

# Appalachia

---

Volume 69  
Number 2 *Summer/Fall 2018: Role Reversal in  
the Mountains*

---

Article 10

2018

## An Injury Changes the Story: Encounter with a Baby Stroller

Elissa Ely

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia>



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ely, Elissa (2018) "An Injury Changes the Story: Encounter with a Baby Stroller," *Appalachia*: Vol. 69: No. 2, Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/appalachia/vol69/iss2/10>

This In This Issue is brought to you for free and open access by Dartmouth Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Appalachia by an authorized editor of Dartmouth Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu](mailto:dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu).

# An Injury Changes the Story

*Encounter with a baby stroller*

**Elissa Ely**



I HAD OVER-PREPARED FOR THE CANADIAN ROCKIES. EARNEST BUT excessive training efforts had led to the very tendonitis they were meant to prevent. Misery and head-slapping regret!

Now we would have none of those high-elevation, grand summit stories we had anticipated. Instead, we chose a lower trail—the Ptarmigan Cirque, a 2.8-mile loop in Alberta’s Kananaskis country—and started to limp up. Two modest waterfalls, a few dry stream crossings; a bit of disappointment. We passed a black dog the size of a black bear and a busload of Asian tourists wearing winter gloves and hats in July, solemnly photographing one another.

We made it to the junction of a small path cutting to the left, up the rock face of Mount Arethusa, 9,551 feet. Wildflowers turned to scree and green to relentless gray. The backs of those heading up bent low; they had lost all color. They could have been on their way to Hell, except that they were walking in the wrong direction.

Gingerly starting down, we met a girl on her way up. Maybe she was 5, wearing a party dress. On each of her sandals, a purple plastic flower sprouted out of the big toe, and with each step, she caught some part of her hem. Over and over, she stopped to free herself. When we leaned down to offer a hand, she shook it away.

Behind her, a young woman in athletic shorts pushed a double stroller with three wheels and enough room inside for two children, although I could see no one inside. It was the kind of vehicle one parent commandeers on a Sunday morning run while the other parent sleeps in: like a mini-condo, without the mini-refrigerator. The woman was pushing it up at least 700 feet of rock and root. My injured ankle had barely ascended this stretch; three wheels and a small condo would never manage the narrow switchbacks.

Beneath netting, the soles of two small sneakers faced outward. Now above those sneakers, I thought I could make out the same resigned expression I’d noticed in other bounced children on Sunday mornings.

—You need help, Mama? the girl asked, using her hands to tug her hem out from under her party sandals. This required lifting her feet from the ground, which required scrambling for balance.

—No thank you, Merin, her mother said, cheerfully.

*The Ptarmigan Cirque loop trail crosses a meadow surrounded by relentless scree-covered rock faces.* KAREN UNG/PLAYOUTSIDEGUIDE.COM

The path was barely wide enough for two people much less a double stroller, and a small crowd of downward walkers had backed up. We waited, witness to a phenomenon.

Had she missed that sign back at the beginning to take the self-guided interpretive nature trail? Was she an ultrarunner? Was this a small bit of insanity? Someone, probably an engineer, called down to suggest that if she persisted, it might be better to pull her carriage from above, instead of pushing it from below. She smiled and kept on pushing.

Merin watched from nearby. She seemed philosophical.

—I better dig a hole, she said to no one in particular. A *big* hole.

She grabbed a strong root that poked into the air like a free stick and began to tug at it. Impossible goals seemed to run in the family.

Her mother stopped, peered over the stroller, and came around.

—Not working well, she murmured. She tugged the stroller over to the edge of the path and crouched down by the front wheel. When that happened, downward hikers flowed forward. Merin's mother jiggled the wheel a few times, and after a minute, turned the stroller onto the path and upward again.

A mountain makes its own weather, and its own stories. One of them—inexplicable and absurd—starts its climb. Because injury prevented the route we would rather have taken, we had come upon it.

The story continues to climb, no matter what the elevation. It cannot be stopped and is no less compelling for being lower to the ground. And then, unless it is our story, it disappears from view.

---

ELISSA ELY is a Boston-based community psychiatrist and writer.