

Wilder Boys

By Brandon Wallace

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Two brothers will need all their wilderness skills to survive when they set off into the woods of Wyoming in search of their absent father.

Jake and Taylor Wilder have been taking care of themselves for a long time. Their father abandoned the family years ago, and their mother is too busy working and running interference between the boys and her boyfriend, Bull, to spend a lot of time with them. Thirteen-year-old Jake spends most of his time reading. He pours over his father's journal, which is full of wilderness facts and survival tips. Eleven-year-old Taylor likes to be outside playing with their dog, Cody, or joking around with the other kids in the neighborhood.

But one night everything changes. The boys discover a dangerous secret that Bull is hiding.

And the next day, they come home from school to find their mother unconscious in an ambulance. Knowing they are no longer safe and with nowhere else to go, the Wilder Boys head off in search of their father. They only have his old letters and journal to help them, but they have to make it.

It's a long journey from the suburbs of Pittsburgh to the wilderness of Wyoming; can the Wilder Boys find their father before Bull catches up with them?

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal
Gr 5–8—A fresh take on the classic theme of youngsters escaping adult strictures to strike out on their own and live off the land. Thirteen-year-old Jake Wilder and his 11-year-old brother Taylor hate and fear their mother's vicious, abusive boyfriend, Bull. Their fears are heightened when, in quick succession, they witness Bull shooting another man and their mother being taken away on a gurney after suffering a beating. The boys grab a bundle of cash Bull had hidden and set off from their home in Pennsylvania to reconnect with their father, who abandoned them years before to live off the grid in Wyoming. With their loyal dog Cody in tow, the boys hop a freight train, hitch a ride with a sympathetic trucker, stow away in the luggage compartment of a bus, and start hiking in the vicinity of the Grand Tetons, with only their father's enigmatic directions to guide them. During the course of their adventures, they rescue a rough-hewn naturalist named Skeet, who takes them in and teaches them survival skills. Though this work is chock-full of action, the style is pedestrian and the ending both abrupt and contrived. Appended is an illustrated list of "Wilderness Tips." VERDICT Despite the lackluster writing and inauthentic conclusion, this book contains enough action, adventure, and outdoor lore to appeal to middle grade fans of Wills Hobbs and Gary Paulsen.—Richard Luzer, Fair Haven Union High School, VT

About the Author
Trekking solo across the remotest corners of Wyoming and Montana as a young man, Brandon Wallace learned how to survive the hard way in the harshest conditions nature could throw at him. Having spent the subsequent two decades as a trail leader, passing on his knowledge to a generation of budding adventurers, he turned his hand to fictionalizing his experiences, and the Wilder Boys series was born.

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Wilder Boys
1 Splashing through murky pools of rainwater by the side of the road, the mud-splattered school bus rumbled to a stop. With an eager leap, Jake and his younger brother, Taylor, rose from their seats.

“Last day of school tomorrow.” Taylor grinned at the bus driver as he reached the door. “What are you gonna do without us?”

Mr. Polanachek grunted. “I’m going to get some peace and quiet, that’s what!”

“Aw, admit it,” Taylor said. “You’re gonna miss us, aren’t ya?”

“Like I’d miss this ulcer you kids been givin’ me.”

Jake nudged his brother from behind. “Quit being a pain, Taylor. You’re making everyone late.”

Taylor laughed and hopped down the bus steps. “See ya tomorrow, Mr. Polanachek! Don’t forget to bring your ulcer with you!”

Jake jumped down beside him on the gravel-strewn side of the road. “Do you even know what an ulcer is, Taylor?”

Taylor ran his fingers through his wavy light brown hair and rolled his eyes up at Jake. At thirteen, Jake was

only two years older than his brother, but that didn't stop him acting like he was a know-it-all adult sometimes. However, before Taylor could answer, the boys heard a sharp high-pitched bark and saw a brown-and-white flash streaking toward them.

"Cody!" Taylor shouted, and squatted down to let the Jack Russell terrier leap into his arms. "How's our boy?"

