

Colorado Journal 2016

A compilation of quotes from “*Wild at Heart*”, photos, and journaling I did during our elk hunting trip September 6 – 17, 2016.



“A man’s life becomes an adventure, the whole thing takes on a transcendent purpose when he releases control in exchange for the recovery of the dreams in his heart.”

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” - Gil Bailie

Journal 9.11.16

Grant had his first close encounter with a bull elk this morning. He was hunting out of a tent blind and the elk came within 20 yards. Grant said he was so close he could hear him breathe. Grant never got an open shot and the bull bounded off after a cow. Grant wonders if he was as prepared as he needed to be – that maybe he could have made the shot if he had done something differently. I am grateful for the opportunity he had to come face to face with such a magnificent animal with only a bow and arrow.



“It’s not a question – it’s *the* question, the one every boy and man is longing to ask. Do I have what it takes? Am I powerful? Until a man knows he’s a man he will forever be trying to prove he is one, while at the same time shrink from anything that might reveal he is not. Most men live their lives haunted by the question, or crippled by the answer they’ve been given.”

I am writing from a ground blind I pieced together this morning. I have yet to see an elk although Ken has seen four; he sits about a quarter mile away from me – Kenny (his son) is farther down yet.

There are ten of us in this hunting party – six guys from Michigan, three of us from South Carolina, and one from North Carolina. We have been planning this trip for over a year – it is, by far, the most expensive hunting trip I have ever been on. It is also doubling as Grant’s senior trip – yes, he graduates high school in about ten months. He will turn 18 in May and enter into a new stage of manhood. I turn 50 in May and enter a new stage of life as well – and it is during the quiet and solitude of this trip that I am seeking clues as to what this next season signifies – what are the focal points during my fifth decade on this planet?

The place where I am looking for those clues? My own heart. I believe vital clues are locked away within my heart. If I can find my heart and look deeply within it I feel that I will know what to do.

This pursuit of my heart has been inspired by my third reading of *Wild at Heart* by John Eldredge. The opening paragraph is set in the mountains of Colorado in pursuit of elk. He compares the hunter’s pursuit of the elusive elk among the rugged Rocky Mountains to his pursuit – and every man’s pursuit – of their own heart.

John believes there are three mythic longings in the heart of every man created in God's image:

1. An adventure to embark upon – a quest
2. An enemy to defeat – seeing myself as a warrior prepared for battle
3. A beauty to rescue – the woman I fight for and who joins me on my quest

We pulled out of the driveway at 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, September 16 for our 32-hour journey to western Colorado. Dreaming of an opportunity to hunt bull elk from within 50 yards, and through the lens of pursuing my heart, these are the observations I have made thus far:

1. Elk live where the air is thin

Elk live in mountains. For a hunter like me who lives at sea level this means I have to adjust to an 8,500' rise in altitude. And so far this thin air is totally kicking my butt! I hike about 30 – 60 minutes each day (twice today) to get to my stand. The hike to the stand is mostly uphill and steep in a few places. And honestly, I am panting, my heart pounding, the sweat dripping, and the muscles in the back of my legs burning every time. It's not that difficult of a hike! I am in decent shape! But, at 8,500' I feel weak. They tell me my body will adjust eventually and I will feel stronger again – but to chase elk I need to exert the effort to breathe the same air they breathe. Honestly, it would be much easier to hunt deer in South Carolina or Michigan – but if I want to hunt elk I need to literally climb these mountains and breathe the same air.

2. You have to be healthy to hunt elk

I caught a cold a couple of days before heading west, and this illness has made hunting much more difficult. For starters, I feel like crap most of the time. I am not breathing well, which means I am not sleeping well. I have a persistent cough that I can't shake (even when sitting in the stand – which doesn't help my chances of seeing elk!). I am doing everything I can to speed this cold along, but it's going to take rest and time (the two things I don't have to spare on this trip!) The cold virus I brought with me makes a challenging quest all the more difficult. And, I could spread the virus to others, which would hinder their ability to hunt. Good health is the foundation for...

That last sentence was interrupted by rain (you can see the droplets smearing the ink in my journal). When I looked around I noticed that the sky was darkening and the wind picking up. I will be honest, my one thought was "I do not want to get stuck on this mountain if it rains!" I packed up immediately and hiked back to the trail and decided to leave the jeep for Ken and Kenny so that don't have to make the long walk back in the dark after 15 hours of hunting tonight.

As I walked back the sky cleared and the sun came back out – so my anxiety subsided for the others. As for me, I was happy to be coming back because I wanted to clean up, shave, get a snack, and do some writing. If not for the rain I would have stayed out until dark – mostly not to disappoint Grant and Ken (I don't want them to think we came all this way and spent all this money and my heart isn't into the hunting).

Even though I don't want my hunting buddies to think my heart isn't fully into the hunting – it's not. I like to hunt, I enjoy it under certain conditions – but is it a top 10 passion? Nope – not anymore. Fifteen years ago it was a top 5 passion for me, but not now. (By the way, why do I care so much about propping up my he-man hunting image? What's that all about?)



“...after years of living in a cage, a lion no longer even believes it is a lion...and a man no longer believes he is a man.”

“This is every man's deepest fear: to be exposed, to be found out, to be discovered as an imposter, and not really a man.”

