

*“Will make every man see
his life in a different light...”*

—**CHUCK HOLTON**, author,
CBN correspondent, former
U.S. Army Airborne Ranger

A DANGEROUS FAITH

**TRUE STORIES OF ANSWERING
THE CALL TO ADVENTURE**

JAMES LUND & PEB JACKSON

A DANGEROUS FAITH

**TRUE STORIES OF ANSWERING
THE CALL TO ADVENTURE**

JAMES LUND & PEB JACKSON



**WATERBROOK
PRESS**

A DANGEROUS FAITH

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

A division of Random House Inc.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from The Message by Eugene Peterson. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. Scripture quotation on page 59 taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

In a few cases, names have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7345-0

Copyright © 2008 by James L. Lund

Note: Failure to apply the principles of risky faith contained herein could result in a seriously underdeveloped spiritual life. Any resemblance to actual biblical principles is entirely intentional.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

WATERBROOK and its deer design logo are registered trademarks of WaterBrook Press, a division of Random House Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lund, James L.

A dangerous faith : true stories of answering the call to adventure / by James Lund and Peb Jackson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4000-7345-0

1. Trust in God—Christianity. I. Jackson, Peb. II. Title.

BV4637.L86 2008

248.4—dc22

2007043534

Printed in the United States of America


2008—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1


SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available in special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookPress.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

*To all the souls who long for adventure and have—only temporarily—
misplaced their courage and faith.*



Jim: To my wife, Angela, who took the greatest risk of all in marrying me.



*Peb: To my dad, Dr. Sheldon Jackson. You set the example for me in your
pursuit of knowledge, love of life, audacious commitment to my mother,
and contagious demonstration of God's love to the very end.*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
1. One Good Shot	7
2. Remember Leona!	25
3. Bering Sea Rescue	51
4. Guardian Angel	73
5. Hostage in Paradise	95
6. The Last Lagoon	119
7. Love and Loss in Iraq	131
8. A Good Day to Die	151
9. I Want to Live	169
10. Deeper into Mystery	189
Where They Are Now	203
Notes	206

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jim Lund: Little did I know eight years ago, when I first started thinking about the relationship between risk and faith, where God would lead me. My thoughts, supercharged by a reading of Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, began moving in the direction of a book. That led to a conversation with Doug Gabbert, then an executive at Multnomah Books and one of my bosses. Doug introduced me to an amazing adventurer named Peb Jackson, who put me in touch with another incredible trailblazer named Gil McCormick, and our expedition in pursuit of a book was off.

The trail has taken more twists and turns than a roller coaster, and we would never have made it without the help of many guides. In particular, thanks go to:

- Doug Gabbert, for introducing me to a new partner and friend.
- Each of the courageous men and women featured in this book, especially Gil and Leona McCormick, Steve Van Meter, Jim Nowak, Dave Anderson, Chris Braman, Sheila Moody, Bruce Olson, Ted Roberts, Carrie McDonnall, Matt Moseley, Boyd Clines, Brian Shul, and Bruce and Sheila Hendricks.
- My reading team: Dave Lund, Angela Lund, Bert Lund, Betty Lund, Erik Lund, David Schlatter, Tom Showalter, Paulmer Soderberg, Bob Green, Jeff Hiersche, Jeff Gerke, Stan Dean, and my "climbing" buddies, Larry Libby and Brian Thomasson.
- Bill Jensen, our agent and so much more: mentor, visionary, encourager, critic, fishing guide, friend. Bill, you da man!
- My wife, Angela, who supported me even when it looked like trying to write this book was a foolish dream, and my children whom I'm so proud of, Erik, Sonja, and Peter, who had to wait on too many evenings for Dad to get home.
- My parents, Bert and Betty Lund, who passed on their love of books

and learning to their son. Year after year, you both set the example I try to live up to—thank you!

- Dave Kopp, for wise counsel and free lunches.
- Our fine editor at WaterBrook, Mick Silva, who caught the vision for this project from the beginning and skillfully guided it all the way home. Hey, Mick, we finally got to do a book together!
- Everyone on the great team at WaterBrook who had a hand in making this possible, including Joel Kneedler, Steve Reed, Leah McMahan, Pam Shoup, and Karen Sherry.
- Jodi Carroll, who kept her sense of humor through my countless phone calls and requests and always found a way to track down the elusive Mr. Jackson. Thanks, Jodi!
- Peb Jackson, a guy who lives a dangerous faith every day and has inspired me in so many ways. Peb, it's been a pleasure. I hope we get to do it again soon.

Last, and most certainly not least, thanks to the Lord, who pushed me to keep going when I was ready to give up. This is for Him.

Peb Jackson: My father was a college professor who had a PhD in history and loved books. At least once a year, he removed his “professorial robes” (so to speak) and took my twin brother, Shel, and me on adventures. (My mother and younger sister, Marilyn, usually engaged in less risky pursuits.) It might've been fishing for salmon off the coast of Oregon or crossing a raging river on a log. I suspect there were other outings he involved me in as a small child that are not part of my present memory, but nevertheless instilled a thirst for risk and adventure. Thanks, Dad.

During the next stage of my adventuring, Dr. Orv Mestad traveled with me and other friends to Patagonia and the east face of Mount Whitney, as well as on flights in his airplane to the Wind River Range in Wyoming. Orv was passionate about fly-fishing, cycling, and mountains. He was a mentor and partner and remains a dear friend.

