

**Day 10,000**

Early on I made avoiding mutilation by lion a top priority in my life. It never occurred to me to visit Africa. With my fair skin, I knew I'd turn into sun-ripened tomato in a matter of minutes. I'm horrible with foreign currencies and only speak English (though I can sing the capitals and countries of Central America in a pretty decent Spanish accent). Nope. Africa wasn't for me. And for that matter, adventure wasn't really my bag, either.

Yet, there I sat. It was day 10,000 since I left the womb and I celebrated by choosing to sleep in a hut beside the Zambezi River. I never thought I'd be there. I'm not completely certain how I got there. Somehow my friend, Jenn managed to convince me that a trip to Africa was the perfect way to spend the extra \$10,000 we had laying around. Oh, wait. We never had an extra ten grand. We saved like misers. Then a hailstorm destroyed our cars and we used the insurance money to zip off to Africa, land of giant spiders and half-crazed hippos. A nice man who spoke a language I didn't, sat outside our little house. He carried an ax and apparently was paid to sit up all night with bright lights facing the river in order to protect us from the very aggressive hippos that come out at night to feed along its banks. Another tidbit of knowledge—hippos kill more humans a year in Africa than crocodiles do. Good to know.

Inside the hut were two beds, both of which were covered in a strong netting that hung over them like a graceful canopy. When we arrived I thought it was romantic and exotic. An hour after sundown I realized the reason for the oh-so-fun netting. Enormous, furry spiders pressed themselves against the walls of our building, eyeing us carefully. Perhaps they thought we'd make a tasty snack. The spiders were our friends, however, because the other bugs, which landed on the net, causing it to sway a bit now and then, were big and unidentifiable. They wanted to eat us. Or at least that's the way I saw it. I prayed that the spiders would feast on the bugs instead of us. Normally, I get up at least once during the night in order to relieve my bladder but my bladder was quite happy with being full that night.

Suddenly a noise unlike anything I'd ever heard before came from the river. My husband jumped up, nearly pulling down the net around us and he was off like a flash across the room. I frantically tucked the netting back into place, all the while squealing at him about falling bugs and the ease with which they could enter our canopy-ed sanctuary. He barely acknowledged me but stood in a disk of moonlight in his skivvies, desperately trying to make out the hippos outside. I didn't want to see them but I couldn't ignore them, either. We could hear them. They sound like those smelly hogs at the county fair only bigger, louder and more tortured. Danny took pictures in the darkness and I envisioned "ax man," as we came to call him, out slaying the wild creatures to protect the pathetic white people whimpering in their beds. I wondered what Matt and Jenn, in the hut next door, were doing. Surely they weren't asleep. The entire experience made me anxious to talk to our friends, to nervously laugh it off and then come back to bed, secure in the knowledge that we would wake up in the morning. Alas, the gargantuan insects hobnobbing about the tiny room again stopped me. Nothing in the world could make me cross that floor barefoot and I realized, with dread, that my shoes were currently

unprotected, tossed on the floor like a couple of roach motels with vacancy lights flashing.

Eventually, Danny fell asleep to the sound of the hippos. I never fully forgot the creepy crawlies rooming with us or the gigantic, tusk-wielding hippos outside. I was awake all night long, waiting for death to take us.

In the morning we rode elephant-back through the jungle looking for more animals to add to our "I saw this critter in Africa" list. After showering (outdoors) we left for the airport, paid a tax in order to exit the country and barely made our flight.

No, adventure is not for me. I lived to see day 10,001 and frankly, that's adventure enough for a lifetime.