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"The View from the Loo" has been a mainstay section of the ***JUST NOW NEWS*** Cowabunga newsletter for decades.

Articles in this section can best be described as: "Reflections and contemplations while responding to nature's call while on safari." Enjoy.

THE VIEW FROM THE LOO:

The View from the Loo:
THE VIEW FROM THE LOO

by Gary K. Clarke
(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter)

One of the most exhilarating experiences of safari is the satisfactory performance of an individual's daily constitution. And this is never more satisfying than when accomplished while surrounded by nature itself and not in the confines of tile, porcelain and artificial lights.

If done properly, this exercise can serve a multitude of functions. Among these are to cleanse one's physical system, to take time out from life's hectic pace and simply contemplate, and to formulate opinions and philosophies.

Thus, the name for this article. ("Loo" is bush lingo for toilet.)

Bush loos come in a fantastic array of designs and creative expressions. Some are functional, others quite imaginative, a few even humorous and most have matchless views.

More than once I've sat on the lower jawbone of an elephant turned upside-down over a hole in the ground. It's not as uncomfortable as it sounds, but you hope that a relative of the deceased does not come along. Many of the islands in the Okavango Delta of Botswana are formed by termite mounds, which resemble enormous castles of clay. An

enterprising camp staff on one island converted an abandoned termite mound into an elevated "throne," and you really felt like royalty while sitting on it and surveying the surrounding habitat. And on the banks of the Zambezi River there is an actual flush-toilet loo with a Dutchdoor where you can sit with lower-half privacy, yet lazily gaze at canoeists floating by.

My views from the loo have never been better than they were on a camping safari to Tanzania. We had full-sized tents with canvas flaps that could be opened to look out. Directly behind each tent the camp staff had erected a smaller tent with a bucket shower on one side. On the other side was a freshly dug "long drop" outfitted with a conventional westernized toilet seat. Next to it was a mound of loose earth and small spade: after each use one shovels into the hole a spadeful or two of dirt to "flush."

But… Ahhh… The view.

In the Serengeti the view extended across the plains to a lovely acacia woodland. In early morning, at first light, the woodlands were often filled with zebra and wildebeest – part of the great migration we had come to witness. Or there would be an occasional gazelle, hartebeest or warthog. And once a silverback jackal nonchalantly paraded by.

In the evenings the view held a glorious sunset, the sky streaked with orange, gold and purple, with acacia trees interlocked in a delicate silhouette on the horizon. You wanted to sit on this loo just for the view, even if you didn't need to.

The view from the loo at our private camp on the floor of the Ngorongoro Crater was totally different. In the distance was the dramatic escarpment wall of the Crater, rising 2,000 feet from the Crater floor to the rim. Frequently clouds of mist would gently rest on the rim like an elongated hot air balloon.

Just to the left of the long drop (as one was sitting on it, not facing it) was a yellow fever tree, mature with age, huge, with part of its fallen trunk changing in color from bright yellow to a deep rust. Beyond the tree was a slight ridge, covered with vegetation, and in habited by a variety of birds.

While enjoying this view at dawn one morning, I heard a lion roaring – just over the ridge! He sounded very close.

Sounds can prove to be an added incentive to complete one's contemplating in record time. But in this particular case, my many years of bush experience allowed me to take the roaring in stride and enjoy a unique serenade – loud initial roars, "*aaaouu, aaaouu, aaaouu*" followed by a series of deep guttural staccato coughs… "*huh, huh, huh…*" Besides, if one were to be confronted by the King of Beasts while sitting on the loo, what better way to go?

Just then an adult spotted hyena ran past me at high speed. Why? In the next instant a full-grown lion ran by, chasing the hyena! Seldom do I have such stimulus in conjunction with my View from the Loo.

The View from the Loo:
THE SPECTER OF BIN LADEN

by Brian Hesse

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, Third Edition, 2002)

Bin Laden was there, less than ten feet away.

His bearded, white-clad image, along with a picture of two jets, was plastered on the back of a dilapidated minibus.

I was enraged.

