

October 2006

Dear Everybody..... From Mark:

Because so many of you have asked, "What happened to Mark?"

Here is: **"My Night on Broke-Back Mountain"**

Suddenly, without warning, my horse exploded down the boulder-strewn mountain trail, bucking and gaining speed. I tried to rein his head around, but in the gathering dusk I couldn't keep my balance or control him. I came out of the saddle and saw the ground coming up fast. "This is going to hurt." I thought. I had no idea how badly. I struck a log across the middle of my back. My ribs and back 'cracked' loudly and a lightning bolt of white hot pain stabbed through me. The next instant I was on the ground, half curled and trying to breathe through a perfect agony.

Sam Testa, my friend, ran to my side. "Don't move me! I think my back's broken." I choked.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Get down the mountain as fast as you can and get help."

"Hang on, Buddy. I'll be back soon." Sam threw his lightweight jacket across my shoulders and was gone.

Sam and I had left the Cedar Lake trailhead in Montana's Cabinet Mountain Wilderness at about 4:00 pm, looking for grizzly bear signs as we rode through the huckleberry patches. We chased the sun upslope as it set behind the great granite ridge towering above us. Increasingly narrow with sheer drop-offs, the trail led us ever higher above the azure blue lakes; a misstep of inches would have sent us tumbling a thousand feet down. I 'legged' *Whiskey* into the slope, and with the reins, blocked his unnerving tendency to look off into space as he plodded along. I wanted his mind on the narrow trail, not 'out there' somewhere.

"My God!" I whispered over and over as we rode along the top of the world at sunset in one of the oldest wildernesses in the US. It was getting late, but the scenery and the hope of spotting a grizzly lured me ever higher. A narrow trail chiseled in a massive rock wall led us across an 8-foot wide wooden bridge – with no guardrail - spanning a 'chimney' in the face. At 7 pm we turned back toward the trailhead 7 miles below.

By 8:15 I was on the ground and in agony with a broken back, seven broken ribs and a punctured lung. *Whiskey* was long gone down the mountain with what little food, water and extra clothing I had stuffed in my saddlebags. As the temperature fell I grew chilled. Sam had never been in the mountains on horseback, never ridden this trail, never ridden at night, and was relatively green as a trail rider. My rescue – my life – depended on him quickly finding his way. If he had trouble, hypothermia might well kill me. Lying on my stomach, I squirmed and swore; my face plastered against the dirt as I fought off the growing cold and sought comfort on the uneven ground. I tried scattering leaves over my back to insulate me, but I was too feeble.

Over the next 5 hours every time I moved I ended up facing steeper down slope. More and more blood pooled in my upper body; a 'gurgling' sounded with each breath. If my internal bleeding was bad, I might drown in my own fluids. I had to turn around, but my face and hands were trapped in a tangle of brush.

The near freezing temperature seeped into my marrow and I shivered uncontrollably. My breathing was more and more labored. I had to get my head upslope. Over the next two hours I broke my way free of the underbrush, but twisting my body might sever my spinal chord. Finally I said aloud: "You chicken (expletive)!" Are you going to lie right here and die head-down in a hole before help comes because you are too afraid of a little pain?" I sucked in my breath, cursed, and in two quick tries hauled my body around so that at last my head was higher than my feet. My breathing eased. *And I could still feel my toes!*

Then I heard the bear – snuffling around in the huckleberries a few yards upslope from me. 'Great,' I thought, 'here I am squirming around and whimpering like a wounded snowshoe hare with a bear in the neighborhood.' I fumbled for the .22 revolver



Sam had left me. I couldn't kill the bear with it - because I couldn't see in the darkness - but I could sure give it something to think about besides me. I lowered my right ear to the musty ground and waited...

'Punk!' A horse's hoof beat sounded suddenly though the duff under my ear.

'Mark! Where are you buddy?'" Sam called through the dark from perhaps fifty yards down the trail.

Too weak to answer and shuddering with hypothermia, I wrestled the flashlight and switched it on and off. And then he was there, covering me with a blanket, and reassuring me that help was on its way. My heart swelled with gratitude to Sam for struggling through the night, for defying the Sheriff who ordered him not to return to me until the rescue team had assembled. "I don't want to have to rescue two people tonight," he had said. Sam's reply: "Look, if your buddy was lying on the mountain dying of hypothermia, what would you do? I'm going." Sam had collected blankets and headed back up the trail. He was back by 12:30 am, a full 2 hours before the rescue team. During that time, the blankets slowed my heat loss. When the rescue team arrived they tucked hot water bottles around my body, checked my wounds, dressed me in a high-tech survival sleeping bag, gave me a jab of blessed Fentanyl, and then carefully strapped me to a litter.

