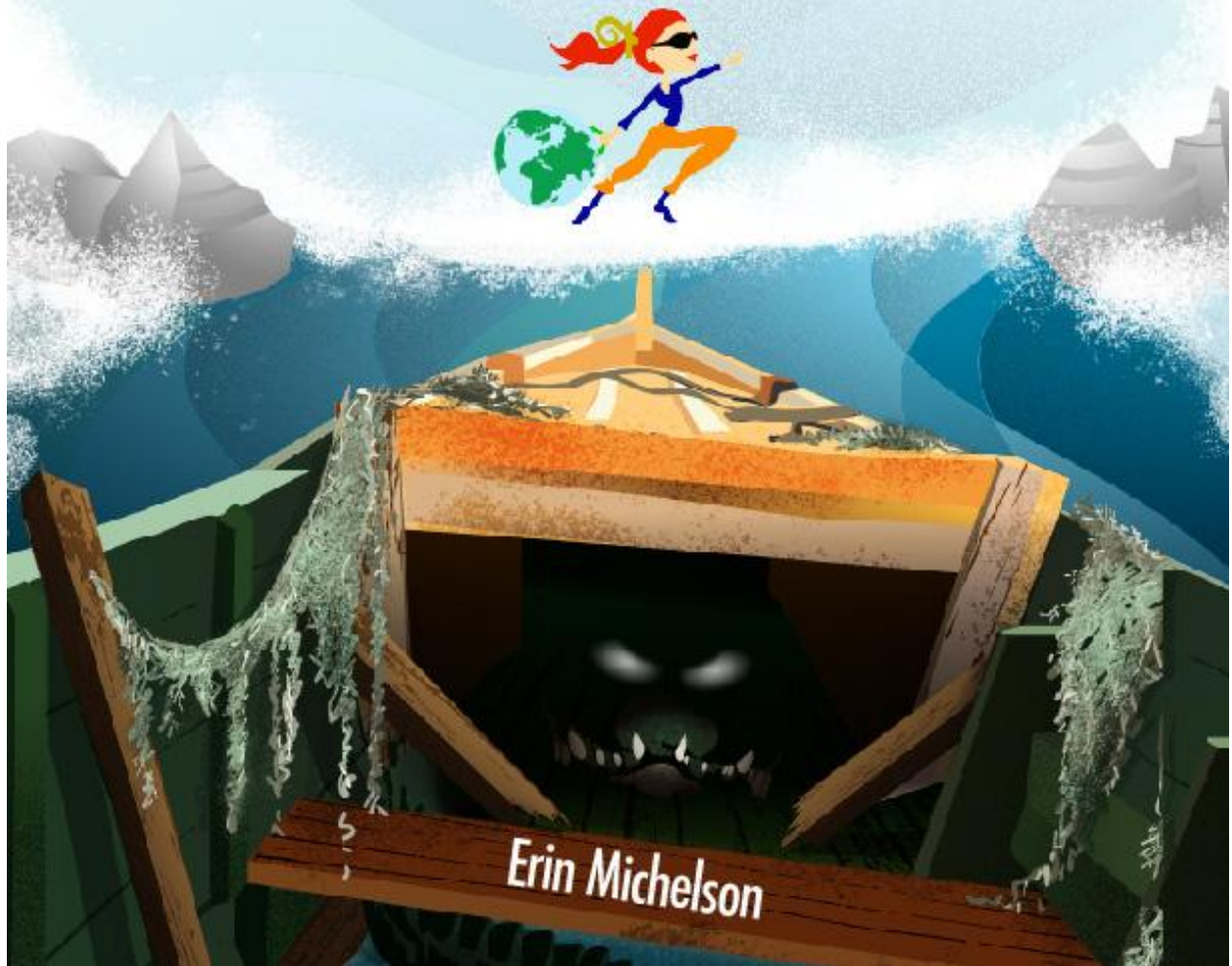


ADVENTURE PHILANTHROPIST

MORE FEAR



Adventure Philanthropist:

More Fear

Erin Michelson

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Introduction

When I wrote *Adventure Philanthropist: Great Adventures Volunteering Abroad*, I decided to tell my story through the emotions I felt during my 2-year, 7-continent, 62-country solo journey. During this epic trek, I experienced one emotion more than any other: fear.