I looked out my window, through a mass of humanity lining the road, past piles of horse fodder, horses and carriages, and beyond heaps of smoking rubbish marking the beginnings of a denuded, goat-filled countryside. I longed to be away from here, on the grass-filled vistas of the Serengeti or the applering acacia- and animal-lined banks of the Zambezi... and I sure as hell wanted to be off of this ironically-named public *car rapide* minibus, neither a car nor rapid, because it was owned by the same Muslim community organization which owned the Bin Laden minibus in front of me. I was an American in the West African country of Senegal, a country nearly 95 percent Muslim. Moreover, I was in a foul mood.

My bilious disposition continued to fester as I walked the streets of Dakar, the capital, looking for the institute where I was to teach a course that afternoon. I reckoned more than a few of the many Muslim Brotherhoods in Senegal sympathized with Bin Laden's message.

Once in the classroom, my temper found barely muted respite as I settled into lecture and discussion. Later, as the students and I wrapped up our session, one man asked "How do Americans find Africa?", meaning, of course, "What do Americans know of Africa?" I immediately launched into my well-worn mantra about the diversity of the continent, about it being a vibrant tapestry of 800 million-plus people in 50-plus countries speaking 800-plus languages; about it being a continent of glaciated mountains, deep forest and open savannah; about it being a place where one can find wildebeest and penguins a few kilometers from each other. I tried to summarize by stating: "It seems so much of what Americans know about this immense continent is overwhelmingly negative – " My words ended abruptly.

I at once realized I had become on of *those* Americans, having let one image, one moment, taint what I could, and indeed did, know about Africa. That is when Gnagna Cambel Dienga, a 20-something Muslim woman, stood up and said: "Tell your countrymen to come to Africa. We want to welcome them, to share with them warm Senegalese and African *teranga*. Tell them we wept for you, with you, on September 11."

And with that, the specter of Bin Laden was laid to rest.

The View from the Loo:
IN THE DARK ABOUT AFRICA
by Brian Hesse

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, Third Edition, 1999)

Nearly a century ago, in *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad took readers on a literary voyage up the Congo River. What he described was an African continent of disease, disaster, and decline. In the middle of the 1990s, Robert Kaplan produced a book entitled *The Coming Anarchy*, and similarly, portrayed Africa as a continent of conflicts and tragedies.

To be sure, Africa does have many, many problems. Yet it is wrong to paint the entire immense -- IMMENSE -- continent as one monochromatic chaotic scene. Africa is a vibrant tapestry of 800 million people in 54+ nations, living and working in bustling urban centers with sky-scrapers and traditional villages with dusty soccer pitches. It is a place of snow-covered mountains, deep forest, and open savannah. It is so many different things and so much to so many. To me, it is a continent that challenges my physical abilities and intellect, soothes my spirit, and inspires faith and wonder. Far from being an alienating place, it is a magnet on my soul.

Nevertheless, Africa does not shed its stereotypes easily. One of the most difficult tasks in considering going to Africa, or, having made the decision, preparing to do so, is not the logistics of getting there. Rather, it is not giving in to imposed generalizations. If I had a dime for every person who has ever told me what bad things *could* happen to me in Africa, I would be a wealthy man. However, it is often the most skeptical individuals who, having heard the stories, seen the pictures, sensed the positive impact Africa has had on me, it is often they who make the comment, "I didn't realize..."

Ultimately, a person's decision and desire to experience a part of Africa has to come from the very place where African solutions are being, and will be, found: from within. But for those of us who have been blessed to share in what is "right" and "good" about Africa's many offerings, far from being a "dark continent," it is a continent about which far too many are in the dark.

The View from the Loo:
"DON'T BE MISLED"

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, First Edition, 2000)

I remember when I *used* to subscribe to just about every travel publication there was — from the big name monthly magazines to the Sunday *New York Times* for its travel

section. Travel articles in these publications used to be informative and accurate, at least based on my previous experiences, and then later reading about where I'd recently been. But no more.

I've become very disillusioned with today's travel articles, and today's travel writers. Granted it seems to be an accepted practice in our society for everything to have a "commercial sponsor", from the Olympics to fine arts performances. And I can usually see through a travel article that is preferable to a tour operator or lodge that gave the writer a "freebie". So many articles today are more like blatant advertisements.

