

# Reinvention

How Travel Adventures  
Can Change Your Life

Carol Patterson

Order this book online at [www.trafford.com/08-0116](http://www.trafford.com/08-0116)  
or email [orders@trafford.com](mailto:orders@trafford.com)

Most Trafford titles are also available at major online book retailers.

© Copyright 2008 Carol Patterson.  
Kalahari Management  
Box 46056, Inglewood Post Office  
Calgary T2G 5H7  
403-290-0805  
[carol@kalahari-online.com](mailto:carol@kalahari-online.com)  
[www.kalahari-online.com](http://www.kalahari-online.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written prior permission of the author.

Note for Librarians: A cataloguing record for this book is available from Library and Archives Canada at [www.collectionscanada.ca/amicus/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/amicus/index-e.html)

Printed in Victoria, BC, Canada.

ISBN: 978-1-4251-6979-4

*We at Trafford believe that it is the responsibility of us all, as both individuals and corporations, to make choices that are environmentally and socially sound. You, in turn, are supporting this responsible conduct each time you purchase a Trafford book, or make use of our publishing services. To find out how you are helping, please visit [www.trafford.com/responsiblepublishing.html](http://www.trafford.com/responsiblepublishing.html)*

*Our mission is to efficiently provide the world's finest, most comprehensive book publishing service, enabling every author to experience success. To find out how to publish your book, your way, and have it available worldwide, visit us online at [www.trafford.com/10510](http://www.trafford.com/10510)*

 **Trafford**  
PUBLISHING™ [www.trafford.com](http://www.trafford.com)

**North America & international**

toll-free: 1 888 232 4444 (USA & Canada)

phone: 250 383 6864 ♦ fax: 250 383 6804 ♦ email: [info@trafford.com](mailto:info@trafford.com)

**The United Kingdom & Europe**

phone: +44 (0)1865 722 113 ♦ local rate: 0845 230 9601

facsimile: +44 (0)1865 722 868 ♦ email: [info.uk@trafford.com](mailto:info.uk@trafford.com)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements v  
Introduction 1

## EXPERIENCES 5

Who Let The Dogs Out? 6  
Reptile Search and Rescue 10  
Flying In The Day 13  
Into The Bridge 15  
The Llama Legend 18  
Stuck On Thompson Pass 22  
Surviving A Coup 25  
Near Death Experiences 29  
Making It Real 32

## WILDLIFE 35

Youthful Adventures 37  
Don't Feed the Bears 39  
The 'Easy' Bezi 42  
Sharing The Trail 45  
Pooping Orangutans 48  
The Bat Cave 51  
An Arctic Expedition 53  
Bambi's Mother Fights Back 60

## PEOPLE AND PLACES 63

Based On Double Occupancy 65  
The People You Meet 68  
Showing The the Door 72  
The Night The Luggage Drowned 73  
Life Under A Cargo Bungee 78  
Ghost Stories 83  
The Sorcerer's Spell 87  
Sometimes You Shouldn't Ask 91  
Get Stuffed! 94  
Lost In Eastern Alberta 97  
Diary Of An Urban Musher 102  
Trying On Other People's Lives 106  
My Red Sunglasses 110

REALIZATION 115

Defining Moments 117

The Ends Of The Earth 120

Lessons Learned On The River 125

The Bear Facts 128

Mom's Always Right 130

Dancing In The Serengeti 134

Changing Through Fish Tourism 137

Preserving The Faroe Islands 141

Between A Croc And A Hard Place 143

Very Much Trouble 146

Climbing (almost) Mt. Kinabalu 148

Epilogue 154

Index 156

Know Someone Who Needs A Reinventure? 160

## Introduction

It's early Tuesday morning, summer 1992, and I'm not at my desk. I'm not wearing a business suit and heels. I'm not entering numbers into spreadsheets. I'm wearing my hiking boots and I'm crouched low on the side of a mountain road watching a helicopter fly in to pick me up. I close my eyes against the dust whipped up by its rotor blades. Today I'm not an accountant. Today I'm an ecotourism consultant. How did this happen?