My pursuits became even more serious as I met others who seemed larger

than life. Tim Hansel of Summit Expedition and John Patten of Adventurous Christians fired my imagination from simmer to white-hot regarding climbing and introduced me to a community of hard-core Christian climbers who probably had as much influence on me as any group ever has. From this sprang a relationship with Dick Savidge that included many climbing adventures and not a few misadventures. Hugo Schoellkopf and Tony Wauterlek helped introduce me to the world of fly-fishing and hunting. Hugo died in an airplane crash in 1987, but for me his legacy in these areas continues. Tony and I have traveled from England to Alaska to Patagonia. He was always ready to go with passport in hand. Dr. Scott Harrison introduced me to the world of big-game hunting in Africa that resulted in the Cape buffalo story in this book. Others who have accompanied me are Joe and Noah Ritchie, Foster and Steve Friess, Rick Christian, Kevin Cusack, and Rick Melson. All of these guys are devoted to experiencing the fullness of adventure, yet also compassionate in giving time and resources to less fortunate and less fearless followers of Christ.

There are dozens of cyclists, including my first gurus, Jim and Barb Carlson, and the irrepressible Tom Ritchey, who are part of a Moab, Utah, “Feast of the Heart” group. Gil McCormick, Carl Yarbrough, and John Dozier were among the leading suspects in “enabling” me to follow my cycling-adventure passions. Jim Bisenius has been a co-conspirator on many fly-fishing adventures from Alaska to Costa Rica to Christmas Island to the Seychelles. He is also emblematic of many of my friends, brothers who stick together through thick and thin. Denver Darling is a buddy I could count on to join me when I would call and say, “I’ve got a trip you cannot refuse.”

For the last ten years, I have met almost every Monday morning with a group of men from my neighborhood, and together we launch into the adventure of exploring Scripture and its application to our daily lives. Thank you Jim Brooke, Drew Wills, Ed Poremba, Rick Risk, Dave Stieber, Mike McCann, Phil Lane, Scott Blackmun, Ken Beach, Dave Lynch, Mike Murphy, Jeff Jenks, Russ Acuff, Dennis Fitzgerald, and Fred Stoot.

For the past several summers, Bill George and a bunch of young turks including his son Jon have joined me in climbing fourteeners in Colorado.

The attraction is mountain climbing, but the real substance is diving deep into issues of life and faith during the journey.

Most recently, Jim Lund has been my co-laborer on this project, doing the lion's share of the work but sharing with me a passion for the theme.

Lastly, I thank my beautiful wife of thirty-seven years, Sharon, at times an adventurer's widow who amazingly—and perhaps sometimes improbably—encouraged my wanderlust. Thanks, honey.

INTRODUCTION

Peb Jackson: A fierce wind whipped against my pajamas, and the tornado siren wailed as I held my father's hand and raced across the yard for the cellar under the guesthouse. I was a small boy in the little town of Haviland, Kansas, encountering real danger for the first time. I remember cowering in the dark cellar, feeling both afraid and thrilled.

As a boy, I always seemed to find opportunities to rediscover that thrill. I'd run across a road when a big truck was coming. I'd walk along a railroad track while a train headed my way. I'd climb the outside ladder rungs of the ten-story water tower at the center of town. I also tried, several times, to hold a cherry-bomb firecracker for as long as I could. Once I held on too long; the explosion lacerated my fingers. Yet that was part of the allure. The danger was real, and so were the consequences.

One other example stands out to me. When I was thirteen, I was driving a tractor and pulling a plow on my uncle's farm. What could be more boring than trying to maintain a straight line in a field for twelve hours? Then I spotted a group of young rabbits darting in alarm from the noise. I somehow tied the steering wheel down and kept the tractor and plow moving while I jumped off, chased down a couple of the rabbits, and jumped back onto the tractor in front of the lethal plow, grinning in triumph. Again, the proximity to risk and its consequences was powerfully attractive.

My fascination with adventure and danger was further fed by reading Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan books and Maurice Herzog's mountaineering classic *Annapurna*. When my father took my twin brother and me on backpacking trips around the Grand Tetons, I imagined myself climbing the heights in the Himalayas with Herzog and other explorers. It was the beginning of a lifelong dedication to pursuing and uncovering the benefits of risk.

Jim Lund: I wasn't as daring as Peb while growing up, but I do recall, as a boy, following a local lad into a hidden tunnel on an Oregon beach and discovering that it stretched far longer and deeper than I could have imagined. Like Peb, I shuddered with a wonderful mixture of fear and excitement. Who knew what lay ahead in that unexpected labyrinth beneath the sand?

Also like Peb, as a youth I was enraptured by tales of marvels and risk and daring: books about dinosaurs and the Hardy boys, TV shows like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and *Star Trek*. I wanted to be there with Frank and Joe, with captains Crane and Kirk, solving mysteries and exploring the farthest reaches of sea and space.

Many years later, my eight-year-old, Peter, and I were riding our "trail bikes"—a pair of beat-up Magnas—down a dusty path on U.S. forest land in central Oregon. We dodged the outstretched branches of juniper trees as we flew along and kept a wary eye out for a recently sighted cougar.

We crested a hill, and there, hidden in the trees on our left, was a huge formation of rocks that practically screamed out the words "Climb me!" In an instant, Peter had dropped his bike and was running for them. "C'mon, Dad!" he yelled. It was vintage Peter, a boy who's constantly veering off-trail to explore a cave, a bug, a shadow, a sound, or whatever else strikes his imagination.

