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JUNE 2013

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DESERT DRAMA
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BORN IN ZIMBABWE, PETER GODWIN HAS RETURNED TO AFRICA TIME AND AGAIN AS A JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR. BUT HE'D NEVER TAKEN HIS NEW YORK CITY–RAISED SONS WITH HIM—UNTIL NOW. THE PLAN? THAT GREAT SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMBO OF BEACH AND BUSH.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHRINE WESSEL

ALMOST HOME

CRADLE OF MAN Jack's Camp sits on the edge of Botswana's moonlike Makgadikgadi Salt Pan (formerly a lake), in the middle of the vast Kalahari Desert. Humans in this region are believed to have been the first to use fire—a million years ago.

FUN FACT: There are scorpions in the desert; to handle them—if the spirit moves you—grab them by the stinger. (But wait for a demo.)

CELEBRITY SIGHTING
Botswana's Moremi and Chobe reserves have Africa's greatest concentration of elephants. Unpoached and unculled, they are unafraid and you can get close—very close.

FUN FACT: Elephants can "hear" through their feet, and their ears are like giant air conditioners, cooling their blood. Oh, and if the ears go flat against their head, they're charging. For real.

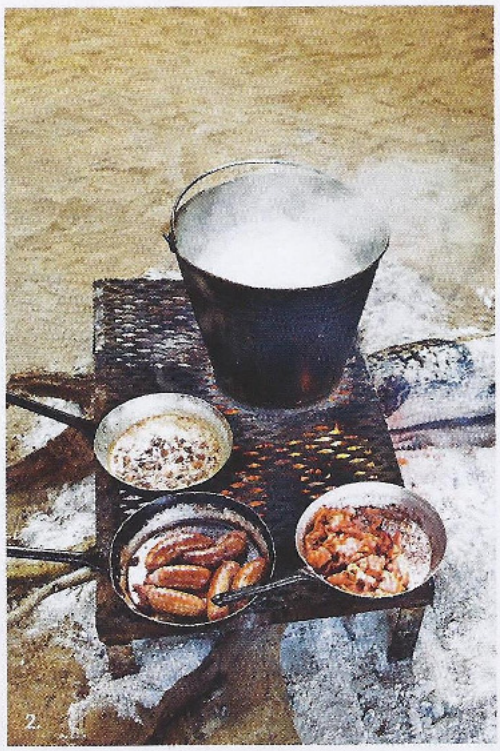
WE STOP FOR LUNCH ON A SANDY, SHALLOW BEND in the river in Botswana's Okavango Delta, overlooked by a pair of curious buffalo. As our boat, the *Lily*, bobs in the water, our guide suggests a swim. What, in this crocodile-infested river? "We've swum here before," he says , "and we've never lost anyone yet." My two sons—Hugo and Thomas, ages ten and thirteen—are champing at the bit.

I imagine how this will look if it goes wrong: He allowed his children to do *what?* But I remember all the times as a kid I swam in the Savé River in Zimbabwe—which probably has a higher croc count, to say nothing of bilharzia—so I cave. The boys leap off the *Lily* into the water. Up on the observation deck, I stand solemn sentinel.

We've been in Africa only a few days, and I am already deep in the familiar thrall of the continent, where life feels more vivid surrounded by predator and prey, poised in the perpetual combat of the food chain, the drama of living infused by the proximity to dying. Africa is a place that, like nowhere else I know, can get you out of your own head. It's the anti-neurosis. And I wonder, watching my boys splashing in the water, having mud fights, playing tug of war with a rolled-up towel, spreading a bright-tangerine net to catch tilapia, if they are beginning to feel it too.

INTIMATE AFRICA
1. Godwin opts for a mobile tented safari in Botswana's Okavango Delta—so his sons can see how the bush actually works. "A qualified guide should open your eyes to the fascinating minutiae of what is going on around you." 2. Meal time—sausage, bacon, mushroom stew.

FUN FACT: *Why don't predators attack you through the mosquito netting's thin, white fabric? Because it reflects ambient light and so appears to them as a substantial barrier.*



I'm a hyphenated, oxymoronic white-African, born and raised in Zimbabwe (then called Rhodesia). Though I haven't lived in Africa since the early 1990s, I've continued to report from there, on everything from wars to wildlife, and to write books about the place. I can't seem to shake free of it, though I've been a resident of New York City for fifteen years.

My sons were born in New York, and they sound like it. Then last year, I stumbled upon my older boy's homework assignment: "The object that describes where I live," Thomas wrote, "is a mini Statue of Liberty." But for "the object that describes me," he chose "a wooden African sculpture. I brought it because my dad is African and I am also part-African and I am proud of it." I felt a pang of shame—it was time to take my sons to Africa.

I had done the same with my English wife years ago. I took her to Zimbabwe and, calling in favors, tailored a ne plus ultra safari. At the acme of it, a lion kill, which we observed from what seemed about three feet away, I turned to Joanna to take my bow, only to find she had her nose in an Updike novel.

For this trip to Africa with the boys, Joanna and I didn't want to return to Zimbabwe. Having written extensively about the misrule of Robert Mugabe, I faced an uncertain reception. But, for me, all of southern Africa is especially freighted with personally witnessed history. Whoever I am now, I feel, like Fortinbras in *Hamlet*, that "I have some rights of memory in this kingdom."

THAT NIGHT AFTER THE BOYS' SWIM, WE CAMP ON Xobega Island. The plan is to sleep beneath the stars, sheltered by nothing more than white mosquito nets, under which no one has ever been attacked, or so our guide assures us. The color is important because it reflects the ambient light and, to predators, seems a substantial barrier. The lightning flickering in the distance from the bruised clouds seems to be getting nearer. "We haven't had rain at this time in fifteen years of camping on this island," he says confidently. It pours all night.

We'd started our Africa trip in Mozambique, a week earlier, for sentimental reasons. I grew up on Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique in the misty valleys of the eastern highlands, under the glittering quartzite of the Chimanimani Mountains, where my mother was one of the only doctors. Summers, we would drive over to the Mozambique coast, three hundred miles east, and set up camp on the beach, to be loosely supervised by a tag team of parents.

I remember my mother and father drinking wine from bottles in raffia slings and eating peri-peri crayfish on the veranda of the Oceana restaurant in the port city of Beira. As a special treat they took us to Mrs. Trinidade's zoo, a novelty to us. Over the border in Rhodesia we had only game reserves—zoos were illegal. Mrs. Trinidade had an old lion that liked to lick your ice cream and crocodiles that moved only when she brought them live chickens to eat. *"Fresco, fresco,"* she explained. Fresh. Once, as the guerilla war against Portuguese rule was escalating, we went up the coast on the S.S. *Mozambique*, which had sailed from Lisbon. On the

THE BOYS ARE SOON PLAYING SNOOKER ON A VINTAGE TABLE THE BRITISH ARMY USED TO LUG AROUND– **NOTHING LIKE A SPOT OF BILLIARDS BEFORE THE BATTLE, EH?**

KALAHARI DREAMIN' Guest tents at Jack's Camp have teak floors and are filled with colonial antiques.