My fear ran the spectrum from agitation to angst, from trepidation to terror—even into downright panic at times. The frightening situations that sparked my fear were usually a result of my steady nonchalance regarding my own physical safety and Pollyanna attitude toward my travels—an approach that tended to land me in dire situations. Repeatedly.

In my book, I touched on several terrifying stories surrounding my encounters with paramilitary rebels and a crazy man with a machete, bus station muggings and political riots. And that was just scraping the surface.

Untold fears involving shark-infested waters, perilous perches, an inescapable maze, and a close look at my own mortality—these are the stories that had yet to be told. Stories that, even a year after I've returned, still make me sweat. It's my hope that, in exorcising these fears on the page, I can both continue to face them with courage and candidness and offer up an empathetic hand to those who have had similar experiences in their travels.

A Smorgasbord of Fear

A quick calculation of all the phobias listed on Wikipedia tells me there are at least 120 different types of fear. Some fears make instant sense to us, like the fear of spiders or the fear of rejection. Some fears don't make any sense at all, such as the fear of the color yellow (xanthophobia) and the fear of buttons (koumpounophobia). Some are understandable yet still hard to explain, like a fear of clowns.

During my travels, I faced four big fears—fears I didn't know I had until I was within their grip. Like the fear of mutilation—I think we can all agree that's a solid, reasonable fear. Or the fear of losing control. Or how about the good 'ole fear of abandonment? And the big whopper—the fear of dying. I experienced each of these large, weighty fears during my trip. And, as it turns out, I had every reason to be afraid.

Fear of Mutilation – Sinai Peninsula, Egypt

It was in 2011, the first year of my two-year adventure, and I was in Cairo. I was getting a bit skittish about the unpredictability of life in the city post-Arab Spring, so I thought I'd take myself on a little sojourn to escape the craziness of it all.

I decided to head into the Sinai desert, which seemed like a reasonable decision at the time. I mean, the Sinai has a general lawlessness about it, but its Wild West reputation hadn't been made any worse by the Egyptian revolution. Or so I thought.

So I booked a bus ride from Cairo that took me under the Suez Canal and along the western edge of the Sinai Peninsula, an 8-hour journey that cost me less than US\$10. I was heading to Sharm el-Sheikh, the largest town on the peninsula, known as the gateway for diving the Red Sea. I had been to the Sinai before, visiting Saint Catherine's (to spy the biblical burning

bush), climbing Mount Sinai, and hitting the small dive town of Nuweiba. I was not a Sinai virgin. I felt I could handle my own.

I took several precautions before leaving Cairo, like making sure I booked a bus that traveled during daylight hours. But instead of grabbing a seat on a tourist bus, I chose a local one, which is my preferred mode of travel—schlepping around like any other Egyptian out for a week-long holiday. I was dropped off at the Cairo station by a friend, and had a rather long and uneventful ride through the desert.

Once I arrived in Sharm (as all intrepid travelers call it), I was barraged by taxi drivers competing for my fare. This ear-splitting haggling is standard treatment upon arriving in a bus depot, and I was fresh meat.

Over the years, I've found that the quickest way to get out of this unpleasant tug-of-war for my fare is to choose a cabbie straight off and put an end to all the bartering up front. I also try to pick an older gentleman—someone that I think I might be able to overpower or at least outrun in a pickle. True to form, the day I arrived in Sharm, I picked an older Bedouin standing on the fringe. He was to drive me to my destination: a resort called Shark's Bay Umbi Village, the only Bedouin-owned dive resort in Sharm, located on the far edge of town.

