

Transcript: “*All Thirteen* for Scholastic *Scope* and *Storyworks*”

Hi *Scope* readers! My name is Christina Soontornvat and I’m so excited to take a look behind the scenes of my narrative nonfiction story for this issue, *Trapped in a Cave*. The article is based on my book *All Thirteen*, about an incredible cave rescue in Thailand on June 23, 2018.

Twelve young players from a soccer team called the Wild Boars went for a hike in a cave with their coach. All of a sudden, the cave flooded, trapping them inside. As the team fought for survival, thousands of people from across Thailand and around the world came together to help save them. Over two weeks, they made the impossible happen. All twelve boys and their coach were brought to safety.

On the day the Wild Boars went missing, I had actually just arrived in Northern Thailand. I’d flown there from my home in Texas to visit my family. They lived just a few hours away from Tham Luang, the cave where the boys were trapped. In fact, we had talked about going to that area to visit some caves, but the weather didn’t look so good. Those same rainstorms that put off our family outing created the crisis in Tham Luang. For the rest of our vacation in Thailand, I watched the story of the rescue unfold on the Thai TV. I felt the sense of worry and hope thick in the air around me.

I had to return to the U.S. before the boys were safely rescued. Like most of the world, I was glued to my phone waiting to see if the rescuers could pull off a miracle. When they did, I just knew this had to be a book.

I wanted kids like you to learn about the incredible, impossible rescue. Having followed the story from both Thailand and the U.S., I felt that there was a big piece missing from the news coverage here: the role that thousands of Thai people played in saving the boys. I wanted to help bring that important part of the story to light for you.

Until then, I had only written fiction books. This would be my first nonfiction book and as I soon learned, it would take a lot of research! I started out by reading every book I could possibly find on caves, cave diving, geology, survival, and even soccer. But to truly understand the rescue, I knew I had to visit the scene where it happened.

So, in October of that year, I flew back to Northern Thailand. Because I don’t speak Thai, my dad came with me to help translate. Together we visited the small close-knit town where the boys live with their families. We hiked through the beautiful mountains they like to explore together after school, and we made the dusty drive up to Tham Luang. More than two months later, it was still flooded with water.

Walking through the parking lot, I could imagine the thousands of people who had gathered there, working day and night to get the boys out. I was lucky enough to interview many of them over the course of my trip—from the boys’ parents, to an expert on the Tham Luang cave, to volunteers who gave whatever they could to the rescue mission. Then, toward the end of my trip, I got exciting news. I’d been invited to join the boys for a dinner they were attending back in the U.S.!

Because they had survived such an intense experience, I think I’d expected them to be more serious but here they were playing goofy pranks on each other at the dinner table! I was struck by how they were both extraordinary and totally ordinary at the same time.

Finally, it was time to start writing. How would I possibly fit all the cool stuff I learned and the amazing people I'd met into one book? Of course, I couldn't! I had to make some tough decisions about who and what to include or this book would have weighed 100 pounds! To do that, I thought about the main theme of my story, the big idea that I wanted you to take away from reading it.

I talked with the Wild Boars who pushed through extreme hunger, cold, and fear to keep themselves alive in the dark. I had talked to dozens of people who defied impossible odds to rescue them. They had all taught me that impossible exists only in your mind. You are capable of so much more than you can imagine. I decided that this was the message I most wanted to share with you.

Keeping it in mind helped me decide what to include in my book and later my *Scope* article. Writing the story helped me realize that we're all so much stronger than we think we are. I hope you feel the same way when you read it! I feel lucky to have learned this powerful lesson and to be able to share it with you.