Then came the moment I remember best from that afternoon. As he ran, Peter twisted his torso for a glance back at me. He didn't speak, but his look said it all: *Are you coming, Dad? I'm not quite sure what's ahead, but I can't wait to check it out—as long as you're with me.*

Isn't that a picture from some point in all our childhoods? We're curious, ready for adventure, excited about the possibilities, thrilled with the hunt. Suddenly, in the midst of the journey, a sliver of doubt needles in. *Hey, there might be danger here—do we know what we're getting into?* But a glance reassures. *There's Dad. It's okay. So let's go!*

We're all born with that sense of curiosity, with an instinctive need to stretch and learn and discover. It's one of God's gifts for this life. Sadly, most of us grow out of it. We become analytical, judgmental, protective. We fear

what failure will do to us or make us look like to others, never mind that failure is one of our greatest teachers.

Worst of all, in that critical moment of doubt, we forget what we knew to do instinctively as children—to look for Dad. Then it meant making eye contact with our earthly father. Today it means seeking and connecting with our Father in heaven.

God created us with this innate desire to risk. It's what makes us grow, spiritually and otherwise. Taking risks for His sake brings Him glory. Remembering to “look for Dad” draws us closer to Him.

Peb: Sharon, my wife of thirty-seven years, has joined me on some of my adventures, though she never really gets excited about cold, pain, and fatigue the way I do. But she gave me one of the most important verses of my life, one I quote often to anyone who will listen:

He who forms the mountains,
creates the wind,
and reveals his thoughts to man,
he who turns dawn to darkness,
and treads the high places of the earth—
the LORD God Almighty is his name.

(Amos 4:13)

God formed each of us and the wondrous world we inhabit. He also gave us a passion to learn and explore. It was no accident. It's our pathway to faith.

Jim: *Risk. Adventure. Danger.* We don't normally associate those words with a devout faith. But in reality, the explorer and the believer are both walking the same path. The life of faith *is* a daring adventure, full of risk and danger. Jesus said: “Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag” (Luke 19:26, MSG).

The disciples risked everything to follow Christ. So did Stephen, Paul, and the other believers of the early church. In the first century, Paul wrote: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long’” (Romans 8:35–36).

In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther wrote: “Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times.”

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, author John Eldredge wrote in *Wild at Heart*: “Adventure, with all its requisite danger and wildness, is a deeply spiritual longing written into the soul of man.”

Today, our need to risk and to fulfill that adventurous, spiritual longing is just as great, and just as necessary. We’re not all equipped with the skills or mind-set to climb Mount Everest, dive to the ocean depths, or hunt Cape buffalo, and that’s okay. But too many of us aim to avoid risk entirely. We’ve worked hard to achieve what we already have—relationships, status, possessions. We don’t want to put our comfortable lifestyles in jeopardy. Yet as we struggle to preserve our complacent existence, we miss out on the amazing rewards of risk. What rewards? Everything that matters—the fully developed faith, joy, and blessings God intends for each of us.

Faith in God is much more than sitting through a church service each Sunday. We are more than “pew potatoes.” Our faith must be active: “Seek me and live” (Amos 5:4). We’re not watching a TV show or attending a concert; we’re participating in a great hunt. We are called to *pursue* a dangerous faith, living every thought, every activity, and every moment at risk for the Lord.

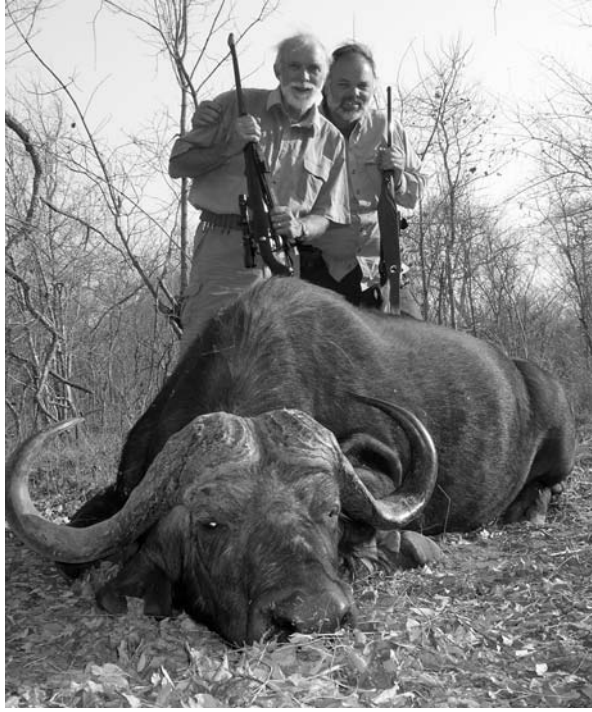
It may mean speaking up when you’d rather be quiet. Or quitting a job to preserve your integrity. Or revealing your deepest fear to your spouse. It is an intentional stretching of long-held beliefs. Only here, on the precipice between the comfortable and the unknown, will faith truly thrive. Only here will you discover the ironic truth: the more you risk and trust God, the closer you move to His heart—and the safer you become.

Peb: I probably have a couple hundred books on climbing and adventure, but few mention faith. It is a remarkable omission. Can you imagine the people fighting for their lives in *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer's account of the 1996 tragedy on Everest, *not* reflecting on the afterlife and their relationship to God or not calling on God for help in those desperate circumstances? The more I thought about this, the more I felt the need for a book about men and women of faith who are attracted to dangerous pursuits. When I learned that Jim was on a similar trail, we joined forces.