With a curt nod, my driver carried my bag to his white, sand-beaten pick-up truck and threw it in the back. Perhaps I should have grabbed my stuff and turned back around when I noticed that his truck wasn't sporting a taxi insignia and that we had to walk beyond the bus station gates to where it was parked, but I pushed these warning bells to the back of my mind and hopped in the cab. Off we went, windows rolled down, communicating with sign language and lots of smiles. I was actually enjoying my ride with him until it started taking a little longer than I thought it should and the sun started to descend in the sky.

A good 30 minutes into the drive, it began to fully dawn on me that he truly wasn't a taxi driver, but a lone Bedouin looking to make an extra buck by picking up passengers at the bus station. I was essentially hitchhiking. This was a sobering realization as we sped deeper into the desert and toward dusk.

Once I put 2+2 together, I started to get a little nervous. I firmly rooted my hand to the door handle. I began to pick out landmarks in case I should have to make a run for it. I formulated an escape plan where I would sprint into the desert, use my hardened survival skills (hah!) to remain alive in the desert heat, elude the Bedouin gangs, and navigate my way to safety in a completely foreign, unmarked land. My smile was seriously starting to fade.

Luckily, just as I was getting ready to launch myself out the passenger-side window, my chauffeur and I arrived at Umbi Village. I had arrived safely and he made a little extra cash on the side. No harm, no foul in my book, and only a few stomach somersaults along the way.

I had chosen to stay at Umbi Village for two reasons. First, ever loyal to sustainable tourism, I wanted to support a Bedouin-owned lodge, turning my nose up at the boring and predictable Ritz Carlton, Radisson, and Marriott in favor of a more authentic experience. Second, it was cheap. Shark's Bay Umbi Village was offering an amazing scuba diving package—a deal almost too good to be true. I couldn't resist. Although perhaps I should have.

Apparently there had recently been a slew of shark attacks in Shark's Bay. Imagine that—shark attacks in a place called Shark's Bay! In the last six months, there had been five shark attacks with three fatalities in those very waters. Two of the attacks were by Hammerheads, and three by Oceanic White Tips. Oceanics in particular are very serious sharks.

The attacks were blamed on Russian tourists chumming the water—adding blood before diving to increase the chance of attracting the local big boys. In diving circles this is considered

an abhorrent practice and insanely dangerous. You never want to provoke a feeding frenzy with large sharks while swimming amongst them.

Predictably, business was a little slow for the Umby, so they were offering cut rates for clueless divers like me who were excited to see big fish. And I bit—hook, line, and sinker.

So, yeah, I got a hell of a bargain. And in truth I saw a lot of amazing sea life for the price: blue spotted rays, sea turtles, alligator fish, and moray eels. I marveled at all the brightly colored, healthy corals. It was fantastic diving!

I was also treated to one of the most beautiful sights I had even seen underwater—a tornado of hundreds if not thousands of barracuda, swimming in a rapid tubular formation. I floated alongside it for a long while, marveling at the flashing silver spiral, barely resisting its magnetic pull. I even ended up seeing a Hammerhead. It was in fairly shallow water, but a ways off in the distance. You could definitely see the shark's distinctive head as it slowly glided by, checking out the scene.

It wasn't the sharks with dorsal fins that I should have been worried about, but a shark with two legs—truly a deadly creature. My Dive Master. A newish diver at the time (under 30 dives), I usually stuck pretty close to the Dive Master and actually appreciated a little extra attention while gearing up and while underwater.

But what I first took to be my Dive Master's keen regard for my safety quickly morphed into an unpleasant situation. His attentions turned amorous, with constant handholding and stroking beneath the deep-blue sea.

Now, rebuffing male advances on land is one thing. It's a bit trickier 65 ft. underwater, especially when the one doling out the affections is your secondary source of air. In a pinch, it was his air supply that would save my life. After repeatedly pulling my hand away, he finally got

the message, but not until after my dive buddy Alison got some pretty great photos of me with my arm fully extended, trying to swim in the opposite direction. As a new diver, it was my moment of truth—sink or swim!

What was intended as a week-long rest turned into an exercise in keeping myself in one piece. First was my ill-considered Bedouin buddy ride. Second was subjecting myself to sharks with a taste for blood and a Dive Master with a taste for small blonde women. Luckily, I emerged intact.