Here at Cowabunga we receive requests to go on Safari with us, complementary, in return for a favorable article. We explain that we are so small that we simply don't have the overhead to cover the expense — and we wouldn't do it even if we could afford it.

Several years ago I received a call from Mary Lou Nolan, Travel Editor of the *Kansas City Star*. I explained our policy, and quickly she said, "Oh no, the *Kansas City Star* always pays full price so I can write what I should". How refreshing! And she did go with us, on one of our more rugged Safaris (to the Ruaha area of southern Tanzania). And she did write an article — a three part series on the front page of the Sunday Travel Section — that was fair and balanced (and even mentioned other Safari operators).

More irritating to me than slanted writing, however, is the superficial approach writers seem to take these days on travel experiences, especially Africa.

A ***true*** Safari is so unlike any other type of travel. It is such a privilege to be in the bush in Africa, watching the wonders of nature unfold with your own eyes, in the company of professional and dedicated guides. Yet so many writers today treat the experience with such a flippant attitude. They fail to appreciate or understand this special venue — one that can actually change your life. Hence, their uninitiated readers perceive a Safari as just another form of glorified phony entertainment.

Don't be misled. Take heart. Go on Safari and see for yourself. All the world is ***not*** a theme park.

The View from the Loo:
SIX DAYS IN THE SUDAN

by Gary K. Clarke

(From *The Just Now News*, the Cowabunga newsletter, Second Edition, 2001)

The Sudan had long intrigued me. The largest nation on the African continent (nearly one million square miles), it features two notable dimensions of the Nile: the confluence of the Blue and White Nile at Khartoum; and the Sudd (or barrier), an

enormous swamp that spreads 250 miles, clogged with huge masses of floating vegetation. It also has more pyramids than Egypt. Its fabled capital city, Khartoum, is steeped in history and has diverse ethnic and cultural groups from throughout the country.

It was September 21, 2001 when I made my first visit to the Sudan, just 10 days after the September 11 terrorist attacks on America. My journey had begun weeks earlier at the Royal Geographical Society in London and from there to Zanzibar, then Bagamoyo on Africa's East Coast, and on to the interior lakes of Tanganyika and Victoria. With other members of the Explorers Club, I was retracing the footsteps of early explorers in their searches for the source of the Nile.

Prior to our departure, the U.S. Department of State had issued warnings on travel to the Sudan, but our group of 17 had secured special permission. Now, however, in light of the 9/11 events in New York City and Washington, DC, the State Department advised all U.S. citizens abroad to exercise extreme caution and to avoid travel to areas that might be hostile to America.

Upon arrival in Uganda, we learned that the Sudan portion of our expedition was officially cancelled. But I wanted to go to the Sudan – to meet the people, experience the culture, feel the country, see the Nile. So I did – alone, and the only one of the original 17 who started…

Tall and imposing, with a barrel chest and regal composure, Ali Mohamed epitomized the Sudan and its people. Standing in the desert heat in his traditional Muslim robe, he was a striking figure with rich chocolate colored skin, close cropped grey hair and distinguished mustache, piercing eyes but a gentle smile.

We had never met but he welcomed me in the desert with the traditional greeting: first his strong right hand on my left shoulder, then a firm pumping handshake, followed by a powerful bear hug, and concluding with a symbolic kiss on each side of my neck just below the ear. All of this was emblematic of one of the most unique adventures I've ever had in Africa.

Ali had a demeanor about him that reflected his military background. A retired Army Captain, he had been the personal driver of the President of the Sudan. Now he was on a staff of four that had set up a private desert camp for me in the shadow of the majestic Meroe pyramids. I was accompanied by a terrific trio of local hosts: an interpreter (who also served as my guide); the Chairman of the Department of Archeology at the University of Khartoum (affectionately known as "the Professor"); and a skilled driver (nicknamed "the Desert Fox") of our 4WD vehicle. And what a driver! He unexpectedly and often darted off the road across endless sands faster and easier than a dorcas gazelle.

