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MORNING MIX

# An American hiker is missing in Japan. Her family is retracing her steps.

By [Daniel Wu](#)

May 2, 2023 at 5:18 a.m. EDT



Patricia Wu-Murad (right) with Murphy Murad (left) and Kirk Murad (center) in a family photo. (Courtesy of Murphy Murad)

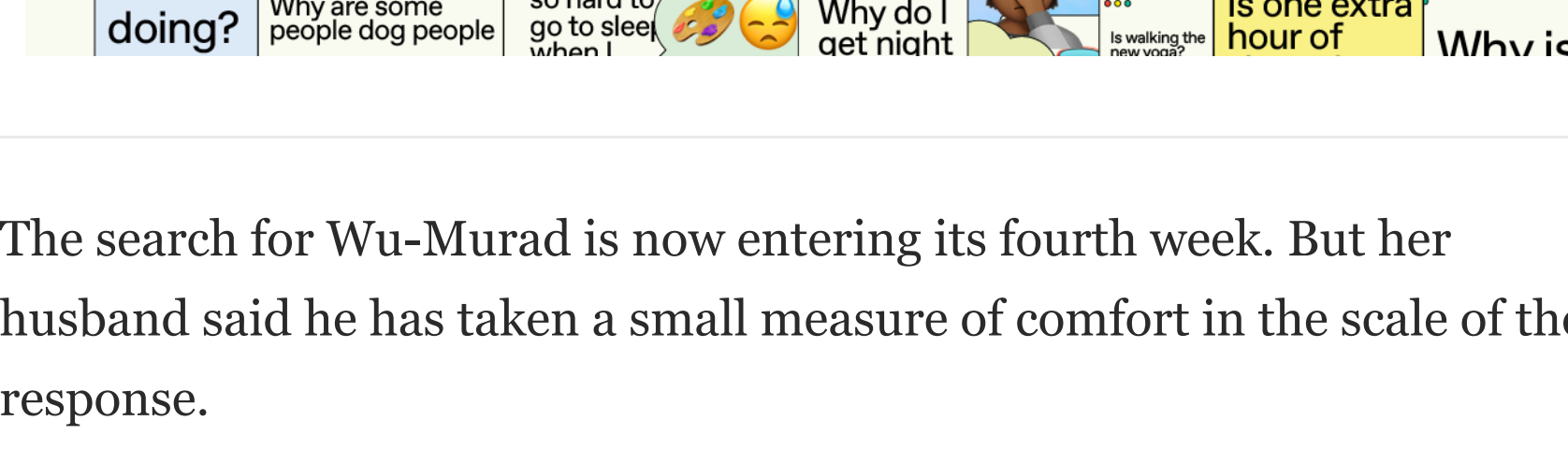
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Kirk Murad feared the worst when he received a distressing call in early April: His wife, Patricia Wu-Murad, had been reported missing on a hiking trip in Japan, halfway across the globe.

Murad, who lives in Connecticut, told The Washington Post his next decision was automatic: He'd travel to Japan with their adult daughter, and they'd search for Wu-Murad themselves.

But Wu-Murad, 60, was missing somewhere along the Kumano Kodo trail, a network of paths that wind along steep climbs and narrow, cliff-side ledges in the forests and mountains of southern Japan. For a search in such challenging terrain, they'd need backup.

The Murads' calls for help quickly reached the halls of Congress and volunteer search-and-rescue teams in California and Hawaii. A fundraiser to continue the search for Wu-Murad raised over \$170,000, and 21 volunteers traveled to Japan from the United States over the following week to aid the family in their mission.