FUN FACT: *The poisoned arrows used by the San are featherless and must be shot from very close range. The hunter, the San believe, cannot sleep indoors or drink until he has tracked down the injured animal.*

WE CLIMB ONE OF THE HUGE DUNES AND STAND ON THE SUMMIT.
THE BOYS FALL UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SILENT.
FINALLY, THOMAS DECLARES, "THIS IS THE BEST VIEW I'VE EVER SEEN."
HUGO GRINS. "I FEEL SO ALIVE"

WATER LAND
Mozambique's six-island Bazaruto Archipelago, in the Indian Ocean, has been a marine reserve for more than forty years. There are several small lodges—Godwin and family stay at Azura, on Benguerra Island—and more than 180 species of birds.

FUN FACT: This is one of the few habitats of the endangered manatee-like dugong, which sailors sometimes mistook for mermaids.

GONE FISHING A dhow in the waters around Benguerra Island. At high tide, the channel here turns into a fish funnel. Dolphins dance around at sunset, and then Azura Benguerra will serve you dinner at tables set out in the shallow water.

FUN FACT: *The brightest star you'll see at night is Alpha Centauri; it's the closest to earth, but you can't see it from New York—it's a Southern Hemisphere star.*

NECK AND NECK Although flat Botswana lacks the topographical beauty of a Zimbabwe or South Africa, it has plenty more going for it (in addition to these elongated inhabitants): Its history is more benign, it was only lightly colonized, its indigenous population (mostly pastoralists) is small, the country is democratic, and its people are sitting on the biggest pile of diamonds in the world.

FUN FACT: *The country's Okavango Delta is the end of a remarkable river system that flows inland instead of out to the sea.*

ANCIENT EVENINGS The culture of the aboriginal Zu/'hoasi Bushmen (a.k.a. the San) is among the oldest on earth, and contact with them is sometimes possible at Botswana's Jack's Camp. If you get lucky, you might witness a trance dance, which goes on for hours into the night.

FUN FACT: *San shamans achieve an altered state of consciousness during a trance dance by hyperventilating, which restricts oxygen flow to the brain.*

WE ACCOMPANY AN EXTENDED FAMILY AS THEY FORAGE IN THE VELD. ONE OF THE ELDERS, KGAMXOO TIXHAO, APPLIES CRUSHED WILD SAGE TO OUR FACES WITH A POWDER PUFF MADE OF FUR FROM A BAT-EARED FOX TO BANISH BAD SPIRITS

IT FEELS LIKE YOU ARE AT SEA ON LAND. THE AIR SHIMMERS. YOUR EYE IS DRAWN TO THE DISTANCE, THE HORIZON, THE CLOUDS, AND THIS PULLS YOU BEYOND YOUR USUAL BUBBLE OF SELF-ABSORPTION INTO SOMETHING MUCH LARGER

deck below ours were thousands of Portuguese conscripts, pale young men with blue-black hair and sad brown eyes, terrified of their first landfall in Africa, convinced they'd be eaten by lions. At night, they strummed guitars and sang mournful fado ballads.

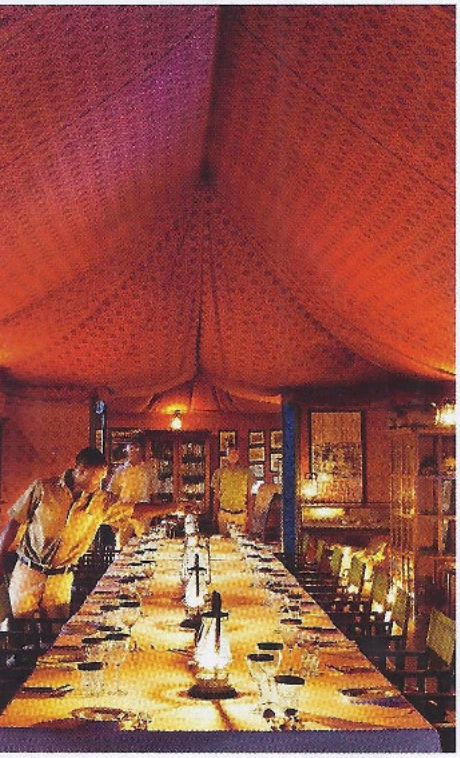
IN 1975, AFTER MORE THAN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS as a colony of Portugal, Mozambique became independent under the avowed Marxist party FRELIMO, and the Portuguese—some 350,000 of them—fled, leaving behind a Lusophone legacy in a country surrounded by officially Anglophone nations.

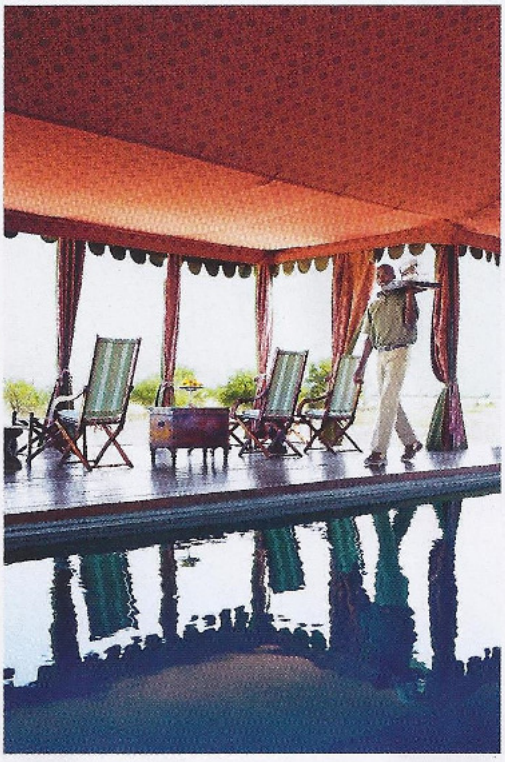
Constant civil war after independence left Mozambique among the world's poorest countries. When I went there to report on the conflict in the mid-1980s, I found that even in the capital, Maputo, at the once swanky Hotel Polana, barefoot waiters served grass soup under dusty chandeliers, and Soviet helicopter gunship pilots lounged around the stagnant green pool in Speedos, drinking vodka shots with bikinied *mestiço* hookers. And when I went back to Mrs. Trinidade's zoo, the lion's cage had become home to Theresa Diaz and her four kids. For privacy, she had braided strips of cardboard through the bars.