There was an instant rapport between Ali and me. Though he spoke no English and my Arabic was limited to "Hababkom Ashra!!" (a friendly greeting), we shared many subjects through our interpreter: family, children (and grandchildren), religion, the desert, the Sudan, the U.S.A., the state of the world . . . and life. At times, there was no need for words; we just seemed to know and understand one another's thoughts.

My host trio ensured that my jaunts in the desert were serendipitous . . . and exhausting. The Professor brought history alive as he personally escorted me around the numerous pyramids, a hand dug well dating back 2000 years and still in use, and the ancient

ruins of the Royal City. My guide led me up a rugged, crumbling shale mountain, blistering in the sun, to see the Sixth Cataract of the Nile. The footing was so treacherous I would have faltered had it not been for two desert nomads – perfect strangers – who literally carried me to the top. And the "Desert Fox" (bless him) rescued the three of us when we were unexpectedly stranded on foot in a fierce rain, wind and sand storm while exploring a stone quarry.

Oh, it was HOT. Up to 117 degrees F. Whenever I returned to camp, bathed in sweat and gagging with thirst, Ali offered me a glass pitcher of red Karkadai, the sweet national drink made from the hibiscus plant. It was soooo refreshing, and he even served ice!

My immediate hosts called me "Ja'Ali," meaning "The Brave One." But to everyone else I was simply known as "The American" (not "an" American, but "The" American). Wherever I traveled in the Sudan I was received with warmth and sincerity, as expressed by the merchants in the bustling market of Omdurman; boat builders on the Nile; celebrants at a festive, crowded wedding reception; officials at the Wildlife Conservation and Environmental Protection Administration; directors and staffs of the Museum of Natural History and the National Museum of Sudan; faculty members of the Ahfad University for Women; traditional weavers in Shinde; uniformed guards in a salute to me at the Presidential Palace; and veiled ladies ceremoniously brewing coffee and tea on the dirt streets of Khartoum.

Plus a wonderful man, blind and 104 years old, living remotely in a mud brick house. As I sat beside him in the heat, he clutched my hand to his breast and kept repeating in Arabic, "Welcome, The American, in peace; Welcome, The American, in peace." Here was an individual whose life had touched three centuries, who had actually lived through much of the significant history of the Sudan, yet cognizant of today's world. And he received me with such serenity, such graciousness. It was extremely moving, almost spiritual.

My last night in the desert was one of my more memorable experiences in Africa. Dusk fell just after 6:30 pm, but it was still over 100 degrees F. The "samoun" wind flowed off the sun baked shale mountains, bringing a current of blast furnace air through our camp. Since it was much too hot for a campfire, light was provided from the eerie glow of a small paraffin lamp. The Meroe pyramids stood as silent silhouettes on the horizon.

Despite the heat, we drank hot hibiscus tea as we sat at the little table and discussed the day's events. I was tired, but it was a good tired, as this entire Sudan adventure had been so fulfilling.

Suddenly, a man appeared from the darkness and stood by the table. He startled me, but the Professor and my guide knew him. He was a traveling minstrel who had heard that the Ja'Ali was here, and had walked to our camp to entertain me! Such hospitality.

He played his aoud, a stringed instrument like a mandolin, and sang folk songs. The camp staff gathered around and joined in the singing, which led to dancing. Just as the scene was getting lively and festive, my guide stood up and said in hushed tones, "Ja'Ali, I have an announcement."

"Yes?", I replied, wondering why he was using such a quiet voice, as there was no one else around.

He continued, "You know alcohol is forbidden in the Sudan."

"Yes, I understand and accept that."

"And as Muslims we do not drink alcohol."

"Yes, I know and respect that."

"But," he divulged, "we have a special drink for you."

He produced a plastic water bottle containing a clear liquid. Called aragy, it is produced by fermenting dates from local palm trees. I was advised to first sip a little to get the taste, then mix it with cola.

WHEW! I have tasted some rotgut in my lifetime, but . . . ! It brought to mind a night in Botswana when a hyena chewed into a metal kerosene container and drank the contents. Curious as to why a hyena would do such a thing, the next morning I had a tiny taste of the kerosene just to see what it was like. YUCK! As repugnant as it was, however, it tasted like ambrosia compared to the aragy. Even diluting the aragy with a full bottle of cola didn't help.