The exploration of faith is, in fact, the greatest adventure of all. It means going all out, not just in our “spiritual” endeavors but in every aspect of life. It means allowing the challenge of adventure to hone us so that we are equipped each day to cope with life's obstacles and opportunities.

The following true stories feature men and women who understand what I'm saying. They have answered the call to explore, to discover, and to seek God in the hard places. They are living out a bold, risk-filled faith—and have found their lives forever changed by the experience. Not all of them expected to meet God on their adventures, yet they all uncovered a holy reward beyond what they'd imagined.

Each of their stories is followed by a few closing comments from Jim or me on the practical applications of a dangerous faith. There are no dull moral lessons here. Instead, we offer what we hope are tools for *your* journey. When you accept this dangerous calling, we believe you'll discover, as I did, that the unvarnished Christ becomes even more alluring. You will be drawn into a faith—and a life—so boldly, so completely, that a personal relationship with God becomes irresistible. You'll be risking everything for what really matters. May these words inspire you to leave the comfortable life behind and dive headlong into complete trust in Him.



One Good Shot

BY PEB JACKSON WITH JAMES LUND

The Cape buffalo of Africa is born mean and grows more ornery by the day. The adult male is black and massive, two thousand pounds of flesh and hair and bone. He stands five feet at the shoulder and stares at potential victims out of malevolent brown eyes. His two heavy horns, which curve down from each side of the buffalo's head, then up and in, may span a meter in length. They're effective for killing a lion—or a man. The buffalo doesn't really care which.

Many consider the Cape buffalo the most dangerous animal in the world to hunt. He's aggressive and stubborn. His hide is at least an inch thick; it's rare to take him in one shot. When wounded and enraged, he's likely to charge at the shooter. Sometimes he'll keep coming after ten shots. I read about one that didn't stop even after fourteen 500-grain bullets entered his body. The fifteenth finally got him.

They say Cape buffaloes have killed more hunters in Africa than any other animal. I heard about an American who was on safari in Tanzania the week after we hunted the same area. He was standing near the woods, minding his own business, when a Cape buffalo suddenly charged out of the trees, knocked him down, and gored him to death. No one knew what provoked the brute to attack. No one even had a chance to raise a rifle.

Robert Ruark, the author and hunter, wrote, "I don't know what there is about buffalo that frightens me so. Lions and leopards and rhinos excite me but don't frighten me. But that buff is so big and mean and ugly and hard to stop, and vindictive and cruel and surly and ornery. He looks like he hates you personally. He looks like you owe him money. He looks like he is hunting you."

I think about all this as I lie in my cabin on a cool evening in Zimbabwe. It's September 15, 2005. I'm on safari. I've traveled ten thousand miles by jet, prop plane, Land Rover, and my own two feet for the chance to face off against this mighty beast of the bush. Tomorrow, it's my turn.

I wonder if I'll sleep at all tonight.

My friend Denver Darling had his turn today. On foot, we stalked herds of buffalo for six hours without firing a single shot—the animals were restless and kept moving. One moved closer than we'd have liked. From the bush, an enormous bull elephant suddenly charged at us, bellowing in anger, his ears flayed back and tusks out. At the time, fortunately, we were in the Land Rover with the engine already running, enabling a hasty retreat. It was a roaring reminder that we were treading on someone else's turf.

As I lie on the cot, listening to the late-evening snorts of colobus monkeys and the cackles of hyenas, I recall the safari tales of Ruark and Teddy Roosevelt

and every hunting story I've ever read. I feel a kinship with all of them. I linger on the memory of another Ruark passage:

Deep in the guts of most men is buried the involuntary response to the hunter's horn, a prickle of the nape hairs, an acceleration of the pulse, an atavistic memory of his fathers, who killed first with stone, and then with club, and then with spear, and then with bow, and then with gun, and finally with formulae. How meek the man is of no importance; somewhere in the pigeon chest of the clerk is still the vestigial remnant of the hunter's heart; somewhere in his nostrils the half-forgotten smell of blood. There is no man with such impoverishment of imagination that at some time he has not wondered how he would handle himself if a lion broke loose from a zoo and he were forced to face him without the protection of bars or handy, climbable trees.

The minutes tick by as I consider what may happen in a few hours. I wonder if I'll have my chance to answer the hunter's horn. I wonder how I'll handle myself if I do.

I don't know, of course, lying there contemplating my stalk of the Cape buffalo, imagining the adventure of a lifetime, that another hunter is already stalking me.



After a restless night, I'm up before 5 a.m. The camp is situated on flat terrain near the banks of a hundred-foot-wide stream, deep in the Zimbabwe bush. On previous days we've seen crocs and hippos in the rivers, but at the moment the only wildlife in view is a pack of hyenas lurking on the opposite shore. It's dark and mercifully cool now, but the heat will be brutal by noon. The smell of fresh bread lures me to the "lodge," a thatched-roof, open-walled structure that houses large stone ovens. Soon Denver and I are seated in safari chairs, ingesting a breakfast of omelettes, coffee, and hot bread.

After breakfast, it's time to prepare ourselves for the hunt. Denver and I spend a few minutes reading from a book titled *Disciplines for the Inner Life*. The themes of today's passages are highly appropriate: anxiety and ungratefulness. They remind me that no matter how apprehensive I am about this day, God is in control, and I must be thankful to Him for simply being here. We are not mighty conquerors come to overpower the savage beast. Instead, we play a role that originated with our forebears, who hunted to sustain themselves, and continues to this day. Something instinctive and God-given has called us here. We are part of the fabric of His creation, men among other living creatures, all threads in His eternal story.

