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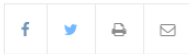
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BLOG MAY 9, 2013 / 11:11 AM

Swallowed by hippo, lived to tell the tale

By GABRIELLE LEVY, UPI.com



Bibi, a three year-old Nile hippopotamus at the St. Louis Zoo in St. Louis, April 25, 2002. mk/bg/Bill Greenblatt UPI | License Photo

"There was no transition at all, no sense of approaching danger. It was as if I had suddenly gone blind and deaf," Paul Templer recalled. "I was aware that my legs were surrounded by water, but my top half was almost dry. I seemed to be trapped in something slimy."

Templer was an experienced river guide leading kayak expeditions along the Zambezi River near Victoria Falls, and one afternoon, he found himself fighting for his life half-swallowed by huge bull hippo.

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The story of Templer's dramatic brush with death in March of 1996, appeared

on the [Guardian's "Experience" blog](#) Friday and has since been shared and tweeted thousands of times.

As he tells it, the hippo "wasn't a stranger -- he and I had met a number of times" and it seemed to have it out for Templer.

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Late in the afternoon after a day of paddling, Templer saw a colleague's boat lifted out of the water on the hippo's back. He went after the other guide, Evan, who had been thrown from his kayak, and found himself stuck in the jaws of the giant animal.

There was a terrible, sulphurous smell, like rotten eggs, and a tremendous pressure against my chest. My arms were trapped but I managed to free one hand and felt around -- my palm passed through the wiry bristles of the hippo's snout. It was only then that I realised I was underwater, trapped up to my waist in his mouth.

I wriggled as hard as I could, and in the few seconds for which he opened his jaws, I managed to escape. I swam towards Evans, but the hippo struck again, dragging me back under the surface. I'd never heard of a hippo attacking repeatedly like this, but he clearly wanted me dead.

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The hippo shook Templer, dragged him under, and held him down before suddenly dragging him back toward the surface, where he was finally able to escape.

But a stroke of good fortune, another colleague knew enough first aid to bind Templer's extensive wounds -- his left arm was crushed, puncture wounds in his chest and back so bad his lung was visible -- and a medical team that happened to be nearby was able to help him survive long enough to reach a surgeon.

Templer's injuries put him at triple risk of major limb loss, but he ended up losing just his left arm, and soon, he was back on the water.

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"Two years later I led an expedition down the Zambezi and as we drifted past the stretch where the attack had taken place, a huge hippo lurched out of the water next to my canoe," he said. "I screamed so loudly that those with me said they'd never heard anything like it. He dived back under and was never seen again. I'd bet my life savings it was the same hippo, determined to have the final word."

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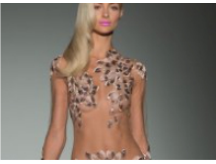
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