Today, Mozambique has been at peace for twenty years and has enjoyed galloping growth, though off a miserably low base.

DINNER AND A DIP
The mess and pool tents at Jack's Camp. You'll get all the comforts except—crucially—air-conditioning: In Africa, you don't want to be sealed off from the environment.

FUN FACT: *The nearby Makgadikgadi Salt Pan becomes a shallow lake in the rainy season, and its wildebeest and zebra migrations are second only to the Serengeti's.*





Our destination in Mozambique, Vilankulo, still can't be reached by a tarred road, but it does have a new "international" airport. Sadly, the power is out for the second time in a week. In the sweltering arrivals hall, a line has formed behind a lone immigration official. In Africa, learning to distinguish between those situations you can alter and those you cannot is a coronary-saving skill. (This is the latter.)

At last, a startlingly young South African chopper pilot—sent by our tour operator—finds us, and soon we're skimming over the dusty town, the palms, the beaches, and then the aquamarine swath of sea, dotted with brightly painted dhows. Ten minutes later, we land on Benguerra Island, the location of one of several small low-impact lodges on the six-island Bazaruto Archipelago, a marine reserve for more than forty years—created principally to protect the dugong, a manatee-like sirenian marine mammal.

It's low tide, and the gently sloping palomino beach lengthens as the sea retreats. To reach the mainland, the island women hitch up their skirts, balance their bundles on their heads, strap their babies to their backs, and wade half a mile out to a waiting dhow. The luffing sails are made of a patchwork of recycled fabric, jute fertilizer bags, denim, hessian flour sacks.

The next day, we take a boat to nearby Bazaruto Island and climb one of the huge dunes. Due east, behind a palisade of churning surf, is the reef and then the expanse of the Indian Ocean. To the west across the short turquoise channel rises the tree-lined mainland. The boys fall uncharacteristically silent. Finally Thomas declares, "This is the best view I've ever seen." Hugo grins. "I feel so alive," he says. And with that they leap off the crest of the massive dune and slide down to the beach below.

Later, I take them fishing in the Mozambique Channel, which the incoming tide turns into a fish funnel. Hugo trawls for bait, his line garlanded with six hooks. He feels a bite. Every single hook has a fish on it. He poses for a trophy photo with four sardines and two tiny red snappers. While we fish, a school of dolphins dance around us until the sun sinks below the mainland.

We dine at a table set out in the shallow sea, and afterward our guide sets up his telescope on the beach. It's a dark moon, so the sky pulses with unrivaled stars, Southern Hemisphere stars. Using a laser pointer, we show the boys how to plot true south from the Southern Cross, and that bright star there, that's Alpha Centauri. It's the closest star to earth, but you can't see it from New York.

WE'D DECIDED AGAINST SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME in South Africa on this first trip—even though it has some of the best-run game lodges on the continent. But to get to Botswana, we must transit Johannesburg, and things immediately veer in an unexpected direction on the drive in from the airport, when Hugo starts spotting . . . luxury cars. He calls them out, a Lamborghini, a Maserati, and what the hell is that? An Alpha . . . Romeo? This is not the Africa he was expecting.

named after a big-game hunter who shot more than 53,000 crocodiles, then repented and took up wildlife conservation. This very spot was his favorite in the world.

FUN FACT: *Why do so many of us "non-indigenous" people have such a strong reaction to southern and eastern Africa in particular? One notion: It's where we evolved as a species; it is our global home; we are all African at heart. (Jack's Camp has a seventy percent return rate.)*

SOON THE BOYS ARE REDUCED TO LITTLE ELONGATED ETRUSCAN FIGURES FAR OFF ON THE HORIZON.

I LIE DOWN ON THIS CALCIFIED LID OF AN ANCIENT SEA, AND TIME SLOWS.

IN ALL DIRECTIONS I CAN SEE TO THE EDGE OF THE EARTH.

I AM ON THE APPROPRIATE PART OF IT

SUNDOWNER Each of Azura Benguerra's sixteen villas has its own pool and comes with a butler. Don't worry—the croc is not real.

FUN FACT: *June through September, you can spot migrating humpback whales.*

My homecoming expedition is fast becoming an episode of *Top Gear*.

We overnight at the luxury Saxon hotel—with hadadas on the lawn, an infinity pool, ponds churning with corpulent koi, Ferraris at the front door. There's an almost nostalgically retro-American attitude to wealth among the newly rich here. They flaunt it unapologetically. In the nineteen years since apartheid was vanquished, the socioeconomic divide has increased. South Africa now has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world.

In the morning, we drive north toward the Magaliesberg Mountains to visit my friend Prospero Bailey, who lives on a small game reserve called The Cradle—because it's next to a World Heritage Site, the Cradle of Humankind, where nearly a third of the evidence of human origins in Africa has been found.

Joanna's attempts to explain the historical iniquities of apartheid, as we pass a shantytown, don't fare too well. "Look what's parked in front of that shack," says Hugo. There, snug in its carport, is a pristine Mercedes S550. Later, on the hilltop reserve, Prospero tells the boys how the nine-year-old son of a paleoanthropologist digging here in 2008 stumbled upon the fossilized collarbone of a two-million-year-old child his own age: *Australopithecus sediba*. "This whole area was once under the sea," Prospero explains; "these scalloped rocks were the ocean floor. Then, two billion years ago, one of the biggest meteors ever to hit the earth struck just over the horizon there—at Vredefort—leaving a crater 180 miles across, and the tide went out and never returned." He toes a blue vein in the rock. "For billions of years after the earth cooled and formed," he says, "there was no oxygen and the sky was red. The only life forms were these, and they just pulsed now and then. But they burped"—Hugo pricks up his ears at this—"something amazing, oxygen, and slowly the sky turned blue, and the world as we know it began to evolve."

Hugo swings his binoculars onto an extraordinary collection of concrete structures nestled against the nearby mountains. It's Pelindaba, a nuclear research center. "Blesbok at three o'clock," I say, trying to wrest him back to the natural world.

"Why are they nodding their heads up and down like that?" Thomas asks.