I suddenly realize that my love of the outdoors, wildlife and adventure has taken me out of the office and into a new and exciting career. I realize my life has undergone the change that I'd hoped for, but feared might not happen.

There had been hints earlier in my life that my career might not look like the standard occupations in a guidance counselor's check-off list like nurse, teacher or police officer.

One of my favorite childhood games was pretending I was a famous animal trainer. I convinced my siblings and playmates to be lions, dogs and whales. The backyard was transformed to a zoo or aquarium, the latter requiring real imagination since I grew up in the short grass prairies of western Canada.

When I was ten, I created my first wildlife attraction. I collected dozens and dozens of lady bugs, placing them in a bucket with what I thought was a suitable habitat – lots of leaves, rocks and twigs to climb on. I was crushed a few hours later when I found the bucket overturned and my collection gone, the bugs having fled back to the garden. I was to learn much later that keeping real life tourism attractions going was just as hard!

At sixteen, I decided I would become a park ranger. I raced home from school with the college catalogue, exhilarated by the idea of working with animals and wearing a real park ranger's uniform. My mother gave me a quick reality check. She pointed out that I didn't like bugs (ladybugs were the exception), that I got cold easily in the outdoors, and that living in remote

locations would be tough for a woman. I had to concede she had more than a few valid points so I went with a more logical choice and became an accountant. There was always work for accountants even if I dreaded the idea of routine days.

When I moved to Calgary in 1980 to do accounting work for an energy company, my inner park ranger came back to life. I discovered the Calgary Zoo and soon became a devoted visitor. I couldn't get enough during regular visits so I became a volunteer, first as a docent leading tours of the Zoo, then as a member of the Zoo's education committee. I wanted to learn more about the zoo's operations and moved on to become a trustee on the board of directors. I chaired the Live Collections and Business Operations committees and ultimately became Chairman of the Board of Directors. As I was moving through those roles, I discovered the Zoo's ecotourism program.

In 1985, the Zoo offered a trip to Namibia, Botswana and South Africa jammed with wildlife watching opportunities and led by the Zoo's Head of Conservation Outreach Brian Keating. It was an irresistible opportunity and I signed on (although with a great deal of trepidation.) I'd just purchased my first house and money was tight, but I figured this was the kind of trip a person should do when they are young. I went for it! When the plane touched down at Johannesburg airport, I felt like I was coming home even though I'd never before set foot in Africa. Seeing my first wild animal, an elegant impala near Namibia's Etosha Pans, started me on a picture-taking frenzy and sent shivers up my spine.

My parents saw no reason for an accountant to run off to Africa. I told them this safari was an exotic adventure to take before I "settled down." To my parent's chagrin, the first safari led to another and another. I was fascinated at seeing the wildlife I'd only read about as a child. Furthermore, I was enchanted by the idea that travel could help these animals. Ironically, habitat land is scarce in Africa and I quickly recognized that tourism provided the economic justification to keep vital wildlife land out of agricultural or industrial development.

I soon realized there had to be a way for me to make a living by combining business with wildlife conservation and travel. I was determined to find it. As I waited on the side of the road for the helicopter that would take me into a remote mountain lodge, I realized that travel had taken me literally and figuratively to a world I preferred.

I scrambled in beside the pilot and we took off. Within seconds I had a mind-popping view of the Rocky Mountains. The 20 minute trip gave me a chance to see above the valley bottoms to the hidden glaciers and back canyons that hikers rarely see. We landed in a lush alpine meadow surrounded by towering peaks, naked of snow in the weeks before the fall precipitation started.

Don, the lodge owner, greeted me with a friendly handshake and took me on a tour of his camp. The main lodge was old and squat; its heavy wood beams and small windows lacked the glitz of modern hotels but they bespoke of its ability to withstand fierce summer storms and winter blizzards. The inside of the Lodge was decorated in Rocky Mountain rustic with some interesting keepsakes, conversation pieces for hikers after a day on the trails.