A few minutes later we're gathering our gear and mounting up for a ride in the Land Rover. Besides Denver and me, our party is made up of locals: Isaac, the Zimbabwe game warden; Skumbuzo, the skinner; Polani, the tracker; and Phillip, the professional hunter. Phillip drives, with Isaac beside him. Denver, Skumbuzo, Polani, and I sit on benches in the open back of the Rover.

The sun begins to rise as we bounce along a barely visible path through the bush. Tinted in vibrant orange, a vast landscape emerges around us. Hills and low mountains appear first, followed by tall acacia trees, brown wooded areas dotted with green vegetation, and then rivers and canyons. The area is teeming with wildlife: elephants, zebras, impalas, and many varieties of monkeys. The setting feels serene and deadly at the same time. There is no sign of man.

For the next two hours, we scan the countryside. I think about what may be ahead and practice deep breathing to settle my nerves. Anything could happen today. I want to be calm when it does.

Suddenly, Polani points and calls out, "Over there!" At the same instant, I see them. About a mile away in tall grass are four dark shapes—Cape buffalo.

The Land Rover skids to a halt. Despite my breathing exercises, I can feel my heart begin to race. I pull out binoculars for a better view.

Man, I think. Look at the horns on that one. Here we go.

Our team is already dismounting when I reach toward the rack on the back of the truck cab and remove the .375 H&H Magnum I've borrowed from Phillip (I brought my own gun to Africa, a .300 Weatherby, but it's not

big enough for Cape buffalo). I check that the magazine is loaded and make sure I have plenty of ammunition. Since I don't know how long I'll be away from the vehicle—it could be minutes or hours—I also grab a backpack filled with water bottles, energy bars, a knife, a jacket, and my Bible. As quietly as possible, I jump to the ground.

It was Saint Irenaeus who once said, “The glory of God is man fully alive.” Right now, without doubt, I am fully alive. My senses are on maximum alert. Every bird call and crunch of leaves under my feet seems to echo without end in my brain. I feel each heartbeat inside my chest.

This could be it, I think. This is my moment.

I watch the tall grass and the leaves on the trees to check the wind. *Good—it's blowing our way. They won't catch our scent.*

Our team moves to the right, behind the cover of a grass-covered hill and out of sight of the buffalo. Phillip and Polani are whispering to each other and pointing. We're going to keep moving right, around the hill, and hope the small herd is still there when we reach the other side.

The stalk begins. We step in single file, Polani and Phillip in front of me, then Denver, Isaac, and Skumbuzo behind us. Each of us carries a rifle. Periodically, Polani and Phillip stop to “converse,” but no words are spoken—all communication is done with hand signals.

It's time to melt into the earth. My attire is designed to make me as invisible as possible: short-sleeved, green and tan polo shirt; khaki pants; and my gray Merrell running shoes. I duck low and steal my way closer to whatever awaits us around the hill.

This is why I hunt, I think. To get into the rhythm of the land. To sense the sun and wind on my face, to smell the acacia trees, to feel dried leaves and dirt underneath my shoes. There is nothing man-made, nothing artificial here. It's all primitive and pristine—all God.

Yet even as I revel in the splendor of my circumstances, I'm also acutely aware of how nervous I am. All the efforts of our team are focused on getting me one good shot at the right animal. The success of this venture—maybe even our own well-being—depends on me doing my job.

So many things can go wrong. The herd might detect our scent before I'm ready and stampede—away from us or directly at us. I might have incorrectly sighted my rifle when I tested it in camp. A tree branch or leaf could deflect my shot.

I recall a hunt years before in south Texas. A magnificent mule deer filled my rifle scope. He couldn't have been more than twenty-five yards away. Yet when I pulled the trigger—twice—that deer hightailed it away without even a scratch on him. Somehow, for reasons I've never fathomed, I missed.

And what will happen if I miss this time?

Stop, I think. It's time to focus.

After forty-five minutes, we reach the far edge of the hill. Peering over the grass, I see that at least three of the buffalo are still there, grazing. Thankfully, the wind still blows our way.

About ten yards ahead is a downed tree. Phillip points to a spot where a large branch diverts from the trunk—he wants me there.

I nod and ever so slowly creep in that direction.

In a few minutes, we're in position behind the tree. Phillip has a V-shaped shooting stick made from tree branches and thick rubber bands, but we're so close now—maybe thirty yards—that I don't need it. I quietly position the H&H on top of the tree trunk.

Phillip, just a couple of feet away, looks at me and holds up three fingers, then one. Of the three animals we can see, he wants me to go for the closest one.

He's a fine *mbogo*, dark and bulky, with horns that must measure at least eighteen inches between the tips. I can hear those immense jaws pulling and chewing at the grass. I lick my lips and make sure the safety on my H&H is off. I take a sight through the rifle scope and check to see that my shooting lane is clear.

The buffalo moves a couple of steps closer and turns so he's facing us. He's still grazing, still unaware of our presence—so far.

I see movement out of the corner of my eye. Phillip looks at me and extends his palm toward the buffalo: *He's yours, Peb. Whenever you're ready.*

I swallow and take another sight. I can feel the solid, comfortable presence

of the weapon in my hands. I'm aware of the sweat beginning to drip down my left cheek and a cramp already forming in my right hamstring. I sense the breeze blowing through the acacias above us and hear the buzz of tsetse flies around me. In my head, I hear my heart pounding harder than before. I imagine I can hear the buffalo's heartbeat too.

I hold still as a statue. I cannot cough or make the slightest sound now. But I must breathe. I force myself to slowly exhale.

