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# Death at the Grand Canyon: How a Story Can Save Lives

Rob Biesenbach | [Storytelling](#)

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(Personal Photo)

Five million people come to the Grand Canyon every year and a handful [don't make it back alive](#). This is the story of one of those deaths, and what it can teach us.

Grand Canyon visitors get into trouble in all kinds of ways. They don't carry enough water or food, they underestimate how strenuous the hike is, they don't bring protection from the sun, they go off the trails, they fail to read maps or bring the right equipment. More than a thousand people require [emergency help](#) of some kind each year.

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## ed Words

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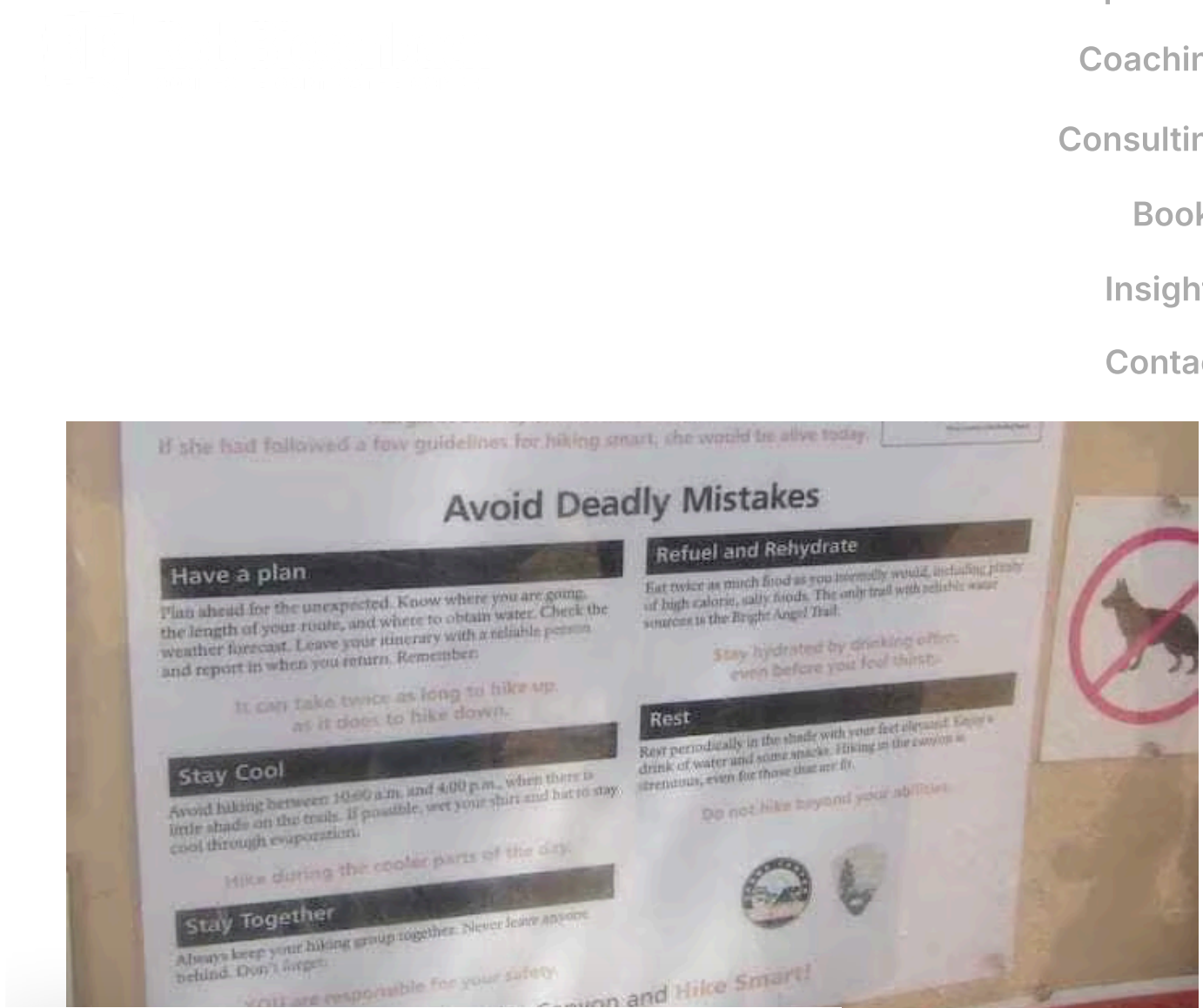
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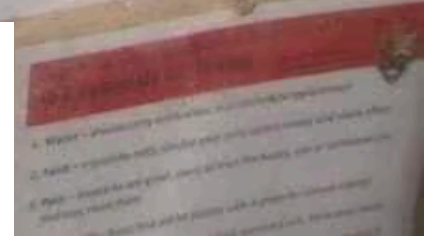
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whether you're prepared.

## The Story Behind the Story

Later I checked online and found [the full story](#), which is even more sad and strange than depicted on the sign. She might have lived if not for some odd communication failures. But I salute the Park Service for focusing on the details that mattered to the audience they're trying to reach and discarding those that would diminish the story's power to affect people's behavior.

For instance, Margaret and her friend had apparently set out to *run*, not just hike, the trail that day. If that detail had been included, it would be easier for people to dismiss the warning — "Oh, I'm just hiking, not running." But that may not have had any impact on the outcome, given their under-

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