Fear of Losing Control – Victoria Falls, Zambia

As it turned out, my love of all things agua continued to get me into deep water, and I found myself in another precarious situation while visiting the world-famous Victoria Falls in Zambia. I was visiting Vic Falls as part of a three-week overland truck expedition through Southern Africa. Starting in Cape Town, we traveled through the Orange River Valley into Namibia, through the heart-stoppingly beautiful Namib Desert and the dunes christened Deadvlei (“dead marsh”) by early German settlers.

We then hugged the infamous Skeleton Coast, heading into Botswana for a wildlife expedition in Etosha National Park and a stupendous canoe-style safari through the Okavango Delta. Our final destination was Victoria Falls, one of the largest waterfalls in the world. It was here on the bank of the Zambezi River overlooking the edge of Vic Falls that I nearly lost control. Once again, I didn’t even realize I had this deep-seated fear until I was up to my neck in hot water. Literally.

I was wandering along the edge of the Zambezi, stretching my legs after many long days in the overland truck, when I stopped to see what my friends were up to. They were wading

about thigh-high into the river and were shouting at me to join in the fun. I didn't know exactly what their plan entailed, but it didn't matter—I jumped in fully clothed, blind to the dangers that lay ahead.

Now, I'd like to think that if I'd known more about this little stunt (important details like crocodiles in the water, the fact that a five-ton elephant had been swept over the falls the previous week, or that a local guide had died taking tourists across the year before), I might have used better judgment. But knowing myself, I'm pretty sure I would have dived in headfirst anyway.

Victoria Falls spans two countries: Zimbabwe and Zambia, and is fed by the mighty Zambezi River. Originating in Angola, the Zambezi crosses five countries before emptying into the Indian Ocean in Mozambique. The Zambezi feeds Vic Falls and during the rainy season has registered a record 184 million gallons of water cascading over the edge every minute. Gulp!

My friends and I were wading into the Zambezi en route to a place called Devil's Pool, where we could play in a basin of water on the very lip of Victoria Falls. The path to this devilish spot was sinister indeed, full of slippery rocks, rushing water, floating debris, and toothy animals.

The first stage of our jaunt required us to all hold hands, forming a large chain as we inched our way across the slick rocks paving the river bottom. The last thing we wanted to do was slip and fall, giving the river a chance to sweep a lone swimmer away. We held on tight to one another as we inched along. All for one and one for all.

The next stage was a small barrier in the river that we needed to traverse, balance-beam style. Still holding hands, we moved sideways with the arches of our feet centered on the beam and our toes gripping tight. At this point, I was starting to wonder what I had gotten myself into.

The next stage was the worst. Letting go of our guides, each of us had to swim a large expanse of the river while keeping our head above water—what we in the States call “dog paddling” but in parts of Africa is called “hippoing.” Apparently, this was where the elephant went over the falls, not strong enough to fight the current en route to the safety of the sand bar in the center of the Zambezi.

As I was making my pilgrimage to Devil’s Pool, it entered my head that I might have truly entered Hell. The entire time we were traversing the Zambezi, we were a mere 1,500 ft. from the edge of the falls. One false move and you plunged over the side into oblivion. My only consolation, which I learned later, was that the crocodiles avoided this area of the river. Apparently, even their pea-sized prehistoric brains understood that it was too dangerous to swim so close to the crest of the falls. When a croc is out-thinking you, you know you’re probably not in full control of your faculties.

From the relative safety of the sand bar, we could then walk to Devil’s Pool, a pristine lagoon fed by a mid-sized waterfall. Admittedly, the site was breathtakingly beautiful and my friends and I splashed in the water, jumping into the cool river eddy, celebrating our triumphant crossing.

Capping off the experience was an opportunity to sit in Devil’s Chair (seriously, you’d think that the names associated with this little misadventure would have been enough to scare me away, but no.) Devil’s Chair is a pothole carved out of the rocks on the very tip of the falls. There’s just enough room for you to stand in it, let go with hands high above your head, and scream and laugh at the folly of life as you risk your neck for a photo op.