The dog squirmed happily in Taylor's grasp and plastered slobber across his cheek.

Jake laughed. "He's right on time!" Cody danced around the boys' feet as if they'd been away for years, rather than a few hours. He always seemed to know the exact time they'd return from school.

As they did every day, the two brothers and Cody turned down a side street into their neighborhood, strolling home to check on their mom. Taylor happily splashed through puddles in the broken sidewalk and kicked a rock toward a peeling yellow fire hydrant that had been almost completely swallowed by weeds.

"I can't believe tomorrow is the last day of school!" Taylor exclaimed. "Man, I can't wait. I'm just gonna sleep in, play baseball, and forget about homework. Hey! Maybe you and me can go fishin'?"

Jake raised an eyebrow at him. "Fishing?"

"Why not? Dad taught you, didn't he? I mean, before he left?"

"Well, sort of, but we don't have any gear."

"We can get some."

"How? Do you have money to buy fishing tackle?"

"Maybe Bull will get it for us."

"Taylor, get real." Jake huffed as the blast of a train whistle sounded from the freight yards down by the river. "When's the last time Bull bought us anything?"

Taylor shrugged. "It was just an idea."

Jake kept quiet. The truth was, thinking about summer made his stomach feel like it was filled with gravel. Even though his school wasn't exactly a five-star academy, Jake loved going there every day. He often spent lunch period in the library, devouring books. He hung out mostly in the action-adventure section, but he would read almost anything else in the library too. School was the one place he didn't have to worry about Mom or her psychotic boyfriend, Bull.

"Hey!" Taylor blurted, pulling Jake from his thoughts. "Check it out!"

Jake halted and followed Taylor's pointed finger, sweeping his dark hair away from his eyes. A brilliant yellow-and-black bird perched on a telephone wire less than thirty feet from where they stood.

"Geez, you ever seen one like that?"

“No,” Jake admitted. Crows, pigeons, and sparrows ruled the area around their neighborhood. He recognized all of them, but there was normally never anything this flashy. “Maybe we’ll find it in the book Mom gave us,” he said. “Let’s look it up when we get home.”

As the boys approached the neighborhood church, they spotted a black-and-white police cruiser parked on the street. Jake recognized the large, familiar shape of Officer Grasso.

“Hey, Officer Grasso!” Taylor shouted. “How many bad guys you catch today?”

The policeman grinned. “Not enough, as usual. How you boys doing? Only one more day of school, huh? You looking forward to summer?”

Taylor gave an exaggerated sigh. “You can say that again.”

Jake just nodded. Both he and his brother liked the policeman. Once or twice a week, Officer Grasso would park here, a toothpick in his mouth, to greet the kids coming home from school. The neighborhood had a reputation for petty crime and drug use, and the policeman knew it made people feel safer to see him around.

“What are you going to do with all your free time?” Officer Grasso asked.

“We were just talkin’ about that,” said Taylor. “I’m gonna play baseball, and me and Jake are goin’ fishing.”

“Fishing, huh? Good idea. When I was a kid, the rivers around here were so dirty from the factories, we didn’t dare go near ’em. Now I hear they hold bass tournaments in them!”

While Taylor tossed a stick for Cody, Officer Grasso lowered his voice and turned to Jake, asking, “Say, you seen Bull lately?”

“Uh, he’s been around,” Jake answered. “Why?”

The officer had asked the question casually, but Jake picked up an undercurrent beneath his words. Jake had to be careful with these kinds of situations. The fact was, he was afraid of Bull, but he couldn’t let anyone know anything was wrong—least of all the cops. Although he would have liked nothing better than to see his mom’s boyfriend thrown in jail, Jake knew that if he took a wrong step, Bull would come after him. Even worse, he might go after Taylor or their mom.

The policemen shrugged. “Oh, nothing, really. There was an, uh, incident last night not far from here. I thought maybe Bull might know something about it.”

Or did it himself, Jake thought.

“Did anyone get hurt?”

The officer lifted his hat, ran his hand over his thick sandy hair, and replaced the hat. “Not this time.”

