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NATIONAL NEWS

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To the Rescue!

A young search-and-rescue-volunteer comes to the aid of lost or injured hikers in northern California

BY TFK KID REPORTER ERIN WIENS ST. JOHN

It's 3:00 a.m. Rain pounds on the windows. Tamsen Bell's pager beeps and she jumps out of bed. Someone is in trouble, and it's up to Bell and the other members of the Marin Search and Rescue Team to help.

The team, which is in Marin County, in northern California, has a motto: "Any time, any place, any weather." Bell, 18, knows firsthand that these are words that the team's 77 volunteers live by. As one of 20 youth members, Bell trains vigorously so that she is prepared to help someone who may have fallen off a cliff or become lost in the woods. The Marin team, founded in 1970, receives up to 50 emergency calls each year.



MARK BELL

Tamsen Bell, 18, gears up for a search-and-rescue training mission.

A Hero in Training

Bell joined the search-and-rescue team when she was 14 years old, the youngest age at which one can join.

"I remember the first search I ever went on," Bell says. "I was so nervous. My mind was in a million different places."

Thanks to her training, Bell now feels more confident. She and her teammates completed a rigorous 60-hour training program. They learned how to perform the basics: tying knots, reading maps and giving medical aid. Bell practices her skills during the team's frequent training sessions.

A Life-Changing Mission

When Bell was 16 years old, she took a lead role in a search-and-rescue mission that she says changed her life. While hiking, a 60-year-old woman fell 50 feet off a cliff and landed on a mountain ledge. She broke a part of her neck and suffered other injuries.



MARK BELL

Bell practices scaling down a mountain in Yosemite National Park, in California, as part of her search-and-rescue training.

In a seated position, Bell slid down a steep part of the mountain to get to where the injured woman lay. She examined the woman to find out what kinds of injuries she had suffered from the fall. Then, Bell had to decide the best way to transport her to safety.

Bell helped to lift the woman onto a litter, which is a metal basket for carrying injured people. Her teammates then pulled the litter up the mountain using ropes. The rescue took more than eight hours, the longest in the history of the team.

Afterwards, Bell says she realized that she could keep her cool in stressful situations. The experience inspired her to devote her life to helping others. She remains a search-and-rescue volunteer and plans to study nursing in college.

Search-and-rescue missions may be tough work, Bell says, but they're also rewarding. "The best part is the support, the friendships and the common feeling that everyone on the team wants to make people's lives better," Bell told TFK.