Yet it was such a genuine gesture of hospitality that, in deference to my hosts, I felt obligated to imbibe. And they made sure my glass was never empty.

Meanwhile, they resumed singing which led them to dancing in a circle around me, all the while violently flicking their wrists to make their finger bones snap together over my head.

It was a surrealistic scene. Here I was in the Sahara Desert at night, under the shadow of ancient pyramids, sitting in a dilapidated little chair slowly sinking in the sand, surrounded by eight Muslims I'd met just a few days ago, sipping a special "brew," feeling so accepted and secure. As I looked up at my Sudanese friends, towering over me in their long white jallabiyahs, a half moon floating in and out of quilted clouds above them, it occurred to me that my family and friends in the USA were probably concerned about my welfare.

The singing, dancing and laughing accelerated at a feverish pace. Such energy! How did they do it, especially in the heat?

After several hours I started to feel the effects of the aragy. To everyone's delight I was demonstrating the Cowabunga greeting, the Cowabunga "high five," my double-jointed thumb, my crossed eyeball trick, when suddenly ….. everything stopped!

Dead silence!

Ohmigosh. Had I unintentionally done something wrong? Or violated a social code?

An uneasy apprehension gripped me. I didn't know what to expect.

Continued silence.

Finally, my guide leaned forward and said, "Ja'Ali, you have to make a decision."

"Yes?"

"Either we stop now, and the chef prepares your evening meal, or we continue to sing and dance."

"Well," I replied, "let's continue to --- " Before I could finish my sentence a joyous cheer erupted with immediate singing and dancing, and more aragy for me (uuunnnhhh).

Never have I had such instant camaraderie, such laughter, such celebration, such a sharing of spirit with near strangers of a different culture. It was difficult to identify my feelings. Yes, I was overwhelmed; and certainly I felt honored. But there was

something else, something intangible that flowed between us all, and I sensed their awareness of it as well.

The night wore on and eventually we were all exhausted, as was the supply of aragy (thankfully). As a late dinner was being prepared, I suggested that instead of me being served at the table like a visiting dignitary (considered necessary protocol for visitors, but it made me feel uncomfortable), why didn't we all eat together in traditional Sudanese style? The staff was thrilled and we all sat in a circle around a single food bowl, reaching in with our fingers. It was a local repast of ful, consisting of rice, broad beans and goat meat. We shared much more than a meal; we shared a special dimension of humanity.

A Turkish water pipe is an elaborate glass apparatus, sometimes three feet high. A bowl at the top burns the tobacco and smoke is drawn through a container of water to cool it before reaching the mouth through a long flexible tube. When Ali relaxed, he would sit on a campstool and smoke apple tobacco. It smelled quite pleasant , and the soft gurgling sound of the water accented the silence of the desert. On our last morning in camp, Ali invited me to join him. I don't smoke *anything*, never have. But I accepted.

I sat next to Ali and he demonstrated the technique. After he inhaled, twin columns of great white smoke billowed from his nostrils, nearly touching the ground. It was glorious! Like a fire breathing dragon . . . and Ali did it so effortlessly. I could do that!

He passed the mouthpiece to me with a gesture of encouragement. I took a long draw, choked, and exhaled a pitiful little wisp of smoke from my nose. Ali laughed heartily and slapped me on the back. Despite my failure, he seemed so pleased I had tried.

The next morning my departure from camp was difficult. In such a brief time I had grown so fond of the staff, and they had received me with openness and affection. To my surprise they presented me with gifts -- some local Sudanese handicrafts. I was touched.

It was with heartfelt emotion that I bade farewell to Ali. His eyes glistened, then filled with tears. I lost it, and we both cried unashamedly. Fortunately I had the long return drive to Khartoum to regain my composure.

There I was immersed in a flurry of last minute activities, official thank-yous, and hasty good-byes.

As I rode through the vibrant streets of Khartoum at dusk en route to the airport, I noted in my Journal: "My heart is sad because I am leaving. I love this city, this country, and its people. I came initially to see the River Nile, but my life has been greatly enriched by the spirit of the Sudanese."