“Well, Bull was home with us last night,” Jake lied. “I doubt he’d know anything.”

Before the policeman could ask anything else, Jake said, “We’d better go check on our mom.”

Officer Grasso seemed unconvinced, but he let the boys go. “Okay. You take care now.”

“You too,” said Jake, continuing down the street. “C’mon, Taylor. Cody.”

Jake felt dread in the pit of his stomach. He hated lying to Officer Grasso, but he couldn’t take any chances where Bull was concerned. He had to keep his family safe. Jake and Taylor had lived in this neighborhood for the last seven years, ever since their father left. It wasn’t exactly mansion heights, but it was still a tight community. Gossip spread quickly. About four blocks deep by ten blocks long, the neighborhood was lined by simple clapboard houses that had seen better days. For Jake and Taylor, it wasn’t much, but it was home.

A couple of houses down the boys passed the peach-colored house belonging to Mrs. Sanchez. As usual at this time of year, Mrs. Sanchez busied herself in the front yard, tending her small vegetable garden.

“Hi, Mrs. Sanchez,” Jake greeted her.

She straightened her back, wincing slightly from arthritis. “Oh, hi, boys. How are you?”

Taylor and Cody hurried over to her. “Anything comin’ up yet?”

“You mean apart from your bean pole of a brother?” Mrs. Sanchez flashed a wry smile at Jake, who was starting to look a lot older than his thirteen years. “Well, yes, as a matter of fact.”

Mrs. Sanchez pointed to a half dozen fat twin leaves that had just poked up out of the ground.

“Cool! What are they?” Taylor asked.

“Don’t you remember? I showed them to you last year,” said Mrs. Sanchez. “Take a guess.”

“Uh, carrots?”

“Nope. Jake?”

“Hmm . . .” Jake had seen the plants before, and he knew the answer was lodged somewhere in his brain. Finally he said, “Squash?”

Mrs. Sanchez beamed. “Very good. Just for that, I’ll let you have the first one that gets ripe!”

“Aw,” Taylor said, disappointed.

Jake punched him in the shoulder. “If you quit being such a pain, I might even share.”

Mrs. Sanchez laughed, then said, “Jake, how is your mom doing?”

“Good,” Taylor answered for him. “The nice weather’s making her feel like her old self.”

Jake knew that wasn’t exactly the truth, but he didn’t see any point in contradicting his younger brother.

Mrs. Sanchez nodded. “Well, you let me know if there’s anything I can do.”

“Thanks!”

At the end of the block, the boys approached their own place—a small house about twice as big as Mrs. Sanchez’s. Unfortunately, it was twice as shabby, too—at least since their mom had gotten sick. White paint peeled like dead skin from the wooden siding, while the wooden slats of the fence had begun to fall off one by one. Every year, Bull promised to get the place fixed up and painted, but like most of Bull’s promises, this one never amounted to anything.

Maybe I’ll just do it myself this summer, Jake thought as he pulled open the screen door and entered the house.

The boys let their book-filled packs plunk to the floor, and then they tiptoed back to check on their mom. The dusty, yellowed blinds were drawn in her room, but even in the dim light, Jake could make out his mother’s sleeping form and hear her ragged breath. A dozen orange vials of pills, half of them with their caps off, sat on the small table next to her bed.

Their mom, Jennifer, had never told the boys exactly what was wrong with her, but Jake had overheard the words depression and anxiety. It had started four years earlier, about the time Bull had shown up. Since then she’d grown steadily worse. First she’d had to quit her job at the bank. Then she stopped being able to go out. For the last year she’d spent most of her time in bed.

For the millionth time, Jake wondered how different it might have been if their father, Abe Wilder, had stuck around. And for the millionth time, anger boiled up inside him. If their father hadn’t been so selfish, Bull wouldn’t be in their lives. Most of all, their mother might not be sick.

“C’mon,” Taylor said. “Let’s see if there’s anything to eat.”

Shaking off his anger, Jake followed his younger brother into the kitchen. Taylor yanked open the refrigerator. “Whoa! Look here!”