The buffalo takes a step forward, then another. He's between two groups of small trees, just twenty-five yards away.

Ever so slightly, I raise the rifle. I center on a spot just below the middle of his chest, right where his heart should be.

Now.

Lord, don't let me miss.

I squeeze the trigger.

I've hunted for almost as long as I can remember. I must have been ten years old when I began taking my first rifle, a .22 Marlin lever-action, out into gray Kansas mornings to stalk "big game" in the evergreen-lined shelter belts designed to stop snow from drifting. In reality, the game was usually squirrels or jack rabbits, but in my mind they were lions, rhinos, or rampaging bull elephants.

For me, the hunt was never about wanting to vanquish another creature. The thrill was simply being out in the elements, be it sun or wind or rain.

I loved storms. I recall awakening at night to the mournful wail of the tornado siren in our little town of Haviland. My father would round up my mother, sister, twin brother, and me, and then we'd all throw on jackets over our pajamas and scurry across the yard to the cellar under the guesthouse. The wind could be fierce, and the cellar, filled with salamanders and fruit jars, was always creepy, but I reveled in the excitement. It was a scene right out of *The Wizard of Oz*, and I was delighted to play it many times.

I remember another scene from my midteens. To earn a few dollars, I was plowing a wheat field for a neighbor. The early morning was beautiful, blue sky as far as I could see, but by late morning a smattering of white clouds had gathered to the west. Over the next few hours, I felt the anticipation build as the clouds grew and darkened. Finally, the sky transformed into an ominous, bulging black mass that filled the heavens, seeming to signal the end of the world.

It was time. I jumped down from the tractor, unhooked the plow, climbed back in, and raced through the darkness at full throttle for the barn two miles away. I didn't make it—the rain attacked with full force, soaking me down to my boots. But I didn't care. I laughed as the storm pummeled me.

It wasn't just inclement weather that triggered this unusual, unrestrained joy. The land itself fascinated me. Twenty miles south of our home was an area called Medicine Lodge, an intriguing territory marked by canyons, streams, and small cliffs. I liked to scramble up and down the rock formations, wander among the cottonwood and juniper trees, and sneak up on deer and coyotes. Spending time in this stimulating environment, so different from the flat Kansas prairies, ignited a passion to see and experience more.

Back then my grandparents lived in Colorado Springs. When we drove across the state line to visit them, my brother, Shel, and I would press our noses against the window of our '57 Chevy, our breath fogging the glass as we competed to see who'd get the first glimpse of Pikes Peak. In our neighborhood, a ten-foot hill was considered a mountain, so Colorado's towering Rockies were almost incomprehensible. That first look at the snowcapped majesty of Pikes Peak never failed to give me a shiver.

I was thirteen when my dad took Shel and me to climb Longs Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park. Though the summit rises to 14,259 feet, the easiest route isn't technical and doesn't require gear. The steep east face of the mountain, on the other hand, can be surmounted only by climbing a deadly sheer cliff known as the Diamond, which features a fifteen-hundred-foot vertical drop.

During a lull on our way up the mountain that day, I crept over to a ledge to catch a glimpse of the east face. I was stunned by what I saw: an enormous, swirling black fog running up, down, and around that impossibly steep terrain. The fog seemed to pulse, as if it were a living creature—one with evil intent.

A couple of hours before, a climber in another group had informed us that two men were taking on the Diamond. Standing there on the ledge, seeing firsthand the water-streaked rock and treacherous fog, I marveled at the thought. *They're out there? In that?* I couldn't imagine what it would take to climb in those conditions—not just the technical know-how, but also the sheer guts to pull it off.

I didn't see how it could be done, yet I desperately wanted to find out. The precipice, both figurative and literal, attracted me. I realized then, as a thirteen-year-old already inclined to take chances, just how much I wanted to challenge myself—to discover my limits and then move beyond them. The lure had been cast, and I was ready to swallow it whole.

Perhaps that helps explain how, over the course of my life, I've found myself exploring trackless territory in the Brooks Range mountains in Alaska; enduring twenty-two hours in subzero weather on avalanche-prone slopes near Aspen, Colorado; contemplating a dangerous river crossing in South America's Patagonia region; and pushing on through a blizzard on a solo ascent of Ben Nevis in Scotland. It provides some hints as to why I've devoted so much energy to climbing, fishing, hunting, sailing, and cycling. It shows, to a degree, why one of my favorite pursuits is spreading out maps to look for a blank spot—and then, when I find one, planning a trip there.

Why, exactly, does that hunger for adventure still rumble in my belly? The challenge is part of it. Every time I journey into the unknown, I learn more about who I am and what I'm capable of. There is nothing like the satisfaction of stepping into the crucible and discovering that, yes, even when mind and body scream that there's nothing left, I *can* keep my grip on an impossibly slim mountain handhold or pedal over the next rise. These discoveries, nuggets mined at the highest altitudes or on the remotest roads, have inspired renewed

confidence, motivation, and focus many times thereafter. I've found they deliver encouragement during any trial in life.

The benefits of these risk-laden endeavors go beyond the personal, however. I've learned that the fastest way to deepen a friendship is to enter into an adventure together. There is something about leaving comfort zones behind, surrounding ourselves with God's creation, and meeting obstacles together that strips away pretensions and barriers. It's as if we can't help being "real." We share ideas and experiences that bond us for life. I've seen it happen time and again with families, friends, kids, businessmen, even United Nations diplomats.

