joe, we want to read these signs. We go on these trips so we can learn a little."

I glanced up ahead. The exit of the canyon was right there. *Right there!* "Can I go up ahead to the path while you read?"

"Alright," my mom said, "JUST to the exit. Wait there."

I quickly ran up to the top. Hmm, still no shade. No seats. There was also a fork. Aha! To the right about 30 feet farther, rocks in the shade. I glanced back. I was still close enough to see my family go by. My feet burned when I sat down. Picking at my thumbnails, I sat and waited. And waited. After 15 minutes, I went back down. Was my family really so busy reading? Good thing I went ahead. But then I saw the sign, and no one was there.

My most humbling lesson in the virtue of patience. It doesn't matter how mercilessly the sun is beating down on you, or how many beads of sweat condense around your eyebrows. Maybe it was "little kid crankiness" or something else. Morale of the story: don't run away from your group. When I saw that sign where my family *used* to be, my world fell upside down. The impossible became possible and the dangers of the world that were always so far away – the ones that could never happen to *me* – all of a sudden seemed to leer down from the shadows, staring back no matter where I turned to look. I preceded to run up and down the path to the gate twice, but never saw my family. A ranger found me crying and offered to help me find them, but there was really no need. One question in the radio brought my family back down the path. I hugged my mom tighter than I ever had before. It was with great relief that I turned my back upon the Grand Canyon and left its secrets mixed in with its muddy water and dusty rocks for another day.

Most commonly I find myself shaking my head when I recall this memory. The arrogance of youth, the crankiness of a tired kid and the embarrassment of thinking I actually knew what I was doing. On the other hand, it was a relatively harmless situation, and I do get the bragging rights of saying I got lost in the Grand Canyon.