Not to be outdone by foolishness, I filmed a video while perched on a nearby ledge. In it you see me smiling and laughing, completely unconcerned about the death drop inches away.

One sudden move and it's sayonara, baby. In the film, you can hear my guide earning his \$40 tip, repeated telling me to please be careful, please don't move, please don't slip.

What I really needed was someone to tell me please don't be such a complete idiot. But I was out of control. Swimming in deadly waters. Cavorting on a cliff. Posing on that perilous perch. The Devil's Pool had successfully sucked me in.

In truth, the real fright during this incident didn't come until about two hours later, after we had retraced our steps past the side bar, hippoing the river expanse, balancing on the shelf spanning the river, and wading our way back to shore.

Exhilarated with my escapade, I dried off in the hot African sun and rejoined two friends who were serenely strolling to the opposite side of the falls for the full vantage. It was here, from the safety of the opposing shore, that the magnitude of my recklessness hit me in the face.

Standing by the guardrails and looking out over the falls, I could see Devil's Chair—a pinprick situated on the edge of some of the mightiest falls in the world. Seeing where I was sitting on the brink of death just hours before, I became nauseous and my stomach lurched, as it does every time I watch that insanely stupid video or see pictures of me in the rock-hewn Devil's Chair, perilously close to a three-mile tumble into a watery grave.

You'd think one near-miss adventure on the Zambezi would be enough, but the next day I grabbed ahold of insanity again and took a microflight over the falls. This flying go-cart gave me a bird's eye view, dipping and banking high in the sky to get the full effect of the fall's power.

From this birds-eye view, I spotted something that gave me shivers anew. A crocodile in the waters near the edge of the falls, swimming against the current to reach the safety of the sand bar. Apparently, the animal's instinct for survival had failed it just as it had failed me. The croc slowly pushed on towards Devil's Pool. Dismissing danger. Completely out of control.

Fear of Abandonment – Old City, Jerusalem

I lost control many times during my two years of adventuring. And I got plain old lost on a regular basis.

One of the times I got horribly turned around was wandering into a maze of dilapidated houses, narrow alleyways, and confusing street signs within the walls of Jerusalem's famed Old City. I was in Jerusalem doing volunteer work and was generously offered an apartment in the Old City during my stay. The apartment was located in the Jewish Quarter. Using this as my base, during my off hours I strolled through the Armenian, Christian, and Arab Quarters, exploring at will.

I was sightseeing in the Arab Quarter one day when I lost my sense of direction. I was trying to make my way to the Rock of the Dome, the most famous Islamic site in Jerusalem. If I had read a guidebook, I might have known that the site was blocked to tourists. But that wasn't my preferred M.O. for exploring a city. Instead I liked to head off with no expectations, discovering places by poking around.

At first I got pretty far, nosing my way to one of the streets leading to the Dome, before being blocked by an Israeli soldier and sent on my way. So I started wandering aimlessly through the Arab Quarter looking around, snapping photos, absorbing the atmosphere, and no doubt looking very much the part of the daft Western tourist.

It was during this meandering that I suddenly noticed that I was alone on a small twisting street, with tall graffiti-wrapped apartment buildings surrounding me on every side. The Old City was always so packed with tourists and religious pilgrims that I was shocked to find myself alone.

But I wasn't alone. A man's loud voice came tumbling out of a window in accented English. "Welcome to Libya!" His words echoed in the deserted alleyway, bouncing off the concrete buildings. His welcome sounded slightly ominous, and I wasn't really sure what he meant.

Now I was lost and alone and also confused. Why did he say Libya? Did he know I was American? How could he tell? Did he mean to scare me? Should I be frightened?

His greeting succeeded in making me feel frightened, all right. I tried to pretend that I wasn't nervous, but the deserted streets were eerie. The lack of life troubled me. There were no people, no stray dogs or cats, no bustling shoppers and rambunctious kiosks. No one.