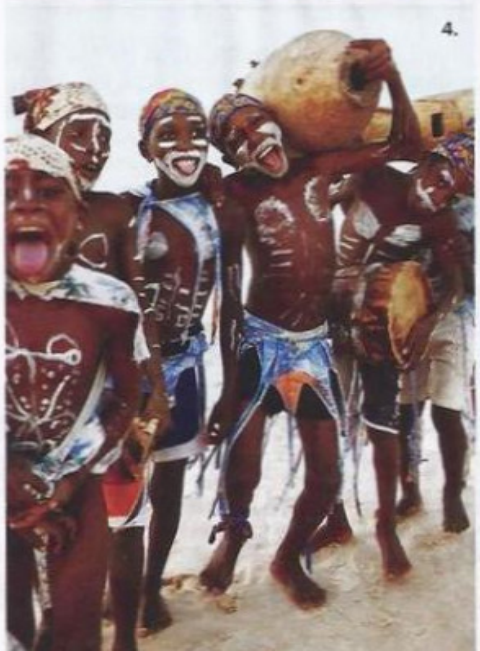
"To get the maggots out of their noses," Prospero says. "And look, there's springbok, and a giraffe. And that muddy patch on the tree? That's where rhino scratch themselves." At least they do for now: A local paper today warns that at current rates, poachers will wipe out the last rhino from South Africa's national parks—once the most secure in Africa—by 2015. The sun sinks behind Pelindaba's cooling towers, and quite suddenly it is dark. "Like someone's turned a switch," says Thomas.

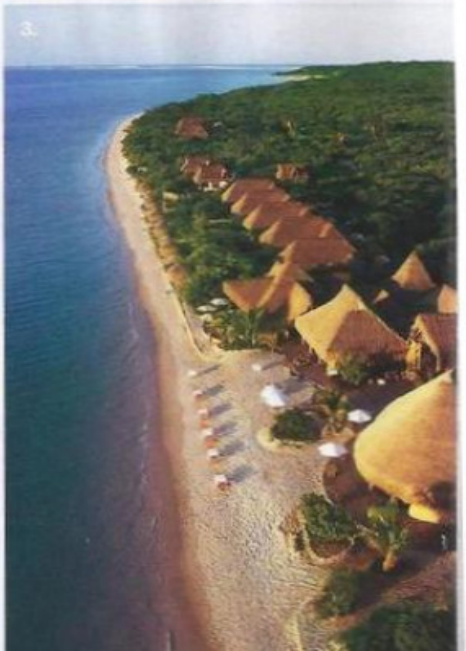
I HAD BEEN TORN ABOUT TAKING THE BOYS TO Victoria Falls. The clatter of sightseeing choppers and the whine of ultralights threaten to drown out the tumult of the falls themselves. But this time of the year, at the end of the rains, it's some tumult, which is why in the end we go. Approaching from the Zambian side, we walk onto the narrow pedestrian Knife Edge Bridge. The spray quickly soaks us. Wreathed by multiple rainbows, the boys whoop in delight, awed at the sheer power of the mighty Zambezi plunging over the black basalt abyss.

It's ironic that Africa's top tourist attraction remains saddled with a quintessentially colonial name, but the local people—the Toka-Leya, MaKololo, BaTonga, Ndebele—call it different things. Queen Victoria never set eyes upon her eponymous falls, although her great-great-great-grandson Prince Charles came here in 1984, a visit I covered as a correspondent. I remember the prince standing on the sky bridge, pondering this magnificent sight. As the press corps waited expectantly, our pens poised over sodden spiral-bound notebooks to record what shaft of poetry might spring from his soul, Prince

MOZAMBIQUE'S NEW DAY
In the 1980s, Benguerra Island was packed with refugees from the country's bloody civil war, which ended in 1992. Things are better now. **1.** Azura Benguarra's beach bed. **2.** Island villagers. **3.** The resort from a chopper. **4.** A local school band tunes up.

FUN FACT: *The country takes its name from Mozambique Island, just off its northern coastline, which itself is thought to be named after a fifteenth-century Arab trader, Musa al Bique.*





Charles turned to the Zambian tourism minister and inquired if many people threw themselves over the edge here.

AT LIVINGSTONE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, A Cessna from Flying Mission Services (FMS) waits on the tarmac to take us to Botswana's Okavango Delta. FMS is nonprofit, and our fare is helping to subsidize the planes' main function as air ambulances, especially for those with AIDS. We take flight, and in a short while—once a bull elephant has been chased off the improbably short bush airstrip—the pilot puts us down at Xaxaba, in the middle of northern Botswana's Moremi Game Reserve, where we will go on our actual safari.

Why Botswana? It's relentlessly flat and hot (less than one percent is arable), and not even its own citizens would claim it has anything like the topographical beauty of Zimbabwe, South Africa, or even Zambia. But it has other charms. For one thing, its history is more benign. The British declared it a protectorate in 1885 at the invitation of local leaders anxious to forestall a Boer advance. It was only lightly settled by whites and has a very small indigenous population (fewer than two million), mostly pastoralists, who happen to be sitting on the biggest pile of diamonds in the world. And it's actually democratic—although the ruling party has never lost power.

It is also a strange time to be coming here—April, just at the end of the rains. Dry season is high season: June through September, when water is scarce, the game gathers for your convenience at water holes. In April, though, there's groundwater everywhere, so the animals are dispersed and the bush is thick, making them hard to see. But the verdant bush is beautiful, and the animals less stressed.

I really didn't want to do a checklist safari, which some are these days—where they guarantee you will see the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo). You learn much more by concentrating on the whole ecology, not just the so-called charismatic megafauna, the wildlife celebs. A qualified guide should open your eyes to the fascinating minutiae of what is going on around you, how the bush actually works. It's not just what you see, it's *how* you see it. As Proust said, the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

That's why I chose a mobile camping safari. The kids are only just old enough for this, and even now they can't be alone in a tent—each one must be with an adult.

Our guide, Ralph Bousfield, is a co-founder of the safari company Uncharted Africa and an old friend. The last time I saw him, we were sharing a hookah in a Moroccan *riad,* celebrating Prospero's fortieth birthday with a weeklong party that rolled through the souks and bars of Marrakech. He's just flown in from an expedition through the Nuba Mountains of southern Sudan.

"Do you have a gun?" Hugo wants to know immediately. He must have one, surely?

No, though Ralph has this: He holds up a little tube. "It's a sort of Very pistol," he says. "It shoots a kind of flare, like a firework."

"That's all?" Hugo grapples with his disappointment.

To get to our mobile camp we have to cross several Okavango waterways. We are the first to attempt the crossing this season, and it looks like we're driving into a lake. "I have a rule," says Ralph. He points to John Barclay, his nephew, whom he's training. "I make John wade across in front. The rule is, if John gets his balls wet, then it's too deep for us.' "

The water rises up John's legs, up and up, to the tops of his thighs, but his khaki crotch doesn't quite dunk, and a rule's a rule, so Ralph puts the Land Cruiser into four-wheel drive and we churn across. Lift your feet, warns Ralph, as water pours in through the doors. And then we're there. We open the doors and water pours out.