"Hey, partner, how you doing?" Greg Johnson, my friend and the Conservation Officer for Unit 1 in Idaho was loading his horses and on his way almost before Delia had hung up the phone. For years Greg and I have ridden the high country together protecting grizzly bears. Now his voice out of the darkness was a welcome reassurance - as was the doctor he brought "...just to be sure things were done right."

I listened dreamily as the team debated whether to try to carry me 4 miles down to the trailhead or to find a place nearby where the rescue helicopter could safely land. For 3 hours 6 men huffed, puffed, stumbled and fell as they hauled me along the narrow trail upslope to "Moose Meadows". At times I was almost hanging from the stretcher as they lost and regained their footing. But they never dropped me, or even jarred me much. At dawn the thump and bumble of their boots on the trail gave way to the swish of grass. I lifted my head to see a beautiful Bell 207 chopper sweep in over the mountains. I thanked everyone as they slid my litter aboard, and we were airborne for Kalispell, Montana - and one of the best trauma centers in the West.

It has been 2 months since I spent my night on the mountain. I am a living testament to the skills, professionalism, caring, dedication, and courage of a lot of people who stood me upright again. The surgical team embedded two foot-long titanium rods along my spine secured with hooks, screws and a bone graft from my hip. They re-inflated my lung and fixed me with a brace that I must wear for 5 months while my spine and ribs knit. I am forbidden from lifting anything heavier than 2 lbs. My favorite coffee mug weighs more than that! Worst of all Delia, my feisty pint-sized wife, colleague and caregiver has sworn to tickle my ribs if I don't take care of myself. A month after leaving the hospital I walked the first 4.5 miles along my road to recovery. I cannot express the love and gratitude I feel to Delia, Sam, Greg, my other rescuers, and medical team, but also to all of you for your support throughout. I will soon be back again on the trail of "The Great Bear." I may not be on horseback - but I will be there - because by saving grizzlies we save the same ecosystems that sustain us all. We are partnering with the Vital Ground Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and others to secure with easements and outright purchases key pieces of critical grizzly bear and wetland habitats in the Northwest. And, of course, as always, we need your help!

So, what happened to *Whiskey*? Sam eventually caught and trailered him that night and drove him home. While I was in the hospital Delia gave him to a trainer for "evaluation." *Whiskey* and I will not be riding together again, but we are both getting yet another chance - and for that we are both lucky to have Delia.

FROM DELIA: Amazing news from our North Luangwa Project Manager Hammer Simwinga: He and his team have now expanded our original programs from 14 villages to 65, benefiting 35,000 people! Recently, while driving to a remote village he came upon a gang of AIDS orphans ranging in age from very young to teenagers, living on their own. To survive they break rocks and sell the crushed stones as construction material. When Hammer tried talking to them, they ran away. So he sat nearby working on the laptop computer that Peggy and Marc Faucher, Owens Foundation friends, generously donated and hand-



carried to Hammer and another for game scout Kamuti Simushi. Bit by bit, the children crept closer, staring at the laptop which showed pictures of children reading and coloring at a school built with Owens Foundation support. Soon the orphans crowded around Hammer, laughing and pointing at familiar faces on the screen.

When Hammer told us about these orphans, we thought how similar they are to the orphaned elephants of Luangwa when in the 1980's and 90's poachers killed most of the adults. The surviving elephants were mainly unruly gangs of unsupervised adolescents and single 'teenage' mothers – so completely opposite a normal elephant society. Our project stopped poaching, and the elephants are slowly recovering. *Gift*, the orphan female elephant, is now the matriarch of a family of five. Because of your support for our work these AIDS orphans can also recover.

Fifteen years ago these children would have worked for poachers, carrying meat and ivory from slaughtered elephants. Now, with schools in nearby villages, with micro-lending programs, agriculture support, training for cottage industries, health care to prevent the spread of HIV and improved Family Planning, they have a chance to be more than slaves to the poaching trade. Hammer encourages the children to go to the school so that they can someday learn to use a computer, and he is helping them visualize - and realize - a better life for themselves and to understand their important role in saving their wildlife heritage.

Everyday our model project in Zambia continues saving elephants and other wildlife by improving the lives of people. *But this is just a beginning. We need your help more than ever to expand our programs into adjacent areas where wildlife and people are desperate.* In a world where so much is wrong, this is something we can do to make things right! This success comes at a price. We all work as hard as we possibly can but we can't do it alone. Thank you so very much for any assistance you can give.