I stood still for a moment, contemplating my choices. Should I venture farther into this house of cards and hope to find my way out? Or should I turn around and try and retrace my steps? I peered into a few passageways as they bent around unknown corners and stared up at the shuttered windows. I felt abandoned.

Then, a little boy appeared.

Out of nowhere, a lad of about eight was standing in front of me. He asked if I was lost and I replied yes. He asked if I wanted him to show me the way out. I hesitated. I was unsure if this little tyke was friend or foe.

While I had been to the Middle East before the Arab Spring, I now felt that the region was much more unstable. Coming off of several weeks of traveling throughout Egypt and Lebanon, it was increasingly clear that as an American, I wasn't likely to be greeted with open arms. I felt I had to be careful in this instance. I didn't want to be led into a trap.

Although in reality I had little choice. I was desperately turned around, mired in this urban maze. I hoped this little guy standing in front of me in a t-shirt and ripped jeans was just a

kid helping out a stranded tourist. He politely offered to show me the way out again, and this time I accepted. I would trust this small person offering me a big kindness.

My three-foot friend led me through a series of circuitous streets. As we wound our way around, there was no doubt in my mind that we were being watched from behind the tightly shuttered windows and locked doors. We emerged not even ten minutes later onto the city's main drag, Via Dolorosa.

I thanked the boy for helping me. He just smiled in return and ran back the way he came. From this central lane that bisected the avenues inside the walled perimeter, I could find my way back, navigating the whole of the medina. As soon as I stepped onto Via Dolorosa, I was instantly swarmed by shoppers, policemen, hawkers, and my fellow camera-toting tourists. The Old City in prime form.

While I was no longer alone, I couldn't shake the feeling of having been abandoned. Standing in that sun-spattered alleyway, I felt I had been deserted by humanity for a split second. That I was in the eye of a chaotic storm, yet surrounded by silence.

It's a memory that makes my heart skip a beat to this day, the fear of being forsaken embedded in my mind forever.

Fear of Death – Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Perhaps the only fear worse than being abandoned is the fear of death—the ultimate silencer.

I came face-to-face with my own mortality during a pre-dawn bus trip from the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa to Bahir Dar, a resort nestled on the shores of Lake Tana.

Our bus departed at about 5:00 am in the pitch dark of a rainy morning. The scheduled 8-hour bus ride cost me 50 cents and I secured an aisle seat, my favorite window spots having already been reserved.

About an hour into our trip, still well before dawn, our driver was negotiating a steep uphill stretch of a steamy, wet road. As our coach headed up the mountain, an oncoming lorry was heading down. Unfortunately, the lorry's brakes had failed, and it was swerving wildly through the traffic, trying to avoid the other vehicles on the road.

The lorry rounded a corner and continued to barrel downhill. As it traveled, it picked up momentum, approaching our passenger bus with alarming speed. I was fast asleep as the truck came towards us, waking up to the screams of my fellow passengers. There was no time to react, only to send up a silent prayer: "Please, God, make us hit head-on." The alternative was crashing through the guardrail and careening over the side of the mountain, which would mean certain death.

As I opened my eyes, I took in the scene of wailing, terrified chaos. In that grim moment, I was able to comprehend that this might be my last moment on earth. I remember thinking how odd that the mind can actually acknowledge impending death.

My contemplation was interrupted by a horrendous thunder of two-ton metal on metal, followed by stunned silence. The lorry had plowed into our bus. It was a direct hit.

It took a few moments for me and the other passengers to realize that we were still alive. The second before impact, our driver had swerved so that the lorry connected with the right side of our bus. As a result, we were pushed toward the mountainside of the road, away from the fatal cliff.

Everyone involved in the accident was unbelievably lucky. Not only did we not plunge over the edge, but no one was seriously injured. A true miracle, since most of my fellow passengers, mainly women and children, weren't wearing seat belts.

The renegade lorry was completely demolished, windows blown out, the cab squashed like an aluminum can. Our bus didn't fare too well, either. The windshield was shattered and the front corner crushed like an accordion.