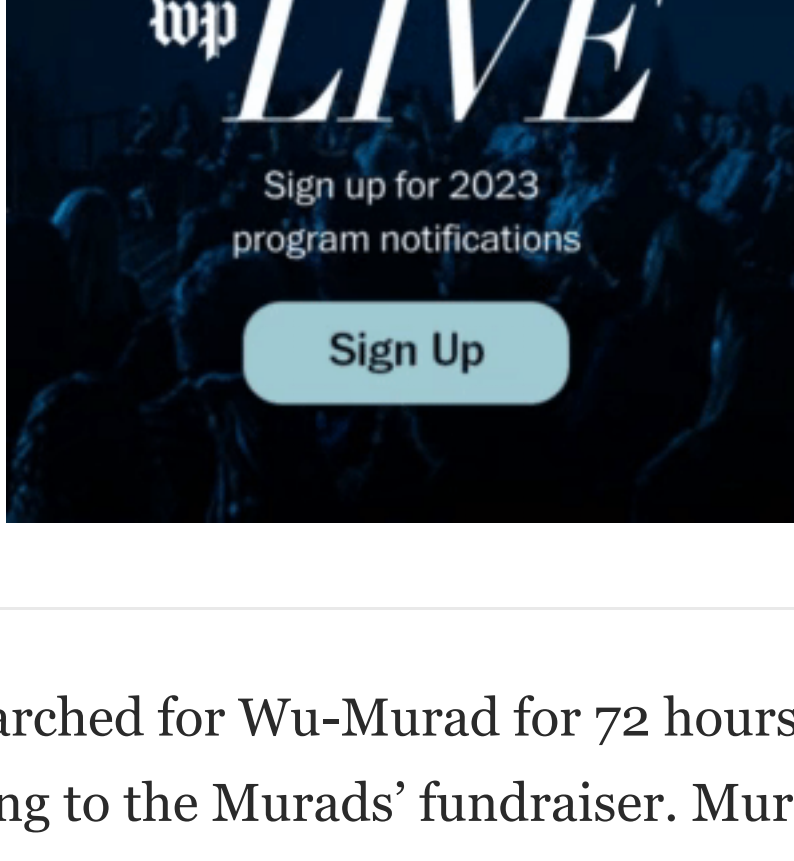
The search for Wu-Murad is now entering its fourth week. But her husband said he has taken a small measure of comfort in the scale of the response.

"It's difficult, obviously, what we're going through," Murad said. "But it restores your faith in humanity that so many people are willing to ... give their time and their money."

Murad described his wife as a giving person who delights in buying gifts and cooking large Thanksgiving meals for her family. Wu-Murad became an avid solo hiker after retiring in 2020 and has since completed several long hiking trips to Spain, Jordan and Egypt.

"She's never been happier," Murad said.

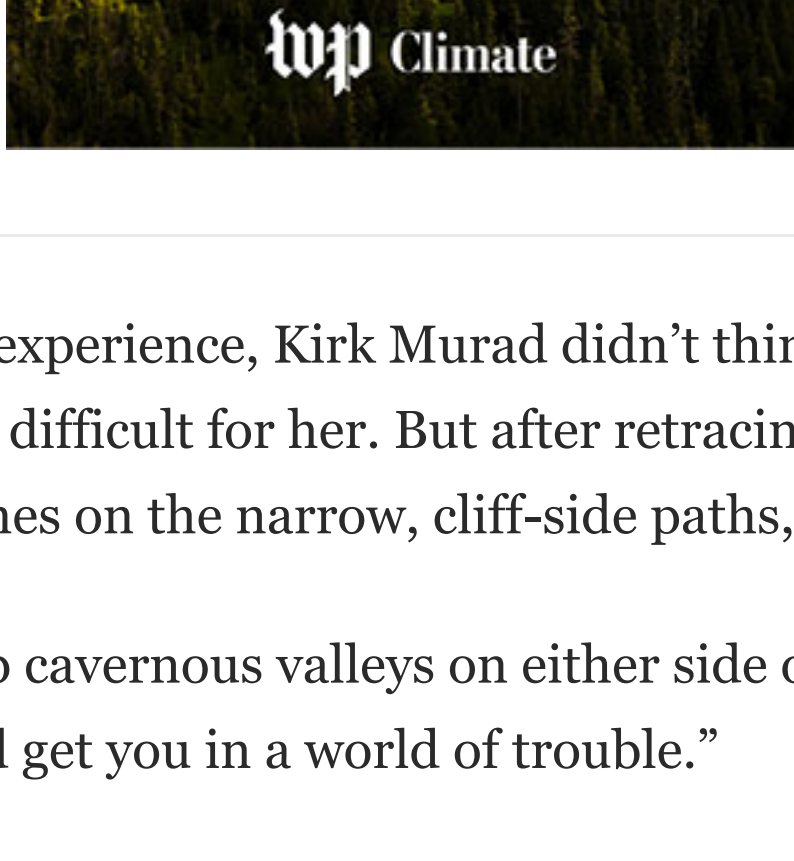
Wu-Murad had spent months planning her trip to Japan, Murad said. On the morning of April 10, she left a guesthouse and set out to complete the Miura-toge Pass, an 11-mile leg of the Kumano Kodo trail involving several steep climbs across mountainous, uneven terrain. She was reported missing that evening after she didn't arrive at the next guesthouse, according to Murad.



