

Commentary...

Intimate is the African Night – Part 3

By Chris Morin
Columnist

The camera's fall, towards the lioness's head instantly created empty space between her eyes and mine, causing the raw magnitude of the moment to somehow leap up yet another level.

Her head snapped an inch to the side in response to the camera bouncing at the end of its strap, which encircled my neck. Absentmindedly, maybe out of habit, I had slung it over my head before standing up and that might very well have saved my life.

The little twists and turns of the swaying camera just three feet above her noggin ratcheted up the raw tension even more. She immediately refocused and this time her eyes seared deeper into mine, which helplessly locked into hers.

Those bottomless feline eyes seemed to emit a soft greenish light, like the sea might hold at a faraway island paradise. Dreadfully enthralling, they induced my awareness, mind, and very soul to fall off the cliff of my own existence and down into hers. She owned me.

The lioness seemed to contemplate if I might be something to spontaneously take, possess, and then devour so as to become a permanent part of her.

My breathing shut down. I presume my heart continued to beat, but for all I know, the blood could have drained from it. Purely, this was Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* being hypnotized by the great snake Kaa, helpless to do anything about it.

A lifetime of two or three seconds passed. I hadn't moved a speck since letting go of the camera. Gradually, she unbolted our stare by turning her head away to see what else the pride was considering, and gradually moved a leg and paw out to resume her previous path.

Like a victim whose spell by the conjurer had just been broken, I turned away as fast as I could while she serenely continued on her way.

The urgent need to let the guide know of the



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Pride of Nine taking an afternoon nap.

predicament made me proclaim, "Umpff! Dwaq! Zhnn!" In a few brief moments, I had gone from a cartoon character in a Disney movie into a real life nightmare, the one where you need to call out for help but can't speak.

"This is nuts! Get hold of yourself!" flashed through my mind. A deep breath, a second, and then I forcefully opened a clenched jaw and offered a halting and sputtered, "l i o n! L i o n. Lion!" Tuke and Henry turned; I gestured madly towards the rear.

They spotted her as she appeared from behind the back of the jeep. Tuke screeched, "oh-oh!" flipped back around and turned on the engine in one single motion. A second later he clutched into first and off we flew into the night.

Tuke drove hard for a half a mile before stopping and talking to us, debriefing. I didn't hear a word he said. I can't imagine Kathleen or Tony did either. I have no idea what they felt, but I was absolutely beside myself.

The next several minutes were some of the most glorious of my life. I was *alive dammit*. "Fantastic to be *alive* and *human*. I'm human!" I soundlessly rejoiced while my eyes watered and my ears rang. The adrenal glands were pumping out utter joy juices, nothing else. "I'm *alive*, I'm *still* human." But there was an additional reason for the joy, separate from having

survived.

My mind comprehended something else entirely. For a few seconds back there, I had unwittingly become a part of the alpha mammal of Africa.

That lioness had fully taken over my fate. If she'd wanted to latch onto my throat in order to yank me down to the ground, that's exactly what would have happened. In that position, nothing could have stopped or even impeded her from doing so.

If she had pounced, the ensuing drama — a guide trying to wheel around a vehicle with a huge turning radius, a spotter possibly attempting a hasty shot, all the while eight other lions rapidly close ranks on a jeepload of screaming tourists — is not a pandemonium scenario that offers the potential for hope.

No, I was hers and she knew it. It's what the top predator does—initially take in the prey through the eyes,

make it a part of them, decide if this one is worth the effort of the kill, and, if it is, thus make it *panthera leo* via consumed sustenance.

I'll guess that all of this rarely occurs from a stationary position of just four feet and the prey goes unscathed.

The fact that she ultimately rejected a carnivorous union with me didn't damage my ego in the slightest. In fact, it reacquainted me with the profound appreciation I have for being human, for being alive, but now infused with a glimmer for being lion.

Man killed in highway rollover

A Springfield man died and two teenagers were injured in a single-vehicle rollover accident on Hwy. 242 on Sunday.

Oregon State Police (OSP) reported that on August 16, at approximately 11:27 a.m. OSP Troopers and emergency personnel responded to a single-vehicle crash on Hwy. 242 near the intersection of Crossroads Road, approximately two miles west of Sisters.

Preliminary investigation revealed a Chevrolet pickup truck operated by Liciano Ramirez-Guillen, age 57, of Springfield, was eastbound when it drove off the roadway and rolled.

Ramirez-Guillen sustained fatal injuries. There were two passengers; a 13-year-old was transported by Life Flight to St. Charles Hospital in Bend with serious injuries and a 15-year-old was transported by ground ambulance to St. Charles in Bend for injuries.

OSP was assisted by Deschutes County Sheriff's Office, Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire Department, and ODOT.

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