

# 12 million & 72

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**by Harold Calvert**

**From the September 1999 Flowstone**

"Is it too late to back out?" I asked as I reached the changeover spot to rig into the main rope.

"No," was the reply from the top of the ridge above me. After stopping to gain a little courage, I talked myself into proceeding. I had gone this distance and much farther in the past, but that was different. It was underground, not in the clouds.

It was hard to change over with my nails and teeth sunk into this rock, and as I began to start my rappel, I thought to myself .....this is not too bad.....I can do this.....it could be okay, but then it happened. With the last foothold passing by, I loosened the rack to start a free rappel. But as I passed into the free drop I was violently spun half round. OH \*\*\*\*!!!!!!! I WILL SURELY DIE!!!!!!

After letting my pants drain a bit, and waiting to stop swinging, I decided to open my eyes and assess the situation. I WILL DEFINITELY DIE NOW!!!!!!!

Okay, so that was a bad idea. Maybe I am close to the bottom now, lets look down. You know you are up too high when the buzzards are circling below you waiting for you to get there. "IS IT TOO LATE TO BACK OUT NOW???"

As I start moving again, suddenly I come to a stop. A metallic squeaky grinding stop. Then a pop..... pop..... squeak.....pop. NOT GOOD!!!! "PATRICK!!!"

"What?"

"WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS ROPE!!!"

"Oh, it's just old, this is probably its last trip. We'll retire it after this trip," he replied.

"NOW YOU TELL ME!"

On the rest of the rappel, I kept my eyes closed because of the round and a half spin back and forth. OKAY, it was as good an excuse as any! Finally reaching the bottom, Wesley asked me how it was.

"Terrible. How was yours?"

"I am looking for the trail out of here," he said nervously.

"I will help you find it!"

Then Jeff said it was a long trail around, and its getting dark fast. Wesley said, "Yeah, and I been hearing critters down here too. We'll stay here and wait." Finally I got on rope to get out of there and away from Wesley's critters that I had began hearing also. It had gotten dark, and the last I saw of Wesley, he had got a big stick and headed for higher ground.

Maybe this would be better in the dark, I thought. Then it started again. Squeak..... pop.....squeak..... every time I would stop. So I climbed..... and climbed..... and climbed.....and inspected every inch of that

rope. I was concentrating so hard on climbing that I didn't notice I was at the top until the rope pad hit me in the head. I LOVE THAT ROPE PAD!!!!

And I can brag and say, "Yep, been there, done that." And, by the way, there are 12 million and 72 red stripes on our rope. I know, I saw every one.