We sleep in raised olive tents on real beds at the edge of a hippo-stuffed lagoon. After dark they come out onto the land to graze. The great tuba blasts of their calls go on all night. Elephants rumble and screech, and lions give their strangled roars too—all of it seems very close through nothing but canvas and mosquito net windows. My sons seem unafraid throughout.

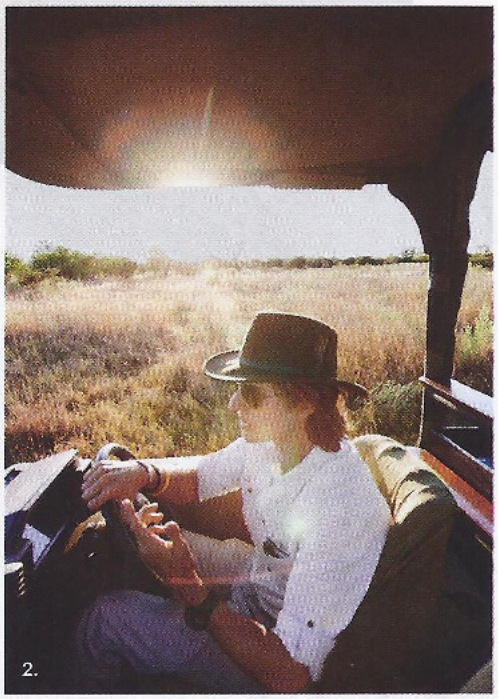
Moremi and the adjoining Chobe National Park have the biggest elephant concentrations in Africa, and these animals are largely unpoached, unculled, and quite unafraid of us, so you can get ridiculously close to them. We explain to the boys that elephants can "hear" through their

(Continued on page 112)

BUSHWHACKING
1. Forging through the water is routine in the Okavango Delta.
2. Guide John Barclay, of Jack's Camp.

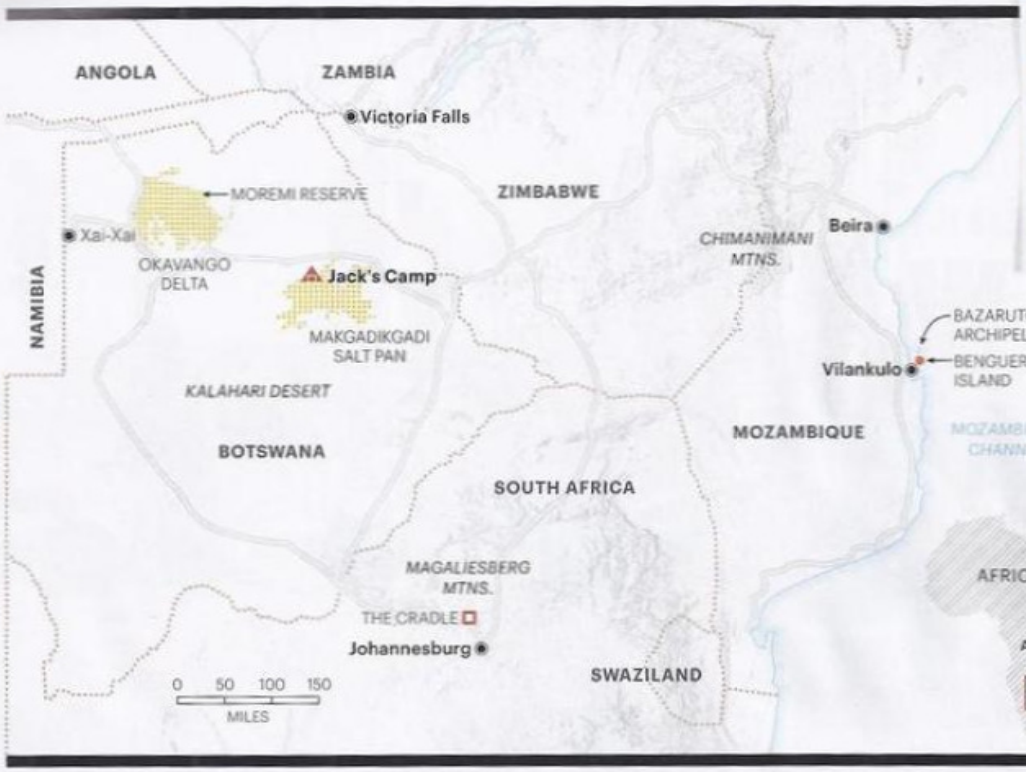
FUN FACT: *Focusing on the small things in Africa is as thrilling as on the megafauna. Take the praying mantis. When the male meets a female, his crotch encourages him to mate, while his brain desperately warns him that he'll end up her post-coital snack. The crotch wins, and he does.*

1.



2.

WITH THE GUIDE'S HELP, THOMAS TRACKS THE LIONS FOR SEVERAL HOURS, UNTIL WE ROUND A CORNER AND THERE THEY ARE—TWO HUGE MALES RESTING UP IN THE OPEN. THE LOOK ON THOMAS'S FACE MAKES THE ENTIRE TRIP WORTHWHILE



Peter Godwin, his wife, Joanna Coles, and their sons, Thomas and Hugo, on Bazaruto Island, in Mozambique's Bazaruto Archipelago.

Beasts of the Southern Wild

Most people go on safari in the dry season (June and July) because the animals are easier to spot. I chose April, just after the rains, because I wanted my family to experience a verdant, lush Africa. We booked our itinerary with **Premier Tours,** of Philadelphia. *Condé Nast Traveler* travel specialist Julian Harrison, the company's president, was born and raised in South Africa and visits the continent regularly; see cntrvlr.com/julian for more information (800-545-1910, ext. 429; 13 days, $13,980, all-inclusive, including round-trip airfare from New York and flights within Africa).

Prices quoted are for June 2013.

MOZAMBIQUE

The coastal town of Vilankulo now has some 12 hotels, including the **Vilanculos Beach Lodge,** with 14 luxury chalets, an infinity pool, and camel rides along the beach (258-2938-2314; doubles from $354). Be sure to check out **Mozambique Horse Safari**'s rides on the beach, which range from 90-minute jaunts suitable for children to ten-day horseback safaris. The outfit is run by Mandy and Pat Retzlaff, ex-Zimbabweans who use horses rescued from there (258-293-842470; 90-minute rides from $50). At **Azura Benguerra,** on nearby Benguerra Island, we stayed in spacious, contemporary *jekka* thatched villas, each with a small pool, a minibar, and its own butler. Snorkeling on the reef and PADI diving are available, as well as big-game fishing (marlin, sailfish, tuna). From June through September, you can spot migrating humpback whales (27-767-050599; villas from $1,600, including meals, drinks, and select activities). Another good option on Benguerra is the **Benguerra Lodge,** the first property to be started by Zimbabweans, in the late 1980s, as Mozambique emerged from civil war. (At the time, the island was packed with refugees from the mainland, who systematically chopped down trees for firewood.) The struggle to refurbish the lodge is legend—all supplies had to be shipped in from Durban (27-11-452-0641; doubles from $940, all-inclusive).