Hours later, sitting on the side of the road and looking at the wreck, I envisioned a very different version of that morning. I could hear the telephone call being made to my next of kin. I could see my body being flown back to the States in a casket. I imagined the funeral service attended by my family and friends.

That morning was a near miss to be sure. I cheated death and faced one of my greatest fears. Head-on.

Surviving Fear

You might surmise from these stories that during my two-year journey I was living in a state of constant fear. And in many ways, I was. Not an out-of-my-head, deranged kind of fear, but a constant, beneath-the-surface, always-on-your-guard, sleeping-with-one-eye-open kind of unease. A slow trickle of terror. A nightmare from which you never awake.

After a time, you become accustomed to your fear. It takes up residence as a constant companion. In a way, I came to rely on it—to keep me aware at all times. I believe my perpetual fear kept me alive.

A few talismans may have also helped improve my chances of survival. Over the course of my journey I picked up a few charms and blessings along the way, perhaps a guardian angel

or two. There were four distinct incidences where I was given good luck, and each instance is seared into my memory.

Tribal Charms – Sapa, Vietnam

Several months into my travels, I found myself in northwest Vietnam, high in the mountainous region of Sapa. Sapa is home to many of Vietnam's ethnic minorities. I was there trekking through the hill villages.

My guide, Yia, was a local shaman woman from the Hmong tribe.

During our trek, we walked for several days through the rice paddies and stayed in local homes. As we walked along, children habitually surrounded us, rushing up to greet us as we slogged through the mud.

As Yia and I wandered from village to village, I passed out gifts of colorful stickers and ballpoint pens to the children—a big luxury for kids in that remote mountain setting. Once, as a thank-you for my ink pens, three little girls presented me with a return gift: small stuffed squares of colorful silk with gold fringe and six silver bells.

Although I was overjoyed at the gesture, I didn't quite know what to do with these small treasures. I finally decided to tie one on each side of my camera bag so the bells would tinkle as I walked. Over the next two years of travel, I came to think of these tiny silk pillows as my good luck charms, always by my side.

Global Blessings – Lebanon, Zambia, & Colombia

In addition to these amulets, I was given more blessings along the way. Come to think of it, I received a blessing in each of the other major regions I visited: the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

An Arab Blessing

My first blessing came while visiting a famous journalist in Beirut, Lebanon. I was invited to Joanne Bajjaly's family home to consult with her nonprofit, This is Baladi, which works to protect and preserve Beirut's cultural heritage.

During one of our work sessions, we took a tea break during which I was introduced to Joanne's mother, a devote Maronite Catholic. We had a short, translated conversation, mostly just pleasantries and a bit about my global volunteer work.

As I was leaving Joanne's house later that day, her mother came over to wish me luck on my future travels. She also said I had a guardian angel watching over me and implored me to always listen to the angel and let the angel guide me. I was touched by her caring gesture and I sincerely appreciated her blessing and well wishes, especially as I was on my way to travel further into the Middle East and into the Horn of Africa for the first time.

An African Blessing

My second blessing was given to me by a group of nuns in Livingstone, Zambia. I was there volunteering with five organizations, all tied to the Catholic Church. One of the organizations, called Lushomo, was a home for abused girls, some as young as seven. The girls came to the children's home to live in safety as they awaited the trial of their accused molesters.

I worked closely with this dedicated group of nuns during my week of volunteering. At our last meeting, I gave a half-day workshop, after which they came up to say goodbye and to offer me their blessing.

Now, as a preschooler I went to a parochial school, taught (at that time) by nuns in full habits. I think meeting these nuns brought back deeply rooted memories of my youngest days at school, and along with these memories, feelings of guided protection.

These blessings also came at an opportune time, as I started my overland journey through Zambia and Malawi, making my way toward Mozambique, a perilous journey involving many border crossings on foot.

