

## Girlfriend lost after argument

**September 18, 2000  
Palm Springs Tramway  
2000-022**

By David Morrill  
The Desert Sun

Rescuers were astonished when they spotted Jeannine Landrenaux, the 22-year-old Palm Desert woman who had been missing for 3 days, waving her arms in Tahquitz Canyon.



Except for a few cuts and slight dehydration, Landrenaux was in remarkably good health.

“It was a very pleasant surprise,” said Alan Franks of Riverside County Search and Rescue. “For awhile we didn’t think we would be able to find her.”

It was about 4 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 19th, when Mike Parker of the National Guard, who was flying in a Blackhawk helicopter to check out the area, spotted the missing woman about 4,000 feet up the canyon in rugged terrain.

“I just happened to be looking at the right spot and saw her and S-O-S chalked on the rocks,” Parker said. “When you find someone, it makes all the blood, sweat and tears we go through worth it.”

The National Guard called in the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department who lifted the stranded woman out of the canyon by helicopter. Because of the rugged canyon landscape, it took rescuers more than two hours to get her in a harness, lift her to the helicopter and get her off the mountain.



Ron Soliman, The Desert Sun

Found: Twenty-two-year-old Jeannine Landrenaux of Palm Desert is lead out of a helicopter by rescuers.

Once she was off the mountain, Landrenaux was taken to Desert Regional Medical Center to be examined. She was later released about 9:15 p.m.

“She was fortunate, because sometimes when you go up there with this kind of heat, it is only a matter of hours before your body gets dehydrated and you go into a state of no return,” said Ken Kraft, a hospital supervisor.

On Sunday, Sept. 17th, Landrenaux was hiking with a friend when the two became separated. Her companion was able to make it down the mountain and notify authorities.

At 6 a.m. Monday, Landrenaux made a 9-1-1 call with her cellular phone and Verizon Wireless was able to tell authorities which mountain she was on.

Officials said she was found near a waterfall, which could have served as her water supply.

“I can’t imagine her to be so goofy and to wander away like that,” said her mother, Barbara Runyard. “We are just really excited that she was found and when we celebrate her 23rd birthday on Halloween it will be extra special this year.”

### Follow-up Story

By David Morrill  
The Desert Sun

As she sat in the small secluded spot 4,500 feet up, Jeannine Landrenaux could have sworn she heard the sound of helicopters and people talking. “Help! Help!” When nobody answered, reality set in. The chatter-like sound was just the waterfall nearby. She was all alone.

For three days, the 22-year-old Palm Desert resident was stranded in the San Jacinto Mountains with just a water bottle, playing cards, energy bar wrappers and four shades of lipstick. Until she was finally saved by the Riverside County Sheriff’s Search and Rescue team, she thought her days were numbered.



Timothy D. Sofranko, The Desert Sun

At Home: A scratched and tired Jeannine Landrenaux, 22, of Palm Desert receives a big kiss from her 4-year-old daughter, Madelynn, while recuperating Thursday after spending four days and three nights lost on Mount San Jacinto.

“When I saw the helicopter I waved at him, and when he waved back my legs just buckled because I was so excited,” Landrenaux said Thursday. “I really thought they

would never find me, and I just started to think about how I would die and if the ants would eat me.”

The plight began Sunday when Landreux and her then-boyfriend Don Vieth took the tram up to the San Jacinto Mountains. At the top, the two got into an argument and Landreux walked off. Vieth tried to follow, but she lost him. “It was so dumb for me to do what I did leaving him like that,” she said.

As she walked down the trail, she saw a hiker and gave him some of her water. He was the last person she saw until her rescue. What she thought was a trail back to the tram turned into deer trails. “The trails just kept ending, and suddenly it got dark and I couldn’t see anything,” she said.

So she found a rock, curled up and went asleep. When she awoke the next morning she was face-to-face with a rattlesnake.

She used every trick she could think of to survive, including eating leaves and roots, making a blanket out of leaves, and putting together an S-O-S sign. “I tried the thing they did in ‘Clan of the Cave Bear,’ where they spin sticks to make fire but I found that to be such movie magic.”

As much as she was trying to keep herself physiologically sound, she also had to battle her mental state. “I kept thinking to myself, ‘I’m 22 years old, and I haven’t done anything spectacular in my life and how it would have been a very boring funeral,’ ” she said.

She’s decided to quit smoking, go back to church and spend more time with family and less time with boyfriends.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.