SOUTH AFRICA

In Johannesburg, the **Saxon** (the city's highest scorer in the 2012 Readers' Choice Awards) is on ten acres of landscaped gardens in the plush Sandton neighborhood. The rooms are like galleries, stuffed with top-quality African art. The corridor off the cliff-high lobby is lined with sketches of famous sojourners—Oprah, Bill Clinton, and hometown champ Nelson Mandela, after whom the Platinum Suite is named. Our boys proclaimed it the most high-end hotel they'd ever seen (27-11-292-6000; doubles from $600). The **Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa,** also in a garden setting in Sandton, has big rooms, working fireplaces, a gym, and a spa (27-11-804-2540; doubles from $480). **The Michelangelo** ranks high in the Readers' Choice Awards as well (27-11-282-7000; doubles from $400). For a farm-to-table meal and great views of a water hole, the rolling highveld, and the Magaliesberg Mountains, take the short drive from Johannesburg to **The Cradle** for the venison carpaccio with truffled celery and the crème brûlée with *amarula* liqueur, made from the fruit of the marula tree (Kromdraai Rd., Lanseria; 27-11659-1622; entrées from $7). Nearby, the child-friendly **Other Side,** at Monaghan Farm, serves a buffet-style spit *braai* (a local barbecue) of lamb and spatchcock chicken at alfresco tables on lawns sloping down to the Jukskei River (Ashanti Rd., Lanseria; 87-630-0742; entrées from $7).

ZAMBIA

For a de rigueur visit to Victoria Falls, the **Royal Livingstone,** on the banks of the Zambezi, has great falls and sunset views (27-11-780-7810; doubles from $740).

BOTSWANA

For the safari itself, I chose a mobile camping safari through **Uncharted Africa,** the better to immerse ourselves in the bush (27-11-447-1605; safaris from $1,500 per person all-inclusive, with a five-night, four-person minimum). To stay put, or for a break in your mobile safari, you can't do better than **Jack's Camp,** operated by Uncharted Africa. It has only ten tents, situated far enough from one another to ensure privacy, and each has flush toilets, hot and cold running water, and indoor and outdoor showers. There's also a pool and a small museum, but the real resource is the staff. Besides game viewing, you can go on walking safaris with San trackers and sit with habituated meerkats. And at certain times of the year (May through September), you can even go on quad-biking excursions in the salt pan (tents from $1,400 per person, all-inclusive, based on double occupancy). –P. G.

FOR MORE IMAGES FROM THE GODWIN FAMILY'S AFRICAN SAFARI, GO TO **CONDENAST TRAVELER.COM.**

MAP BY JOYCE PENDOLA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 94

feet, that they can listen to other elephants miles away through infrasound, and that their ears act like giant engine radiators, cooling their blood. And we teach them how those ears will also indicate the difference between a mock and a real charge. That adolescent coming toward us, for example—that's a mock charge because he's sticking his ears out to make himself look bigger. If it were for real, his ears would be pinned back against his head to be more aerodynamic, so he could charge faster. Has anyone been charged for real here, asks Thomas. Ralph admits that quite recently an elephant charged a pair of Japanese visitors and flipped their vehicle, killing one of them. It turned out that the elephant had a massive abscess under its tusk and was being driven mad by the pain.

Ralph has given the boys two books, one on tracking and the other, which Hugo seizes, is *Scatalogue*, by Kevin Murray, on the fine art of animal-poop identification. *Scatalogue* is a treasure trove of intestinal information: A hyena's stomach, for example, is essentially a vat of hydrochloric acid—it digests everything but hair—and a moth has evolved that feeds exclusively on the keratin in the hair in hyena poop.

In the morning, Ralph shows Thomas large paw prints pressed into the white sandy track. "What are they?" he challenges. Thomas does as he has just been taught: fixed or retractable claws? Fixed. "Lion?" he asks tentatively. Ralph nods. Luckily, lions are quite lazy and with Ralph's help, Thomas diligently tracks these two for several hours, until we round a corner and there they are—two huge males resting up in the open. The look on Thomas's face makes the entire trip worthwhile.

WE CONCENTRATE just as much on the small things as the big. After all, there's far more insect biomass per acre of the reserve than vertebrate biomass. And there's much here to fascinate the boys, cool evolutionary tactics like Batesian mimicry—where a vulnerable animal, usually an insect, mimics a harmful one to fool predators. And the golden orb spider, which has six different kinds of web construction, for different conditions and varies the amount of glue on the web: less during the day, since too much reflects the sun and warns off prey, and more at night, to make it more stickily effective.

On a branch of a sapling is a praying mantis, rocking gently like an observant Jew at the Wailing Wall. Meet *Mantis religiosa*. The male of the species has two brains—one in its head and one in its crotch. When he encounters a female, the brain in his crotch encourages him to mate with her. But the brain in his head is desperately warning him that he will become her post-coital snack. The crotch brain wins. Hugo notices a bird writhing on the ground near us with a broken wing. But he needn't worry—in the bush, little is as it first appears. It's a female plover, and she's only pretending to be wounded to distract us from her nearby chicks.

After four days in the north of Moremi, we break camp and drive south into the heart of the the world's biggest inland delta—the end of the extraordinary Okavango river system that flows backward into the interior instead of out into the sea. We board the *Lily*, and soon we're slaloming through the papyrus-fringed chicanes of the delta's waterways.

SO FAR I've restrained the boys from interrogating Ralph about the great swatches of scar on his legs, arms, and face. But over breakfast one morning he says he will tell them. How he earned these scars is what led to him to establish the place we're next headed, Jack's Camp, named after his father.

If you own vintage crocodile-skin—anything by Hermès or Asprey or Louis Vuitton—you're likely wearing Jack's handiwork. He's still in the Guinness Book of Records for shooting 53,000 crocodiles—most of them at Lake Rukwa in southern Tanzania. Like many prolific big-game hunters, he repented in the end. He came south to Botswana and started ostrich farming and safari guiding. He'd had a life filled with near misses, including seven light plane crashes. Ralph was at the controls for the eighth—when the throttle cable snapped just after takeoff. He got out, but Jack was trapped in the burning wreck of the flipped plane, so Ralph went back in. He managed to pull Jack free but in the process was terribly burned himself.

