

Tom Siebel On Being Gored By An Elephant

Once you get hurt you hear about all the other accidents on safari that nobody talks about.

AS TOLD TO STEVEN BERTONI
PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIELA HASBUN

.....

A year ago . . . I was on safari in Tanzania with my wife and two daughters, and we had spent three days touring the Serengeti in the back of a Land Rover . . . seeing lots of animals, wildebeests, lions, zebra. . . [My family was] quite jet-lagged and decided to take a day off. So I asked the guide if we could take a walking safari. . . I showed up at 6:30 in the morning with my Nikon camera . . . and he [had] a double-barreled .470-caliber rifle and [said,] "I don't anticipate we'll have any problems, but if we get charged by an animal, it's very important that we stand our ground because if you turn and run we're going to get hurt because they chase things that run. . ."

So, we . . . go out for a walk and in front of the lodge is a watering hole. . . In the Serengeti [they] are pretty few and far between so they're pretty attractive features for migrating animals . . . and we came upon a herd of water buffalo . . . big and mean and kind of superbad looking, so we tiptoed around that . . . and about [15] minutes later, we came across a herd of elephants . . . about 200 yards away.

Understand, it's just daybreak, there's virtually no wind. It is very quiet, and we can clearly see . . . roughly 15 or 16 of them, half . . . juveniles and half . . . adult females . . . grazing the way they do and ripping branches off trees and stuff. . . I'm not certain what happened. But, all of a sudden, one of the larger female elephants just spun around and sat on her haunches and put her trunk in the air and her ears out fully extended and just bellowed at us.

.....



Tom Siebel A year and 16 surgeries later, hoping to run and bike again.

So, this is 6 tons of elephant moving 30 miles per hour and she could cover 200 yards in not much time . . .

I don't know if she could see us or smell us, but she pointed right at us. She paused for probably two seconds and then [made] a beeline right at us. So, this is 6 tons of elephant moving 30 miles per hour, and she could cover 200 yards in not much time. . . And I would say about 4 yards in front of me the guide is standing there with his .470 double-barreled rifle. . .

Let's put this in perspective: A .470 rifle is a large charge; it's almost the size of a roll of dimes. It's a side-by-side double-barrel rifle and [will] drop an elephant in its tracks. . .

So, the animal is closing in and the guy doesn't shoot. Then 40 yards, and the guide doesn't shoot. This animal's now 20 yards [away], and the guide has not shot. At 10 yards he still hasn't shot, and this animal is closing in . . . like a Caterpillar tractor coming at you. . . I'd say the animal is 4



Then the animal continues up right in front of me, and I'm standing there. It's maybe 2 feet away, and it's just standing there. And I'll remember this instant until the day I die.



Imagine what it's like taking an elephant tusk through the thigh or having a 6-ton animal step on your leg. The pain was intolerable. I thought, "Please, God make it stop."



I still have the iPhone that was in my left front pocket that basically exploded. It's now in about 200 pieces, and I have been meaning to send it back to Steve Jobs for a refund.

yards away and this guide then shoots and misses. It goes above its head. . Then the elephant came up to him and [with her] trunk . . . just threw him aside. I could hear the air decompress out of his body as the animal hurled him over maybe 10 yards to my right.

Then the animal continues up right in front of me, and I'm standing there . . . [It's] maybe 2 feet away, and it's just standing there. And I'll remember this instant until the day I die. And for three seconds--one, one thousand; two, one thousand; three, one thousand--the animal is standing there; I'm standing there. I can smell it . . . the pungent odor. . . I can see the gray, the hair follicles . . . the eyeball, the trunk, the tusk, the foot--the whole thing. . . And I was like, "Okay, what are we going to do now?"

And the animal then proceeds to kick my teeth in, basically. It knocked me to the ground with its trunk, it rolled me, punched me, put a tusk through my left thigh, gored it, then ripped it out sideways. It stepped on my leg, kicked my leg, broke six ribs and ripped up my shoulder. . . I remember every instant of it . . . trying to protect my head with my arms. I remember the blows to my

lower extremities, and it just hurt so bad I couldn't believe it. . . . Imagine what it's like taking an elephant tusk through the thigh . . . or hav[ing] a 6-ton animal step on your leg . . . It just snaps. . . . The pain was intolerable. . . . I had one thought: "Please, God, make this stop."

And after a while I looked up. . . . The dust is settled. The elephant's gone. Dead quiet in the Serengeti. . . . The guide is over there 12 yards [away], curled up in a ball, wrapped around [the] . . . rifle, playing dead. . . . Basically what happened is I got served up. So I said, "This might be a good time to reload." . . . He was virtually unhurt. . . . Then he called the lodge and brought out a [group] of pickup trucks and vehicles to surround me to keep the animals away. And I lay in the spot for three and a half hours. I was hurt, I couldn't move. My left thigh was just flayed wide open, my right foot was dangling on my leg, held on by two tendons and a flap of skin. . . .

[Finally,] they moved me into a pick-up truck, then the back of a tail-dragger Cessna with a couple of nurses on it . . . and flew to Nairobi. . . . When you're hurt pretty badly, I assure you a place like the Aga Khan

[University] Hospital in Nairobi is a pretty scary place. I think they did the best job they could there. . . . They cleaned up the wound site, put a stabilizer on my leg, then gave us a nurse and we flew back to the United States . . . to San Jose. It was a 20-hour flight and . . . through some error or oversight . . . they packed [only] 10 hours of morphine . . . and 15 hours of fluids. . . . By the time I . . . arrived in San Jose, . . . I'd lost two-thirds of my blood. . . . They performed a bunch of surgeries, put me in an intensive care unit for days and days and days.

So here we are a year later, 16 surgeries later. I still have something on my leg called an Ilizarov external fixator [to mend, lengthen and reshape] the tibia . . . between your ankle bone and your knee. . . . They've taken a chunk of bone out of my pelvis about the size of your fist and moved it down into my ankle to try to get it all fused together. . . . The prognosis is that I'll be able to walk and run and ride a bicycle and play golf [again]. . . .

I [still] have the iPhone that was in my left front pocket that basically exploded . . . it's now in about 200 pieces. . . . and I have been meaning to send it back to Steve Jobs for a refund.