A Latin Blessing

My third blessing came while I was staying for several weeks in Bogota, Colombia, attending language school. I was staying in my new friend Christian's swanky apartment while he was in New York on business. Christian's apartment had a housekeeper, Betsy, who came once a week, and a full-time doorwoman named Ama.

During my month in residence, I became fast friends with both Betsy and Ama. The three of us would sometimes sit and have coffee after my classes. We struggled to converse in my limited Spanish and yet we had a grand time eating croissants and drinking coffee and sharing stories—mainly through hand gestures.

I finally left Bogota en route to Santa Marta in order to trek to Colombia's Lost City. On my way to the airport, I gave small thank-you gifts of flowers and candy to both Betsy and Ama. As the taxi idled outside and Betsy wrestled my luggage into the waiting cab, Ama held the door

for me. As we hugged goodbye, she took me to one side and blessed me again and again, laying her hands on my forehead and shoulders, and truly touching my heart.

For the bulk of my two-year trek, I carried these blessings from my earth-bound angels with me. It was only after I returned to the States that I realized that each of these blessings in Lebanon, Zambia, and Colombia came only days before my scariest moments during my global travels.

During these perilous times, I also held on tight to my Hmong charms, even after they started slowly deteriorating one bell and one bit of fringe at a time. During my final weeks on the road, the stuffing finally started to fall out of my one remaining charm.

I was in my tent, camping alone in the middle of Patagonia, when I untied it from my camera bag so it wouldn't fall off and be lost on the trail. For a few minutes, I considered just tossing aside the stained bit of worn silk, but I ended up holding onto the disintegrating talisman just a little while longer. I decided to keep my remaining good luck charm with me until I stepped back onto U.S. soil. Just in case.

Less Fear

While living on the road, I think I was able to confront my fears by cultivating the opposing force. For instance, when I felt lost and alone in the Old City, my way out was to let go of my fear of being abandoned, and instead surrender my fear to trust. Only by believing in the goodness of my boy guide was I able to reach safety.

Likewise, when in the midst of the all-consuming Zambezi, I was only able to escape from the dangers swirling around me by steadfastly seeking harmony. The serene cool waters of

Devil's Pool were my respite, my reward for fighting the currents that were trying to take me under and hold me back.

In the Sinai, it was an awesome, frenzied spectacle of fish in an ancient mating ritual that reminded me of all the beauty in the world. It helped me focus not on mutilation, of how species tear one another apart, but on creation as the dominant force of nature.

And my brush with death in Ethiopia has been a constant reminder in my life to never take anything for granted. Facing my mortality had helped me to continually strive for heartfelt experiences, to understand that our place in this world is temporary, and to take the opportunity every day to celebrate life.

This is perhaps the greatest gift I received from my journey: the ability to confront my fears and to embrace these emotions that have in turn strengthened me. I'm a stronger person today after my travels. I'm now a person who cherishes life. A person who faces her fears. Head on.

About the Author

A former finance executive, Erin Michelson is a consultant specializing in asset generation and expansion strategies for nonprofit organizations. She has worked on every side of philanthropy: holding management positions with several leading organizations, founding her own nonprofit, serving as a Board of Director, and running her own charitable fund. A recognized social entrepreneur and recipient of multiple international awards, Erin has lived and studied in Auckland, Beijing, Cape Town, and Hong Kong, and holds degrees in International Relations, Political Science, and Government & Public Administration. Living a nomadic life, Erin continues to consult, volunteer, and travel widely. Visit her website at www.GoErinGo.com.

About the Adventure Philanthropist Series

Adventure Philanthropist: Great Adventures Volunteering Abroad is available on Amazon and Lulu.com. The stories told in *More Fear* come alive through photos and videos found on www.GoErinGo.com.

GoErinGo! Fund Giving

All profits from the sale of *Adventure Philanthropist: More Fear* will be donated to nonprofit organizations that help protect women and children. As I travel around the world, I understand that I am merely a visitor. The women and children who live in these harsh environments are the ones with real courage. I never forget that my fear is fleeting. Their fear—of physical violence while collecting fire wood, walking to school, and working in fields and factories—is permanent.