Jack died the next day. Ralph spent two months in the hospital having hundreds of skin grafts. He was the only white patient in the burns unit of the main hospital in Soweto, then embroiled in daily anti-apartheid battles, so the doctors there were expert at treating "necklace" burns.

When he was finally discharged, Ralph discovered a complete set of state-of-the-art safari equipment, circa 1959, while sorting through his father's belongings. With that and the insurance money, he set up a tented lodge on his father's favorite spot in the world, here on the northern edge of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pan, in the middle of the Kalahari Desert, which makes up seventy percent of Botswana. And he called it Jack's Camp.

Until ten thousand years ago, the Makgadikgadi was a vast lake—the size of Switzerland. When you are in it, you are overcome with a profound sense of tranquillity. It is as much about the absence of things as about what is present, which is very little. It feels like you are at sea on land. The air shimmers and the white salt-

Word Trips

By Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

MOUNTAIN SCRAMBLE

Scramble the mountainous words in Column 1 and enter their anagrams in the grid, one each in a row to be discovered. As an aid in scrambling, definitions of the 11 new words are given in Column 2 in random order. When you've filled the grid, climb the path of circles to see where you're doing the scrambling—the solution to this month's puzzle.

COLUMN 1
SIERRA
PITONS
DENALI
SHERPA
HEIGHT
ASCENT
CRATER
SERACS
BASALT
ROUTES
RUGGED

	U	○			R
		A	○	C	
	I			○	N
		R	○	E	
	H		A		○
○	A			A	
		U	○		E
○	A		L		
	○	R		S	
	A		S		○
	I	○	H		

COLUMN 2
Removal from power
Fraction
Hit with a hammer
U.S. president
Gentle pat or touch
Indian drums
Grievance
Batting position
Sentence part
Kind of rod or ring
Lifter

APRIL'S PUZZLE ANSWER: See page 114.
For the 2012 grand-prize winner, see page 26.

Enter online for a chance to win a spa weekend for two!

Enter your answer online at condenasttraveler.com/wordtrips/june. No purchase necessary. Full rules and entry form available online at this address. All correct answers will be included in a drawing for the annual prize: a spa resort weekend for two (approximate retail value, $2,500). Entries must be received by 11:59 P.M. E.T. on June 30, 2013, when the contest ends. Contest open to legal residents of the United States and Canada (excluding Quebec) age 18 and older. Odds of winning depend on the number of correct entries received. Answer will be published in the August issue. Sponsored by *Condé Nast Traveler*, 4 Times Square, New York, New York 10036.

ed crust of the pan reflects the light. Your eye is drawn to the distance, the horizon, the clouds, and this pulls you beyond your usual bubble of self-absorption out into something much larger.

The tented camp (one of four now) is African Raj in style, built with teak floors and stuffed with colonial antiques. Crucially, there's no air-conditioning (there are standard fans) so you're never sealed off from the environment. The boys are soon playing snooker on a vintage table that the British army used to lug around—nothing like a spot of billiards before battle, eh?

In the rainy season, Makgadikgadi becomes a shallow lake and the destination for a wildebeest and zebra migration second only to the Serengeti's. And with the ungulates come the predators—the boys see their first cheetah, sitting on a termite mound, scanning the horizon for snacks. Meerkats, too, will seek out a high point to keep watch; in fact they climb up the boys and perch on their heads for a better view.

But there is another presence at Jack's, one that adds a whole new dimension—the San. Ralph works with a small, rotating group of aboriginal Zu/'hoasi Bushmen who come from Xai Xai, near the Namibian border. These are some of the last traditional-living San in Africa. I have worked extensively with them on assignment, and I know that contact with these San will be a unique experience for the boys.

One morning, we accompany an extended family as they forage in the veld. One of the elders, Kgamxoo Tixhao, applies crushed wild sage to our faces with a powder puff made of fur from a bat-eared fox to banish bad spirits from entering the *nyore*, their village. Xixae, his son, shows the boys how to make fire by rubbing two sticks together. Scientists believe that humans near here were the first to use fire, a million years ago. The long stick is the man, says Xixae, the short one is the woman. And the fire, he says with a grin, is their baby. He takes advantage of the flame to light his pipe, a brass .50 caliber shell plugged with tobacco, which he passes around the San family.

The women are digging around an unremarkable shrub, but as in so much of the Kalahari, the real action is underground—a moisture-filled tuber the size of a watermelon. They score it, drink from it, then rub an earth poultice into the cut and rebury it. "So we can drink from it next time," says Kgamxoo. They show the boys how to construct a bird trap with a lasso of twine attached to a sapling that springs up over the bird's neck. And the fine art of scorpion handling—you grab it by the stinger.

What most interests the boys is the poison arrow—I have a trio of them framed behind glass back in New York. They are tipped with neurotoxic poison from the larvae of diamphidia beetle. The arrow is unflighted, so must be shot from very close range. Then the hunter must track the injured animal, explains Kgamxoo. Until you find it, you cannot sleep indoors or drink, as this will dilute the poison.

That night we return to the *nyore* to watch the trance dance. In good times, the San at Jack's will dance two or three times a week, in bad times less often, says Ralph. It's not done to order for visitors. The women sit by the fire, clapping and singing while the men dance in a circle around them. This is one of the oldest cultures on earth, and unlike more modern tongues, San languages have few borrowed words—most clans find each other unintelligible. Yet they sing the same songs! The sounds are pre-linguistic.

Through the night the pace picks up as energy builds in the dancers' stomachs, rises up their spines, and explodes into an altered state of consciousness. Physiologically, Ralph explains, the shamans hyperventilate, which deprives the brain of oxygen (by expelling carbon dioxide and constricting the blood vessels), making them light-headed. In that state they are able to conduct energy healing, and you can feel an incredible heat coming from them. Ralph turns to the boys. "Very few Western people have seen this," he says. When one of the San, an extraordinary-looking Keith Richards doppelgänger named Cobra Keipeile, beckons Thomas, my son is too shy at first, but then he gets up and dances around the flames for hours.

In the morning, we see a new species of animal in the conservancy—cattle—wandering in to drink at a water hole. "They shouldn't be here," Ralph says with a sigh, and the boys are dragooned to help

Word Trips

FOR THIS MONTH'S CONTEST, SEE PAGE 112.