Japanese police searched for Wu-Murad for 72 hours before calling off the search, according to the Murads' fundraiser. Murad said momentum in the search picked up again after Murad and the couple's daughter Murphy arrived in Japan and received an offer of help from Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), who asked the State Department to press Japanese authorities to resume the search.

The Nara prefectural police, which Murphy said is now overseeing Wu-Murad's search, told The Post there were no updates to the search.

Kirk and Murphy Murad said they found no evidence of Wu-Murad when they hiked the trail. The last sign she left was a log in the guest book of the guesthouse she left, where she appeared to exchange messages in English and Japanese with the innkeeper. At the top of her note, she'd written "blessed to be healthy."

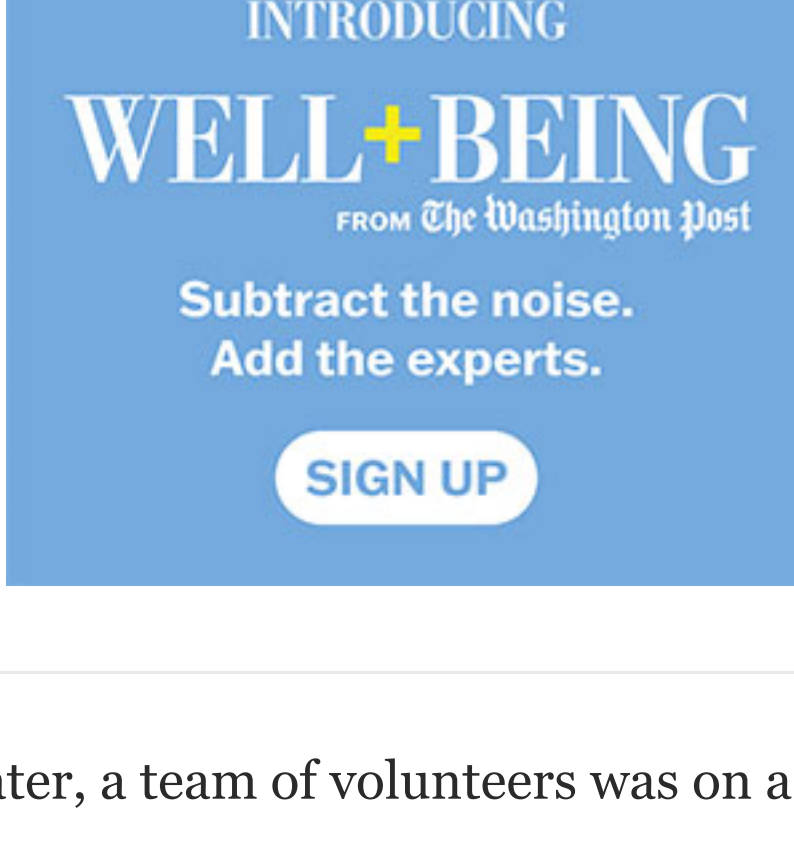


With Wu-Murad's experience, Kirk Murad didn't think even the Miura-toge Pass would be difficult for her. But after retracing the trail and slipping several times on the narrow, cliff-side paths, his fears grew.

"There's deep, deep cavernous valleys on either side of the trail," he said. "One misstep could get you in a world of trouble."

Kirk and Murphy Murad hired a Japanese team to help them with their search, they said. But they could only cover so much ground. At home, Wu-Murad's family sent out requests to search-and-rescue groups in the United States asking for help.