One of my dearest buddies is a man twenty years my senior, Orv Mestad. Orv was already a friend before we, along with two companions, decided to climb the east face of California's Mount Whitney. But our experience there cemented a relationship that has lasted more than two decades.

We were about three hundred feet from Whitney's 14,505-foot summit when the mountain unleashed a rock that struck Orv on the head and left him temporarily unconscious. With the day's light nearly gone, going down wasn't an option. I had to hold a bloodied Orv with one hand and, without dropping him into the void below, tie him into a new rope with the other hand so we could ascend the final leg to meet our partners, Dick and Nancy Savidge. Since we'd planned to return by evening and left our overnight gear behind, the four of us huddled in an ice-encased stone hut at the top. Orv was slipping in and out of consciousness, so he rated the lone sleeping bag we'd borrowed from another group of climbers. It was one of the coldest and longest nights of my life.

Dawn, however, brought a welcome change. Orv had improved markedly and was able to descend ahead of us with another climber, a doctor. I'll never forget the memory of meeting Orv at the trailhead five thousand feet below the summit, his head wrapped in a huge bandage, an even bigger smile on his face. "I am so grateful to you guys," he said after embracing each of us. "I feel like I have a new lease on life."

Orv flashed that same smile and gave me another bear hug when I visited

him recently at his home in Glendora, California. We've gone climbing and fly-fishing and simply enjoyed each other's company many times since that day on Mount Whitney. There is a bond between us, a brotherhood forged in the mountains years ago, that will never be lost. This deep fellowship that emerged from our shared experience—that always seems to rise up from communal adventure—is one of the great pleasures of my life.

Orv's friendship, and that of many others, has come to mean even more to me recently. My role has changed—once the hunter, I am now the hunted. Through my experience, I've discovered another benefit to living on life's edge, one that overshadows the rest. I've known it for a long time, but I understand it now with crystal clarity.

It was May 12, 2006, when the hunter revealed himself. I was in my office in an old brick building in downtown Colorado Springs. I sat at my oak desk, making phone calls and shuffling papers. A Fernando Ortega CD played in the background.

I was working. But I was also waiting.

A couple of weeks before, a routine blood test had shown that my PSA count was up. Three days earlier, I'd had a biopsy from my prostate. I knew there was potential for something serious. Nevertheless, I wasn't prepared for what I was about to hear.

At 10 a.m., the phone rang. My doctor got right to the point. "Peb, I've got bad news for you. You have cancer. I think you and your wife ought to come over here this afternoon so we can talk about what the next step is."

I hung up the phone. My breathing quickened. I felt a pressure on my forehead. The dreaded word: *cancer*. I could hardly believe it. Only one day earlier I had celebrated my sixty-second birthday. I'd taken care of myself all these years. I felt great, at the top of my game. I was excited about the future.

Suddenly, everything changed.

For a few minutes, I just sat at my desk. The CD kept playing, but I didn't hear it. I wept.

Finally, I began to focus. My eyes took in one of the photos on my wall.

It was a shot by Carl Yarbrough of me cycling on the Dingle Peninsula on Ireland's west coast. Behind me and the single-lane road, the sun was just breaking over the rocky coastline and outlying islands. You couldn't see my expression in the photo, but I knew it was one of pure joy.

A thought ran through my mind: *You know, this isn't a death sentence. They say that if you're going to get cancer, this is the one to get. So, Lord, strengthen me. Give me the courage to face this. I can't put this on the shelf or hide it in a closet. Lord, help me to embrace this experience!*

Over the next few months, that's just what my wife, Sharon, and I did. We talked to doctors. We researched. We learned everything we could about prostate cancer and the treatment options.

I decided on surgery. Doctors removed my prostate on June 19, just a few weeks after the cancer diagnosis. My recovery went well. Additional biopsies uncovered nothing malignant. The prognosis was that I was cancer free and could get on with my life.

Relief.

Then, in mid-August, came an astonishing report: my latest PSA count was nearly identical to presurgery levels. The doctors were so surprised, they ordered a second test. It confirmed the results of the first one.

My cancer was back, and it had spread. An oncologist told me, "It's very likely that it's in your bones. You know that's incurable don't you?"

I had a hard time wrapping my brain around this one. I thought, *Lord, what's going on here? I thought I was free. All of a sudden, I'm not only not free, I've got something lethal.*

Driving home from the hospital, I saw an imaginary neon sign in front of my face. The words that I'd shoved aside before came back to me, flashing on and off, seemingly unavoidable: *death sentence.*

Yet this is where years of pushing myself to the limit began paying dividends. I'd faced perilous situations throughout my life—usually by choice—and had gained so much because of them. Perhaps, I thought, my cancer was less a sentence and more an adventure. Like any good adventure, it was a chal-

lenge, a journey into the unknown. It involved a huge element of risk. The stakes were as big as they get. But with the risk would come wonderful side effects: stretching, learning, growing.

And most of all, trusting.

Before any hunt or climb, I do everything I can to prepare myself. I check and pack my gear. I research the area I'm heading to. I plan for multiple scenarios.

I've taken the same approach to living. I've done all I can to ensure a long and enjoyable life. I've eaten well. I've exercised and kept myself in excellent physical condition. And to ward off disease, for years I've taken all the vitamins and supplements designed to prevent maladies such as prostate cancer.

The result? I get one of the most aggressive prostate cancers that exists.

It's helped me realize something: no matter how confident you are in a situation, no matter how much you prepare, no matter how good you are at whatever you do, you're still not in control. Sooner or later everything comes down to dependence on God.