A short walk out the front door was a small, crystal clear lake. It was easy to imagine visitors sitting on the grassy banks watching the clouds chasing across the sky and letting the hours slip by. I was there to assess his business plans for the lodge and for the people he hoped to bring to this valley, but I was struck by his passion for the mountains and his desire to share it with travellers.

In the years since that day, I've met lots of people with a passion for travel. Many of them spend all their spare dollars and time on it. Some have given up well-paying jobs or prosperous businesses to create a career and life in tourism. Their lifestyles and backgrounds are as varied as the colors in a rainbow and just as fascinating to watch.

I realized that day in 1992 that travel had changed my life and eventually I came to realize that it has changed the lives of other people as well. I've come across hundreds of stories of how travel has transformed people and the communities where they live; so I decided to record some of them. Not all the stories are earth-shattering epiphanies; some are just gentle adjustments. Not everyone's story is uplifting either. Each of us can probably recall at least one travel horror that makes great retelling.

This book is a celebration of travel. I've felt its positive effects and I've seen it change others. Hopefully you'll see yourself in some of the adventures, and be inspired to create your own Reinventure!

## Section Two - Wildlife

"I have never been in a natural place and felt that was a waste of time. I never have. If I'm walking around a desert or whatever, every second is worthwhile."

~ Viggo Mortensen



Don't Feed The Bears, page 40

## The 'Easy' Bezi

*"It is the little bits of things that fret and worry us; we can dodge an elephant, but we can't a fly." ~ Josh Bill*

Encounters with large animals always make an impression on travellers. The risk, real or perceived, make for tales frequently retold by travellers to their friends and family back home. Miles' misadventures with a bear were great fodder for his friend's travel tales and made it a better vacation, at least in the re-telling.

Watching animals has been the focus of many of my trips, so I have probably found myself in more unusual situations than many people. As I discovered on one of my wildlife safaris, having to face real danger strips away many of our civilized responses. It lets us meet our inner survivalist. Dialing 911 is not an option in the bush. I think the confidence and relief one feels after a lucky escape gives a person a new-found appreciation for life and shakes off the tedium that often accompanies our workaday world.

I remember that feeling after courting disaster in one particularly-close elephant encounter and how shocked I'd been that something like that had happened to me, someone who always plans for every outcome. I'd been to Africa several times, but never to Zimbabwe, home of the famous Zambezi River. Several of my friends had canoed the 'Bezi' and assured me it was a wildlife experience like no other; something I shouldn't miss. I've never been a great paddler and my nerve for water adventures runs into the 'cluck, cluck' category, but everyone said it would be a piece of cake. I've always found that when someone uses that expression they are usually bad bakers and you should proceed with caution.

Safaris in Zimbabwe are much different than those in eastern Africa where you bump around the savannah in Land Rovers and the ubiquitous white mini-van. In Zimbabwe you're able to leave the vehicles and walk among the animals. The guides carry reassuringly-large rifles and you can count on having

several members of the big five – elephant, rhino, buffalo, hippo and lion – strolling through your safari camp at any time of the day or night. Sleep is often interrupted by the sound of large branches splitting or eerie night calls. You play ‘what’s that sound?’ with your tent-mate.

The unsettling feeling of leaving the security of camp and being at one with God’s creatures can’t be conveyed by a travel brochure. You soon understand why our ancestors took some time to come out of the trees. We’re smaller than lots of predators and don’t run all that fast, something I learned first-hand.

One day a stomach bug hit our safari group and my husband, Colin, and another camper, Lois, were hit particularly hard. When I awoke that morning to the sounds of retching all around me, I knew we wouldn’t make a full day of paddling. After all, how do you paddle and puke at the same time?