On April 19, the call reached Michael St. John, a former firefighter and volunteer with the Marin County Sheriff's Office search-and-rescue team in northern California. He was moved by the Murads' story, he said, and he believed there was much more ground to cover in the valleys and cliffs surrounding the trail. He quickly reached out to the Murads and to friends with several other search-and-rescue teams in California and Hawaii.



Around 24 hours later, a team of volunteers was on a flight to Japan.

"It's sort of astonishing that we were contacted in the afternoon, and by the next morning we were all on a flight," said Molly Williams, another volunteer from the Marin County search-and-rescue team who joined St. John.



Volunteers search for Patricia Wu-Murad on the Kumano Kodo trail in Japan. (Michael St. John)

Nearly two dozen volunteers from California and Hawaii traveled to Japan to assist the Murads, St. John said. They fastened ropes to trees and rappelled down into the steep valleys where Wu-Murad might have fallen and rappelled into the rivers and streams that wound along parts of the trail. But after four days of searching, they came up empty-handed.

St. John said that before his team departed, he advised the Murads to bring in a new search team equipped to descend deeper into the valleys where Wu-Murad may have disappeared.

Kirk Murad said the family is holding out for a miracle.

"She loves her family enough to want to survive for us," he said.

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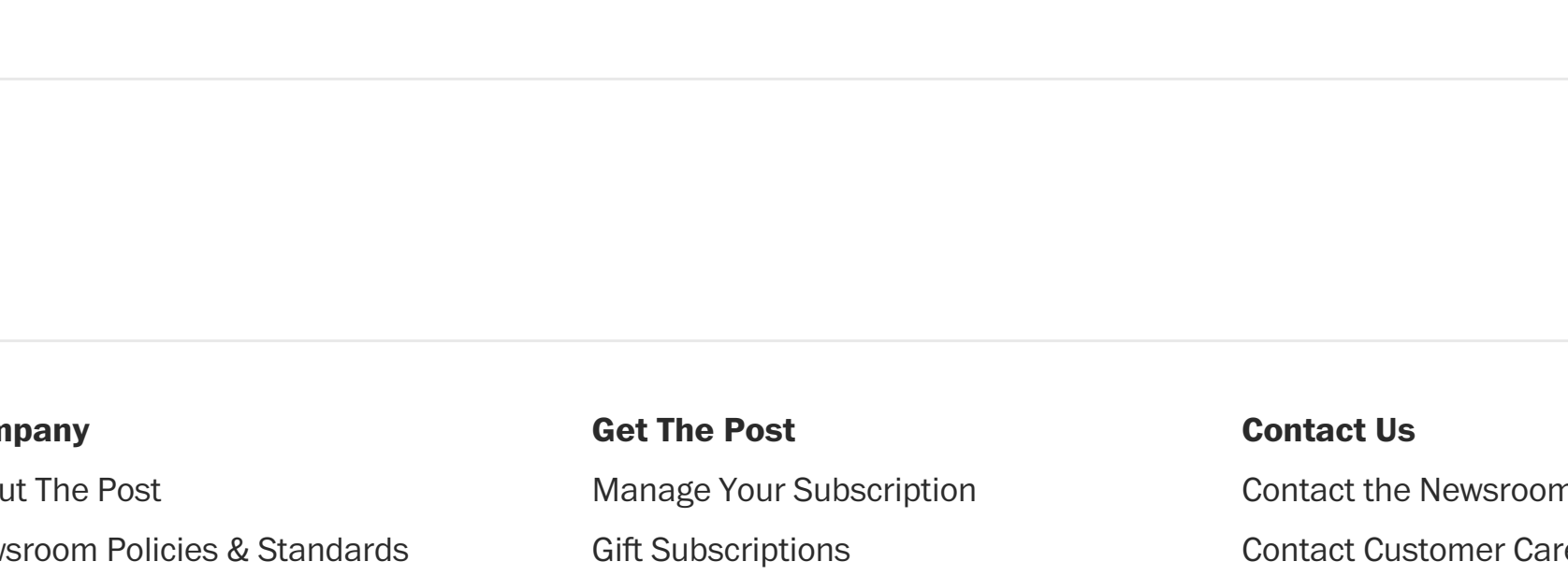
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