Six days in the Sudan forever changed my view of the world.

"To dare is to do . . . to fear is to fail."
-- John Goddard

The View from the Loo:
WHAT IS IT ABOUT BEING ON SAFARI?

by Gary K. Clarke

(The following is an excerpt from Gary's book, *I'd Rather Be on Safari*)

"I'm so homesick for Africa and I haven't even left yet."
— Ernest Hemingway, whilst on Safari

What is it about being on Safari in Africa that makes it such a singular experience?

A Safari is more — much more — than seeing and photographing animals in the wild. It's the thrill of exploring new areas, the adventure of living in different cultures, the excitement of unanticipated eventualities.

The bush heightens one's awareness, sharpening imagination and senses, with no need for other resources. Trees and rocks, rivers and plains, mountains and valleys, regarded with almost spiritual reverence, take on enhanced value. There is elation with all that is living, discovery of oneself, a vision of a pure universe unsullied by the pettiness and contingencies of everyday human existence.

All life works in cycles, and nowhere is this more prevalent than on the ancient continent of Africa: temperature cycles, light cycles, climatic cycles, births, deaths. After only a few days in the bush your entire system becomes one in heartbeat with the Earth. You are in tune with the rhythm of life because you are in AFRICA!

Your days are full, and fulfilling. You are outdoors most of the time and constantly surrounded by life. Being on Safari offers the simplicity of basic daily living. Decisions are few and everyday stress is greatly reduced. It's easy to choose what to wear because you packed light. When you get in a vehicle it is not a question of whether to go first to the supermarket or the service station; you're not even driving. And your Guide is taking you to see *wildlife*. Once in awhile you have to make a decision: Do you go on a game drive, or a bush walk? Do you go canoeing, or stay in camp and watch animals?

The complexities that dominate your life back home are unimportant on Safari — the day's news, meeting deadlines, remembering your PIN numbers and passwords, computer viruses, bills, taxes, keeping track of keys . . . and codes. You can't do anything about them anyway. Many of the things you take for granted at home become terribly significant on Safari — pure drinking water, awareness of nature, fresh air, sunrise and sunset, paved roads, toilet paper.

A Safari is a travel experience unlike any other — bringing together people who may or may not have been previously acquainted, but are eagerly anticipating a shared adventure. Already there is a common bond — Africa and its wildlife — generating such excitement that grown people are feeling (and sometimes acting) like children again. Ernest Hemingway once observed, *No one says to anyone in Africa, 'Why don't you grow up?'*

This same bond brings a bright and happy spiritual substance to the group. People with varying backgrounds drop the facades of society to be on a comparable and

compatible level with other group members — many of whom are strangers, but may become lifelong friends. This bond bridges generations. In one of my groups the youngest member was 12 years old, the oldest was 88! What fun for me as Safari leader to experience Africa all over again through their eyes, their questions, their reactions.

At the end of a Safari someone usually laments, "Well, back to the real world." I like to point out that *this* is the real world, and we are returning to the artificial world that we have fabricated for ourselves.

On Safari you gain a totally new perspective of Africa, its wildlife and environment, its peoples and cultures. Everything you see, hear, or read about Africa will now have a different meaning. And you develop a new perspective on yourself as well — on your relationships with other ethnic groups, on your society and its place in the world.

The adventures shared with fellow Safarists, the camaraderie around the campfire, the humor that can only occur on Safari — these memories will last a lifetime.

Others with a passion for Africa have expressed their feelings in a variety of ways.

In 1856 African explorer Richard Burton wrote in his journal: "Of the gladdest moments in life, methinks is the departure upon a distant journey into unknown lands. Shaking off with one mighty effort the fetters of habit, the leaden weight of routine, the cloak of many cares and the slavery of home, man feels once more happy. The blood flows with the fast circulation of childhood . . . of fresh dawns the morn of life . . ."