Usually, the fridge held nothing but Bull’s beer and maybe a half-empty ketchup bottle. Today a fresh pack of hot dogs sat on the middle shelf.

“Looks like Bull used mom’s food stamps to buy some real food for once,” Jake said.

“I saw ’em first!”

Taylor grabbed the package and tore it open. He shoved one of the cold hot dogs into his mouth and gave another one to Cody.

Just then the boys heard the front screen door open, followed by heavy footsteps. A moment later the scraggly, unshaved face of their mother’s boyfriend appeared in the kitchen door. Jake’s stomach dropped as Bull’s gray eyes flashed toward him.

“Hey, Bull,” Taylor said. “Thanks for getting us the—”

Bull’s face contorted with rage. “What do ya think you’re doin’? Those franks aren’t for you punks. And they’re especially not for your mangy mutt!”

Bull kicked at Cody, but the dog deftly leaped to the side, cowering from the stocky, barrel-chested brute standing over him.

“Leave him alone!” Taylor hollered. “He didn’t do anything to you!”

“He’s eating my food!”

“Taylor . . .,” Jake began, trying to calm his brother. Jake knew that once Taylor got going, there wasn’t much that could stop him. Even though fights with Bull only ever ended one way.

“It’s our mom’s money that bought this food!” Taylor shouted at Bull. “Cody can have as much as he wants!”

“You’d better watch your mouth,” Bull snarled, stepping forward.

Taylor didn’t back down; instead he puffed his chest out and glared up at Bull, his green eyes flashing. “Why? You’re not even part of this family! If our dad were here, he’d kick you out on your butt!”

Bull’s face grew even redder, all the way up his veiny forehead to the roots of his slicked-back hair. “Thank God, I ain’t your dad. Your dad was a worthless loser, and crazy, too! What kind of man would leave his kids and his sick wife to go chase some crazy daydream?”

“She wasn’t sick before you came along!” Taylor shouted back. “You made her sick. You make me sick. You steal and cheat and . . .”

Bull took another step forward. “Why, you lyin’ little—”

Bull raised his hand to strike Taylor, his sinewy forearm slick with sweat.

“No!” Jake shouted, leaping in front of Bull’s arm as it began to swing. The blow caught Jake flush on the cheek, knocking him to the floor. Cody began barking furiously. Jake saw purple spots but struggled to get back up, afraid Bull would strike Taylor next. However, instead of continuing the attack, Bull just glared at the two boys.

“You thieving little punks. If it wasn’t for your . . .”

Bull didn’t finish the sentence. Instead he spun around and stormed out of the house, tearing off the screen door as he left.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rick Maldonado:

Book is written, printed, or descriptive for everything. You can learn everything you want by a guide. Book has a different type. As we know that book is important factor to bring us around the world. Alongside that you can your reading skill was fluently. A guide Wilder Boys will make you to always be smarter. You can feel far more confidence if you can know about anything. But some of you think this open or reading the book make you bored. It isn't make you fun. Why they could be thought like that? Have you trying to find

best book or ideal book with you?

Sharon Garcia:

This book untitled Wilder Boys to be one of several books this best seller in this year, here is because when you read this guide you can get a lot of benefit into it. You will easily to buy that book in the book retail outlet or you can order it through online. The publisher of the book sells the e-book too. It makes you easier to read this book, as you can read this book in your Smart phone. So there is no reason for you to past this book from your list.

Alice Myers:

The actual book Wilder Boys has a lot info on it. So when you check out this book you can get a lot of gain. The book was written by the very famous author. Tom makes some research previous to write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you can get the point easily after perusing this book.

Lauren Clarke:

What is your hobby? Have you heard that will question when you got learners? We believe that that question was given by teacher on their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everybody has different hobby. And you also know that little person just like reading or as reading become their hobby. You have to know that reading is very important along with book as to be the point. Book is important thing to increase you knowledge, except your current teacher or lecturer. You find good news or update in relation to something by book. Amount types of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is actually Wilder Boys.

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