An encouraging report from North Luangwa Park: Ten more black rhinoceros have been translocated



Photo Credit: Marc Faucher/NLNP 2006

to the park, and thanks to the continuing support for park security and wildlife monitoring from the Frankfurt Zoological Society, to the Conservation Fund of Zambia, and others – the first baby rhino has been born in NLNP! FZS scientists Elsabe and Hugo van der Westhuizen who coordinated the rhino re-introduction program are now leaving Zambia. We are grateful for their good work and wish them well. We also look forward to knowing their replacements, Frank Hajek and Jessica Groenendijk. We are fulfilled at the success building on the foundation we established by securing the region from the death grip poachers had on both the people and the animals.

And finally – thanks to all of you our nationwide lecture tour this spring/summer was a grand success. We will never forget how you opened your homes and hearts to us. Thanks also to those who made long trips to attend our lectures and bought our new book Secrets of the Savanna. As a result, *Secrets* made the 'LA Times Best Seller List' and is in its third printing. It was wonderful getting to know you all face-to-face after so many years, and we so greatly appreciate you making us feel at home and introducing us and our work to your friends and communities. Until we meet again... **Thank you for all your support.**

Cheers,

Delia and Mark

Delia and Mark Owens

HOW TO HELP

SUPPORT A CONTINUED BAN ON TRADE IN IVORY: Please contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service or your home country CITES representative, and the CITES secretariat and ask for a complete ban on the trade in ivory. Without a market, poachers will not be encouraged to kill elephants.

- **CITES Secretariat:** 15, Chemin des Anemones -- Case Postale 456, CH-1219 -- Chatelaine -- Geneva, Switzerland. PHONE: 4122-979-9139-40, FAX: 4122-797-3417, EMAIL: cites@unep.ch
- **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service** -- 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 432 -- Arlington, Virginia 22203

LEGACY PLANNING: Touch the future by including the Owens Foundation in your Estate Planning.

Contact Tammy for more information:

- **Will, Living Trust or other plan:** Name the OFWC as a recipient of a fixed amount or a % of your estate.
- **Annuity or Life Insurance Policy:** Designate OFWC
- **Retirement Plans:** Designate OFWC as a beneficiary of all or a percent of your Retirement Plan.

MATCHING DONATIONS:

Some companies match employee & retiree donations to 501(c)(3) nonprofits such as the Owens Foundation. Multiply your giving and empower conservation.

RECOMMEND A FRIEND:

Let us know of anyone who shares our love of people, wild places and wildlife. We never share our database.

- **NEW EMAIL OR POST ADDRESSES:** Please advise any changes in your contact information. Save \$ - make us ☺.
- **DONATION BY CREDIT CARD:** can be made at www.owens-foundation.org via **DONATE NOW BUTTON** or by calling Tammy (678-648-1267). 3% goes to the Credit Card Co. You will be asked for the security code on your credit card as an added level of protection for you – assuring that your card number is not being used fraudulently.
- **FOREIGN CURRENCY DONATIONS:** must be made by wire transfer, US\$ money order or check or by credit card.
- **PURCHASES** via OF webpage link www.owens-foundation.org to www.barnes&noble.com generate income for our work.
- **RECYCLE USED CELL PHONES:** See our web page link to recycle cell phones at no charge and make \$ for OFWC.



RIGHT: TBA Joyce Chuba uses one of the stethoscopes donated by OFWC supporters, Drs. Beth Caldwell and Ken Greenwood and one of 2 Doppler Fetoscopes donated by Dr. Russel Thomsen of the Russian American Medical Foundation.

DONATIONS FOR NORTH LUANGWA: Thanks to all who have shipped school, craft & medical supplies to North Luangwa. They are GREATLY needed and appreciated. Still needed are:

School Supplies: Crayons, pens, pencils, erasers, chalk, wildlife books & magazines (used are fine).

Medical Supplies: Antibiotic soap, latex gloves, Betadine, sterile bandages, antibiotic ointment, gauze, first aid tape, Band-Aids, Ziploc bags, backpacks.

Sewing Supplies: Women's groups can use any fabric, thread or sewing notions.

Shipping: Label medical as *Hygiene Supplies*, school and craft donations as *Education Supplies*. List on the USPS Customs Form as a *Gift* with a low value. Ship USPO surface/no insurance. **IMPORTANT:** Use sturdy boxes, w/ **2 strips of duct tape in each direction and overlay edges w/ 2-inch plastic tape**. Use USPO "M BAG" for books at \$1 per pound, 11 lbs minimum and 66 lbs max per box. Use USPS site: <http://ircalc.usps.gov/> to calculate postage by weight. Remember shipping is expensive. Airmail is generally a waste of money. EVERYTHING goes surface from Lusaka to Mpika.

SHIP TO: Hammer Simwinga, PO Box 450140, Mpika, Zambia **THANK YOU - THANK YOU - THANK YOU!!!**