"Square Deal" (April 2013)

PUZZLE ANSWER: THE DIAGONAL SPELLS **ALAMO.**

			B		T	A		
		R	R	U	R	M		
T	R	A	I	N	A	B	L	E
R	E	P	L	E	N	I	S	H
O	U	T	L	A	S	T	E	D
S	Q	U	I	R	M	I	N	G
G	Y	R	A	T	I	O	N	
		E	N	H	T	U		
			T			S		

chase them out. Historically, the game reserve is an artificial, Victorian construct. In the pre-colonial days, man and animal mixed in the same landscape. Africa's human populations have exploded since then and upset the natural balance, and now there is a general acceptance that wildlife be separated from man, although in fact most charismatic megafauna in Africa still live outside designated game reserves. One of the hardest-learned lessons of the last fifty years is that wildlife protection never works unless the people living around a park feel some sense of ownership of it. All the armed anti-poaching units in the world won't protect an endangered species if the host human population around a reserve feels envious or hostile to it. Most wildlife lodges now have community components, ranging from real resource sharing to mere cosmetic add-ons. And many black Africans are now involved in conservation.

It certainly may be true that we pathologically romanticize Africa. I have a theory about this—about the strength of the reaction that so many people have to southern and eastern Africa in particular, and why so many return time and again (Jack's Camp has a seventy percent return rate). My theory is that at some deep, antediluvian level, we recognize it as our global home, the crucible of our origins. This is where we evolved. There's something about the quality of the light, the vegetation, and the wildlife itself that strikes an ancient, pre-racial, homogenetic chord. That we are all African at heart.

ON OUR LAST DAY, just before sunset, we drive into the middle of the salt pan and park. "Everyone go in a different direction," says Ralph, "until you can't see anyone else." "You trying to ditch us?" Thomas asks, but he jogs away. We all do. Soon the boys are reduced to little elongated Etruscan figures far off on the horizon, silhouetted against the setting sun. Then they disappear, alone in the vastness of the desert. I lie down on this calcified lid of an ancient sea, and time slows. In all directions I can see to the edge of the earth. I am on the appropriate part of it.

There are three separate storms in the far distance. In the last of the sun's rays, the tops of the towering cumulonimbuses shimmer golden even as tiny fingers of lightning flicker from their bellies. The only sound is the warm breeze ruffling my clothes and hair. As the sun dips below the desert rim, the moon and its equerry, Venus, are already bright. Far off a jackal yips. A black korhaan flaps overhead. Then a brown specter appears, trotting purposely across the empty landscape. It is a hyena. □

Cuba

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 111

stop along Revolutionary Road before we make our way to Cienfuegos, through the lush landscape of a country where a big papaya can cost more than a day's wages. Where the state makes it easier, I hear, to get a sex-change operation than a tonsillectomy. And where teaching, as Mili did before she followed the money into tourism, went from being a reasonably well-paid profession, when Cuba was a client of Russia, to the unsustainable province of mostly amateurs.

"How can a street sweeper make as much as a lawyer?" We pester Mili with our idiotic questions, although there are things she'd be foolhardy to say out loud; she grew up, like every schoolchild in Cuba, reciting, "We will be like Che."

Just outside Santa Clara, site of the battle that put Batista on the ropes, the Che Memorial is a complex of several buildings, including a museum where pilgrims can pore over personal memorabilia—the pistol, the journals, the beret of course—and buy picture postcards. "Check this out," I say to Verna, who has a serious crush on Che. "Here's one you don't have yet."

"No!" she huffs. "I want him smiling."

Alberto Korda, whose accidental snapshot of Che is said to be the most reproduced image in the history of photography—so often that it might as well be a logo—was a fashion photographer until he fell in love with a revolution "more beautiful than a woman." And there is something vaguely erotic about this fetish-laden shrine to the world's sexiest revolutionary—even in the chaste and dimly lit mausoleum, where Che's remains are interred with those of twenty-nine other guerrillas, including Tania, the woman who was rumored to have been his lover and whose name Patty Hearst took when she joined the Symbionese Liberation Army. *Are sex and revolution always conflated?* I wonder as I walk back outside, where Susie is doing yoga in a small patch of grass near our bus. Not when you think of Gandhi or Rosa Luxemburg.

I'm hungry and it's too hot to think. All I know is that under the soaring royal palms and unmistakable Cuban blue sky, gazing up at the bold geometry of Che's memorial and knowing that half a million citizens of Santa Clara volunteered thousands of hours of labor to build it—why, if standing inside Chartres could make you believe in religion, or standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial could make you believe in democracy, then this could make you believe in the revolution.

THERE'S A JOKE in Cuba that the three greatest successes of the revolution are health, education, and sports; and the three greatest failures are breakfast, lunch, and dinner. To that I would add the three great unintentional consequences: thousands of square miles of unspoiled and biologically diverse wilderness; countless architectural treasures, seven of which are designated (and funded) as UNESCO World Heritage Sites; and a vibrant visual arts culture that can take advantage of both the Cuban educational system and a kink in the embargo which has opened it to buyers in the American art market.

Cienfuegos provides access to all three. About a third of the way down this crocodile-shaped island, on the Caribbean coast, it's just thirty miles from the Zapata Swamp, the largest protected wetland in the Caribbean. But we're in Cuba to commune with people, not plants, and must, alas, make do with a brief guided tour of the nearby Botanical Gardens, two hundred-odd acres of exotic flora, including hundreds of varieties of palms, dozens of flashy orchids, and thick vines that inspire Steve to grab hold and make like Tarzan. Here we stroll in the shade of giant trees, swatting at mosquitoes and smelling strange flowers, like one that reeks of dirty laundry. Then a quick bathroom break before hitting the road again.

"Do you have some change for the attendant?" I ask Verna.

"Of course," Verna says. "But she probably makes more than a doctor."

WHEN WE PULL into Cienfuegos, it's clear why the city is called the Pearl of the South. The historic center is a perfect example of French neoclassical architecture, all beautifully restored, with a pristine town square where freshly painted green chairs line up at attention. The outskirts feel like a sleepy seaside town. Horse-drawn carriages clatter down dusty streets, and men carry huge strings of garlic slung over their shoulders like bandoliers; at dusk the setting sun turns pale-blue buildings purple and casts a burnt-orange glow over the young boys fishing for their dinner from the pier. Cienfuegos has the vaguely raffish charm of an artists' colony—like Key West in the early '60s—and is, in fact, home to a close-knit community of local artists whose studios we will visit on our art crawl. But first, a people-to-people "discussion" with members of the local branch of UNEAC, the National Writers and Artists Union, after which we are presented with our portraits—savagely hilarious caricatures that have been sketched by a couple of strolling artists who now expect to be paid. *Thank you, cretins, for making socialism possible.*

By the time we leave Cienfuegos later