



## Local Matters.

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#### The survival of Aron Ralston

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Cherry Creek High School graduate Aron Ralston was 27 years old in April 2003 when he brazenly hiked alone into Utah's Blue John Canyon with little more than a water bottle, a sandwich, a camcorder and a cheap multipurpose utility knife.

He walked out five days later after testing the limits of human endurance. An 800-pound boulder had trapped Ralston at the bottom of a narrow canyon — his cries for help buried in a desolate corner of Canyonlands National Park.

The self-styled climber survived his 127-hour ordeal by rationing what little food he had, recycling his urine and talking himself into mental survival. He fought his boredom in quixotic efforts to move the enormous rock and by taping sometimes humorous confessionals on his camcorder.

Eventually, and famously, Ralston escaped death by taking the most final of last resorts, cutting off his dying arm below the elbow. Its depiction is the culmination of "127 Hours," a new film based on Ralston's best-selling 2004 memoir "Between a Rock and a Hard Place."

To be clear, it is the totality of the author's existential and physical crisis that captured the focus of director Danny Boyle, whose previous works include the 2008 hit "Slumdog Millionaire" and 1996's "Trainspotting."

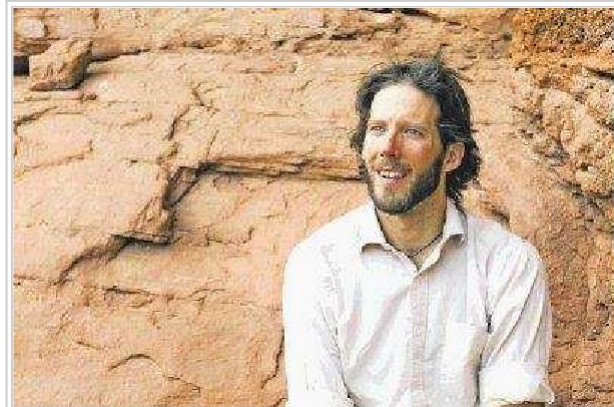
Actor James Franco turns in essentially a one-man tour de force as Ralston. Boyle traps the audience, along with the climber, at the bottom of his pit. A passing raven and the recurring temptation of the knife are the supporting characters.

Viewers never leave Ralston's side as the famished climber waxes emotional, hallucinates reunions, and slowly finds the wherewithal to remove the only thing that stands in the way of life.

Colorado Community Newspapers recently asked the onetime Centennial resident to reflect on his experiences and the new film that has revived his story.

**CCN:** The movie is getting great reviews, but it's also causing some people to faint and vomit. Any thoughts?

**Ralston:** [The amputation] is a fairly small part of the film. It is a very powerful and intense scene. I kind of take it as a compliment to the filmmakers, a testimony to how accurate they made the film because I was there trying my hardest not to pass out in the midst of [removing my arm], telling myself repeatedly, "Don't pass out, keep breathing."



In 2003, former Centennial resident Aron Ralston was forced to cut off his arm during a harrowing ordeal in Utah's Blue John Canyon. Ralston's story is told in the new film "127 Hours." The movie had its Colorado premiere at the recent Denver Film Festival. Courtesy photo by Chuck Zlotnick

**CCN:** The movie audience is essentially trapped with you at the bottom of the canyon as you hallucinate and experience tremendous psychological and physical duress. By the time you get around to cutting off the arm, it's sort of like, "C'mon, Aron, get rid of it already."

**Ralston:** Yeah. That's what we really wanted people to do. There have been a number of times when the audience has burst into cheers in that moment. That's really the point. It's freedom. It's liberation. It's exhilarating. It was the most ecstatic moment of my life — up until my son was born. All of that joy of being alive was right there in one moment. The euphoria was so intense. That almost made me pass out more than the pain.

**CCN:** Your experience in the canyon was highly surreal, and now you're the subject of a major motion picture and effectively a popular-culture figure. Has this experience been equally surreal?

**Ralston:** Yeah, it definitely has been. I came from being a fairly private introspective person. I had friends, but I did kind of keep them at a distance. That's another thing that is portrayed fairly accurately in the film.

**CCN:** What about your portrayal as a guy who dances around canyons like they're his playpen, doesn't bring proper equipment, doesn't tell anyone where he's going, and uses risk as a way to attract women? Are you still a crazy fool?

**Ralston:** (laughs) Maybe we all are in some aspects. But I have gone through a transformation. I do think the film does capture a good amount of my essence from that era. Here I was, 27 years old and an accomplished outdoorsman. I was very ego-driven and at a place of need fulfillment. The outdoors was where I was deriving that sense of my identity.

Today, I definitely wear a helmet a good deal of the time in the canyons — but not always. It depends on the objective hazard and your assessment of the risks. One guy's preparation is another guy's burden. It's dependent on your skills — not just what's in your pack, but what's in your head.

Are you being irresponsible when you take your dog out for a walk and you don't tell somebody where you're going? That to me was the equivalent experience. This was something that was so low key, low consequence and low risk. That was a misjudgment, but that was the place I was in my life.

**CCN:** Someone told me he would not see "127 Hours" because he refuses to support a movie about a guy who has become famous and successful by being stupid.

**Ralston:** I'm not going to hide the fact that I started a business. I'm a motivational speaker. I wrote a book. I've done endorsements and commercials. It's been a lot of financial gain for me and my family. But I've also tried to give back to the wilderness and to disabled-athletics programs and empowering at-risk youth to see something stronger in themselves.

If somebody decides to boycott it because they don't need messages of hope and inspiration, fine. I'm not going to begrudge anybody for not wanting to spend an hour and a half sitting in a movie theater. But I saw the legacy that this story had. People wrote to tell me how it affected them and even saved their life — in a couple of instances — from suicide and depression.

I'm really glad that the film team — Danny Boyle primarily and James Franco — collaborated with me to make sure this was an authentic experience and has an uplifting message to it.

**CCN:** Are you still a risk taker? Do you have an edgy investment portfolio? Do you cross intersections when the sign flashes, "Don't walk"?

**Ralston:** (laughs) Today, I have a 9-month-old baby son. It's definitely changed my perception of risk. The transition you go through from when you drive on your way to the hospital to have the baby to when you drive on your way home with the baby — it's an incredible transformation. I see myself making different decisions [since my son was born].

**CCN:** You lost an arm, but you traded it for something else?

**Ralston:** Yeah. What's important to me is the impact that this story has had for people. I want it to continue to have that effect of hope, uplifting inspiration, and giving folks a sense that they're not alone. I look at this experience as a gift. For my family, it's connected our relationships much more deeply than they were. The film has taken [the message] to an even higher level.