I knew this already. God is Lord of the universe. He's sovereign. He created me and everything around me. My life and the time I have on this earth are entirely in His hands.

But now I *know* it. I understand it with a searing intensity. It's fearful and deeply comforting at the same time. All I have is my trust in Him.

Recently, that trust has taken an interesting turn. To battle my cancer at the physical level, my treatment has included a few months of hormone therapy combined with aggressive diet and supplement programs. But I've also submitted to spiritual "treatments." I've participated in a dozen healing services conducted by friends in Hawaii, San Francisco, my hometown, and elsewhere. These spiritual warriors have traveled from across the country to anoint me with oil, lay hands on me, and pray for my health.

I've done a lot of praying myself. I've talked with God all my life, but my recent experiences with cancer have led to a closeness with Him that I've never felt before.

The apparent outcome of all this surfaced a few months ago in a hospital room in Houston. After a battery of tests, two doctors walked in with befuddled looks on their faces.

“Peb, your situation is very peculiar,” one said in an apologetic tone. “We can’t find a trace of your cancer.”

This was one time I didn’t mind being labeled “peculiar.” I praised God—once again, I was being pronounced cancer free.

Will I stay that way? I don’t know. I’m taking this journey one moment at a time. So I’ll continue to value the prayers of friends and will do everything physically and spiritually possible to stay healthy. And I’ll cherish every day—every adventure—every perfect moment—that’s given me.

What’s exciting is that once again I’ve emerged from the crucible with a new perspective. My life has been burned down to its most basic elements. What remains is my reliance on Him, His sovereignty, and His all-sufficiency.

It is, in fact, all I’ve ever had.



On that hot day back in the Zimbabwe bush, rifle poised, I’m so focused on the Cape buffalo that I hear nothing when I squeeze the trigger. It’s a sublime moment, like a black-and-white photograph, with time silent and frozen.

Abruptly, the moment ends. Sound and color come rushing back.

The buffalo bellows and bucks like a rodeo bull. He kicks up dust and knocks down trees.

I can’t believe I missed. “Didn’t I hit him? Didn’t I hit him?” My voice has jumped an octave, my eyes opened wide.

“You got him good,” Phillip says.

The buffalo, enraged, keeps bucking in a circle. His nostrils flare. He doesn’t see us. I stare, dumbfounded. I’ve never seen anything like this.

“If you want, you can take another shot,” Phillip says.

I take one long breath to calm my nerves and put another shell into the buffalo. He moans, loud, low, and long.

The buffalo stumbles away. After about twenty yards, he stops and lies down.

Just like that, he's gone.

The emotions converge and wash over me: awe, relief, humility. It is the end of a dream, yet also a beginning, an awakening. I feel I've joined an age-old fellowship inhabited by both man and beast. And as I breathe it all in, the sense of fulfillment is one of the most profound I've ever experienced.

We linger for an hour at the site. I stand near the buffalo's massive body, then sit beside him in the dirt. I touch those deadly horns, saying nothing. It is a privilege to be here. Even the Africans, who have played this scene hundreds of times, speak in reverent whispers.

There is birth, and there is death. In between are the hunter's horn and the brief adventure we call life.

Finally, sweating from the midday heat, we prepare the buffalo for the trip back to camp and pack up our gear. As the truck rolls away, I turn for a last look at the matted brown grass where the *mbogo* lay. Evidence of his presence, and ours, has nearly disappeared; all is silent and still. Yet I can imagine, just on the other side of the hill, his brothers still standing majestically in the veldt, heads high, horns thrust toward the sky and the blazing African sun.



HE IS THERE

I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.

PSALM 52:8

Many years ago I was playing basketball with my friend Jim Dobson and a few other guys in Jim's backyard. It was a typical male-bonding scene filled with trash talking, hard fouls, and plain macho fun. At one point I made a sharp cut to the hoop. My plant didn't hold. I slid to the pavement and writhed in pain, my ankle severely twisted.

The guys, concerned, gathered around me. Jim had his hand on my shoulder. I groaned loudly, my eyes closed. I didn't know how to deal with the sudden agony. Then I opened my eyes and, seeing Jim next to me, shot my right arm out and latched on to his calf with a death grip. I needed something alive, a flesh-and-blood presence, to hold on to. I'll never forget how comforting that felt. Jim's leg was the anchor that got me through a moment of pure anguish.

Faith in God is like believing a man can walk over Niagara Falls on a tightrope while pushing a wheelbarrow. Trust in God is like getting in the wheelbarrow!

Dr. James Dobson

More times than I can count, I've experienced God's comforting presence in much the same way. During my darkest moments, I've opened my eyes and discovered He is right there. I could grab hold of something indescribable, yet real. The Lord has been with me when I thought I couldn't go on—on remote mountain faces, arduous cycling trails, and raging rivers. And He has certainly journeyed with me during my battle with cancer.

Moses said to the people of Israel, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:8). I believe that promise wholeheartedly.

God will always stand with me. I trust that He's there and that He cares.

Of all the chances I've taken and continue to take in my life, the biggest and most important one is this: I trust God. Jesus put it plainly to the disciples: "Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1–2).

I want one of those rooms. It's the ultimate destination, the last unexplored territory on the map. I suspect it offers a view of spectacular peaks and quick access to glorious roads and rivers. Yet Jesus makes it clear that to hold my reservation, the required down payment is trust. That's a huge risk, of course. But it's one I'm very willing to take.

—PJ

Don't be afraid to go out on a limb. That's where the fruit is.

H. Jackson Browne