The guides shuttled the sickest guests along with their spouses off to the next camp to rest. I was happy to spend a day in camp and Colin was too green to much care what we did with him. Once settled in camp, James, the guide assigned to watch over sick bay, suggested that Lois’ husband, Phil and I follow him across a fallen tree to a nearby island to bird watch. We could enjoy some wildlife watching and James could keep an eye on camp and our sick compatriots. It sounded like a great plan, so we grabbed our binoculars and cameras and headed out.

We’d spotted only a few birds before we looked back at camp to see two bull elephants lumbering among the canvas tents. Lois and Colin had prudently taken shelter behind a large tree. They were more than a little nervous about such large visitors and had no idea of how to move these big guys along. Saying ‘shoo’ seems a little inadequate in the face of several tons of pachyderm. James jumped up from his perch by the river and scurried back to camp to chase off the elephants, and keep his insurance premiums from escalating.

Phil and I had every faith in James's rescue skills and were enjoying our ringside seats for the mini-drama. We were sitting close to a ledge overlooking the river when the tall adrenaline grass behind us starting to rustle. Adrenaline grass is accurately named; it is tall and thick and your adrenaline often kicks in as something unexpected walks out of it. This was one of those times. After a few seconds of the stalks waving and crunching, the large grey head of an elephant appeared with apparently more behind it. Phil was elated at the thought of some close-up shots of a big bull. He knew that they were seldom aggressive as long as you don't corner them.

Unfortunately our good luck didn't hold. A few seconds later the grass rustled again and a much, much smaller elephant came into view. My heart leapt to my throat as it became clear we were looking at a cow-calf herd, not a couple of bachelors. We were in deep doo doo! Female elephants are extremely protective of their young, and this mamma was none too happy to see us.

As we started to back up, I was mentally evaluating our options and not liking any of them. Going forward would have meant we'd be flatter than road-kill in seconds. Backing up was going to put us into the Zambezi River very quickly. I recalled some enthusiastic tour guide telling me that the river had a crocodile density of one croc every square metre. The term 'crocodile infested' was not an understatement.

Fortunately, having rescued our spouses from their elephant encounter, James looked over to see us trying to avoid a nasty showdown. He ran for the tree bridge again, shaking his rifle in the air to get the elephants' attention.

The lead cow elephant was suitably impressed by the size of James' gun. She turned and led her group into the river. Better her than me, I thought, as she swam through the crocs to the other side.

I've always stressed the need for good guides in my tourism training workshops, but that day I was really glad I was

travelling with the best. I was able to laugh about this experience later, but I learned in spades that paying extra for a good guide was as, or more important than hiring a good accountant for your taxes or a mechanic for your car.

## Sharing The Trail

*“The only reason I would take up jogging is so that I could hear heavy breathing again.” ~ Erma Bombeck*

After many years as a wilderness guide, Kirk Hoessle became president of Alaska Wildland Adventures, a small-group, natural history tour company with trips ranging from the protected areas of the Kenai Peninsula to Denali National Park in Alaska.

Kirk holds a degree in Environmental Education and is excellent interpreter of the environment, having worked for many years in interpretative design and planning. Kirk knows though that there are times when a good guide has to manage encounters with animals on the trail first and save the interpretation until for back at the lodge. He describes one his most memorable wildlife encounters:

A couple years ago, I lead one of our groups on a hike in the Chugach National Forest, near our Kenai Riverside Lodge in Alaska. We were hiking along the Russian River Trail. (By the way, we actually get this question a couple times a year: “Is this the same Russian River that they have in California?” We humans say the funniest things sometimes, don’t we?) Well, it was approaching ten o’clock at night, but it was mid July, so the sun was still well above the horizon. It was, however, the time of day where the primary use of the trail transitions from humans to critters.

I was hiking near the front of a group of seven or eight, when we suddenly heard up ahead what sounded to me like the roar of a lion. Someone asked, “Is that a bear?” I said, “I don’t know,