

## **Brothers tell bizarre tale of being raised in the bush**

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VERNON, B.C. -- Two half-starved brothers who emerged from the bush two weeks ago are telling an astonishing tale of growing up in complete isolation in the remote backwoods of B.C.'s Interior.

Initially, the story of Tom and Will Green seemed like Swiss-Family-Robinson fiction.

But now a wide-ranging group including a young mother, lawyer, counsellor, Salvation Army staff and the local member of Parliament have come to believe it might be true.

"They are not like other street kids," says Carol Anne, who once ran a group home for runaways and now works as a receptionist for local Canadian Alliance MP Darrel Stinson.

"They don't have that what's-it-to-you, in-your-face demeanour."

The kind-hearted group of residents put the brothers in a hotel and provided them with food. They are also fiercely protecting the privacy of Tom, 22, and Will, 16. None would arrange an interview, for fear of spooking the boys back into the bush.

Born in the wilderness, the brothers claim they were raised in complete isolation by their mother and father, who call themselves Mary and Joseph Green. They believe they were born in Canada, but that their parents are American.

They say they have never been to school, seen a doctor, watched television or made a childhood friend.

Their mother taught them to read using books she bought during occasional trips out of the wilderness homestead. The family's sole contact with the outside world was one friend who paid them rare visits.

They hunted for food and supplemented their diet with provisions from town.

The brothers say they do not know where the money came from.

Will says he was ordered to leave home this summer when he became a vegetarian and his mother declared him an "alien influence" in the home, says Rhelda Evans, a case worker for Stinson.

Tom followed, and the brothers hitched a ride to Vernon, in B.C.'s Interior about 80 kilometres northeast of Kelowna, where they surfaced about four months ago.

They spent the summer in the bush, begging fruit, vegetables and money from local farmers.

Evans has so far found no one who can verify their birthplace or citizenship. They claim to have no birth certificates, hospital or school records and carry no identification.

If the story is true, says Evans, in the eyes of the state, Tom and Will Green do not exist.

A kindly woman with 13 grandchildren of her own, Evans was initially skeptical.

But after meeting the brothers, she joined the group trying to help.

"There are individual kids who are really good actors, but I don't think two kids could be really good actors," she added.

Stinson, who grew up near Revelstoke, B.C., is reserving judgment. But knowing the backwoods of B.C., he believes the story is plausible.

The vast tracts of wilderness in the Interior have long drawn people seeking refuge or solitude.

The Kootenay area near Nelson was a magnet for American draft dodgers in the 1960s. And to this day, there are settlers living deep in the forest where the unwritten etiquette is to leave alone those who shun company, Stinson says.

The brothers are protective of their parents and refuse to divulge their location, says Evans.

"We're still trying to win their trust so they will allow us to help them," she says.

(Vancouver Province)

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