

In June 2018, Dr. Faiola's daughter Anne Marie (the amazingly successful owner and CEO of Brambleberry.com) took him as her guest to Tanzania, AFRICA! The following is a description from his daughter of ONE day of their trip:

It's hard to describe how amazing the day with the lion was but I'll do my best.

It started bright and early at 4 a.m. because our fellow safari-goers, Carolyn and Howard, were going ballooning over the plains. Lucky them! Dad and I decided not to do that though so we had a slightly later start. Unluckily for me, Carolyn and Howard's tent was next to mine and though I am certain they tried to be quiet, they woke me up so it took me an hour to get back to sleep. Once I did, I slept until 7 though and that was so decadent.

Dad and I started out slowly and leisurely with our driver and guide. We were the first car out of the tented campsite (calling it a campsite is to demean it but it wasn't really glamming either ... somewhere in between). We stayed in the actual Serengeti, in the park. They build the entire camp up every year, in a different location to lessen its environmental impact, and it holds exactly 15 people. There are 21 staff members from many different tribes. I asked them each what tribe they were from and I never got the same answer twice.

The problem with being the first out of the camp is that the tsetse flies have yet to be disturbed so they come out, in droves. DROVES. Their bite is horrifically painful and they seem immune to bug spray. The guide and driver were spraying it indiscriminately and it was doing nothing but choking me and Dad out. And then it happened:

A perfect shot.

Of what? A bird. And then another bird. And another one. And slowly, the cruiser started to fill with aggressive, biting, African tsetse flies. Dad, oblivious, and a bit irritating to me, kept on taking photos of birds as I grew increasingly anxious over the flies, but quick and decisive in my fly swatting technique. Thank goodness I decided that this was a good place to read Mindful magazine ("healthy mind, healthy life") because it proved to be an excellent fly swatting implement. So as I mindfully swatted at flies, Dad got all the bird photos for Mom (which is her love language and so it was fine with me because making Mom happy is also one of my goals).

Immediately after we were finally out of tsetse fly territory, we came across an incredible sight: a giant herd of female impala and circling males who wanted to fight for dominance of the group. We watched as the males all tried to break females off from the group and then the main male would try to herd them back. But, if the other males got females separated in opposite ends of the pack, the main male would stray far too far and allow an interloper male to get into the pack, undefended. We stayed there a long time (30 minutes?) watching this intricate game of strategy and marveled at it all. The alpha male usually only last about 6 mos. He is so busy defending his harem that he hardly eats. He finally yields to a younger, well nourished male, "here have them, their yours."

Then it was a mud bath of hippos. They were uneventful except when they fought just a touch but underwhelming in their slowness and general "Hey those look like mud covered rocks!"-ness. That said, I could have sat there all day with some food, and a cold beverage, and in a lawn chair, waiting for them to move and I would have been perfectly happy. Just being in their presence in freaking Africa, even if they didn't *do* anything is so big and wow and amazing.

Then the leopard.... I mean really, Africa, could you quit underwhelming us?! Our eagle eye guide, Filbert, spotted it in the tree. Dad couldn't get his big lens camera out of its protective case fast enough so my little Cannon took the only photos we got of the leopard in the tree and then climbing down to hide in the grass. I can see I got the photos and that makes me happy because it makes Dad happy. And envious. (There were others, later).

We picked Howard and Carolyn up. They enjoyed their balloon ride though I think Dad and I won the 'awesome morning' award for sure.

From there, the day got more nuts with how amazing it was. The cheetah Filbert spotted across the plains and the headlong rush over the plains to photograph and experience the animal. The HUGE herd of zebra mixing with the wildebeest and the antelope things. Another lion family. Zebras bathing(!!!!!) Ostriches. So many ostriches.

But the highlight of the day was the tree lion that happened solely by accident. We went to go have lunch in the shade and as we drove around the tree, noticed a lion, just sitting there in the tree. She wasn't sleeping; she was awake and alert and lazy. We were positively gob smacked. It was US and the lion. No other safari vehicle around. Just us. (That's the benefit of staying overnight in the actual Serengeti; you get way further into the park than a normal day trip safari). So we all took like 59376 photos and videos; I took my requisite "Here I am with a big animal!" selfie and then, we all looked at each other and shrugged. I mean, the coolest thing ever was in front of us but we had all the photos we possibly could need and, we still needed to eat lunch. And so we did. We ate lunch with the lion in the shade of the tree. The lion perked up when Carolyn opened her chicken. She seemed not to care one whit for me and Dad's vegetarian lunches but her chicken? She smelled it and perked right up. And so we sat, silently eating our lunches, in the shade of the tree, in awe of the moment and in complete stillness as we contemplated the vast savannah all around us and the giant, magnificent creature in front of us.

I didn't think the day with the elephants could be topped. And then I didn't think the day with the Masai could be topped. And then, just like that, nature's majesty shows that you can never take anything for granted, that there is always more and that beauty is everywhere, even at the lowly place you were going to take your lunch.

Love you all oodles.