African author Elspeth Huxley wrote: "To depart on a Safari is not only a physical act, it is also a gesture. You leave behind the worries, the strains, the irritations of life among people under pressure, and enter the world of creatures who are pressed into no moulds, but have only to be themselves; bonds loosen, anxiety fades, the mind closes against the world you left behind like a folding sea anemone. Enjoyment of the moment, the true delight in living, in life as it is and not as others in the past have made it, all this returns. Each breath you draw gives pleasure, you wake with a new sense of wonder at the pure light shining on golden grasses and the web on the thorn, and at the cooing of the dove. ...Only when the chains of civilization were loosened, when you escaped for an instance from the mould, could you understand the meaning of spontaneous happiness. To live this life forever seemed the only desirable form of existence."

On returning from her first East African Safari, American writer Anne Morrow Lindbergh had these reflections: "What I missed chiefly was the teeming atmosphere of life in which, for those weeks, we were immersed.

"We were plunged, day and night, in the life of wild animals who wandered at will and without fear before our eyes: gazelle cropping the grass in front of camp, zebra thundering past on the prairie, lions wandering across the road, giraffe nibbling at trees. Why should I, born and bred in New England, now miss these exotic animals I had never seen before? What have I in common with the mountainous elephant, the striped zebra, the towering giraffe, the swift gazelle? What did they mean to me?

"Nothing, I would think, and yet I felt a connection with these animals I saw daily. There was some tenuous link between us, and now that it is broken I feel deprived, poorer."

Professional Guide Garth Thompson describes his wilderness trails thusly: "We have designed walking trails into wilderness areas, devoid of any road but abundant in flora, fauna and scenery. The paths that you will walk are clean and covered only with the tracks of life. It is here that you will smell dust and dung, drink in the songs of birds, encounter animals at close quarters, sit silently at waterholes and watch nature in its quest for survival. You will be a part of nature as man used to be, you will not feel alienated, you will sit on the soil, run your hands through the sand, drink from the river, use an ancient tree as a back rest and look into your star scattered ceiling before falling asleep after a well earned day."

Writer and big game hunter Robert Ruark observed: "It was not until we found this camp that I became aware of what had happened to me in Africa. It had been happening daily, but my perceptions had been so blunted by civilized living that I had somewhere lost an appreciation of simplicity, had dulled my sensitivity by a glut of sensation and the rush of modern existence. All of a sudden I was seeing skies and noticing mountains and appreciating animals and cataloguing the flowers that dot the yellowed, grassy plains of Africa. I was tabulating birdcalls and marveling over the sheer drop of the rift and feeling good. I was getting up before dawn and loving it. I was feeling kind, and acutely alive, and very conscious of sun and moon, sky and breeze, and hot and cold."

Two of my Safarists expressed it well. One lady said that being on Safari was like opening a new present everyday. And then there was the world traveller who had been just about everywhere: Canada, Mexico, Europe, Australia, China, South America, Antarctica — wherever people travel these days. About halfway through his first trip to Africa he told me, "One day on Safari is like *two weeks* anywhere else in the world."

I know what he means. On Safari I feel like a bottle of Coca-Cola that has been shaken on a hot day — effervescent and overflowing with sights, sounds, impressions, emotions. Sometimes, even after more than 30 years and over 115 Safaris, an event or episode on Safari will be almost more than I can take. And the experience continues throughout one's life. In the days and weeks and years that follow, little vignettes of a Safari will float in my mind and flood my spirit with Africa. This happens at the most unexpected (and sometimes inopportune) time. And it is wonderful. I still have vignettes from my first Safari in 1974.

Those who ask me why I keep going back to Africa obviously have never been. I asked myself the same question and I keep searching for an answer. Maybe it is a mystical affinity for Africa. The Continent fascinates and rejuvenates me. At the end of every Safari I leave a part of myself in Africa, and bring a little piece of Africa back with me. If they cut out my heart when I die, I'm sure it will be in the shape of Africa.

Writer Don Steffen said it so well: "Once you have visited Africa, you never leave it. And Africa never leaves you. Its dust, mostly red, sometimes white, often black, settles on the heart . . . and remains forever . . . one always returns — if only in spirit."

To think just now of the evenings in Africa when the sun turns the sky blood red and one sees the dark and massive silhouettes of elephants on the horizon . . . oh, it gives me a quiver of joyousness.

It is said that God does not subtract from one's allotted time those days spent on Safari.

Safaris since 1974.