Hunting now, and this trip in particular, is first and foremost an opportunity to build stronger relationships with the men I care most about – and Grant is #1 on that list. Would I like to kill an elk – heck ya! Would I love for Grant to get an elk – very much so. But, whether or not either of us harvests an elk this trip is bringing us closer together and will give us something to talk about for the rest of our lives. The second reason I want to keep hunting? What I am experiencing right now – solitude in God's creation. Mountains surround me as I sit outside our cabin writing these words. The peaks to my left swell over 10,000'. They are majestic and strong – just like the God who created them. When I hunt I experience quiet, I have the rare opportunity to be still and know that he is God.



A bonus on this trip? No cell service, no internet, and no interruptions. The only way someone can contact me would be to call an emergency number, radio a message to the outfitter, and then he would come find me. And unless someone dies that ain't gonna happen! This hunting trip bought me 9 days of true quiet. We didn't just travel to Colorado; we traveled to the dark side of the moon. And how much is that worth?

The realizations that hit me on the walk back today?

- I like hunting and truly appreciate the benefits I just mentioned
- But, I love writing. Writing is probably a top 5 passion

Other observations I may want to further explore:

3. Hunting elk is a group effort

Hunting an elk (finding my heart) involves asking other men to help me. BJ scouts the elk, clears the trails, sets up the stands, and packs the elk off the mountain by mule. Tim Parker invited us into this group. Ken had the truck and the gear. Dana loaned us what we didn't have. Mike and Ray have the experience. If we get an elk this week it's only because so many other men stepped in to help.



“Where does a man go...to learn his true name, a name that can never be taken from him? That deep heart knowledge comes only through a process of *initiation*. You have to know where you’ve come from, you have to have faced a series of trials that test you, you have to have taken a journey, and you have to have faced your enemy.”

4. Bow hunting is up close and personal

The only way to kill an elk with a bow is to get close. And getting close to an elk takes a lot of planning, work, and experience (and probably a bit of luck). There are 100 different ways to spook an elk, but only a few ways to bring him close.



“Every boy, in his journey to become a man, takes an arrow in the center of his heart, in the place of his strength. Because the wound is rarely discussed and even more rarely healed, every man carries a wound. And the wound is nearly always given by his father.”

5. Choose your guide carefully

Some guides can't be trusted and shouldn't be followed (never follow me in the woods unless I have a GPS – I have zero sense of direction!) Grant didn't get to hunt last night because the guy taking him to the stand got lost – they walked in circles for hours.

6. Navigating the mountains is very tricky

It's so easy to lose your way searching for your heart. Walking back by myself this morning I took a wrong turn. If not for my GPS I could have been in trouble. When I travel with a small group of hunters we seldom lose our way.



“Eve was created within the lush beauty of Eden’s garden. But Adam, if you’ll remember, was created *outside* the Garden, in the wilderness.”

“The core of a man’s heart is undomesticated *and that is good.*”

“Desire reveals design, and design reveals destiny.”

7. Getting enough water and calories is really important

I am expending a lot of energy chasing these elk and I feel hungry all the time. My body requires more calories (and the right kind) and I am also drinking a lot of water. (The risk of dehydration is very real and if I succumb to dehydration the hunt is over.)

8. Sacrifice required

Family and friends sacrifice for each other to harvest an elk. I made sure Grant was put into the best stand. I got up at 4 a.m. this morning even though I felt very rough because I thought Ken needed help quartering his elk. Ken gave me his stand yesterday because he knew I was struggling with the altitude (the stand he hunted was a farther walk, uphill). Who has God brought into my life that he is asking me to sacrifice for as they search out the masculine heart? Who do I look to for help?

9. Timing is everything

It turns out that the rut is late this year – which means we aren't seeing or hearing as many elk. There is timing to elk hunting that is out of your control. You make your best guess and go for it – but if the timing is off it's going to be tough.

10. The problem with tunnel vision

There is a beauty in the pursuit of elk that can be missed if you have tunnel vision on getting an elk. Harvesting an elk is a goal – but not the only goal. In fact, not even my primary goal. Grant and I are chasing them together – exploring, experimenting, strategizing. We sat together for several hours yesterday and will hunt together the rest of this trip. This is the true win for me, and I believe for him also.



“Masculinity is bestowed.”

“Femininity can never bestow masculinity.”

“The ancient societies believed that a boy becomes a man only through ritual and effort – only through the ‘active intervention of the older men,’” Bly reminds us.

11. Suffering is part of the journey

We hiked in the rain yesterday – and then sat for two hours to hunt. We got very cold. It felt so good to make it back to the lodge and eat hot food. Suffering shared forges a brotherhood and multiplies the joy when through perseverance we overcome.

12. There are no short cuts when it comes to rest

I slept 12 hours two nights ago. I wanted to chase elk, but I needed to rest and recover from this cold. I have needed more rest than I've wanted this week – but my best chance to get an elk will come with sufficient rest and good health.



“God is fiercely committed to you, to the restoration and release of your masculine heart. But a wound that goes unacknowledged and unwept is a wound that cannot heal. A wound you’ve embraced is a wound that cannot heal. A wound you think you deserved is a wound that cannot heal.”

What passions are in my heart that God wants me to live and lead from?

1. A vibrant, Christ-centered ministry partnership and love affair with Sandi. Walking closely with Christ, leading spiritually, and intimacy with Sandi have always been a package deal (and I have a 30-year track record to prove it).
2. Writing about the way God’s grace intersects my life and sharing it with others redemptively in a confessional and invitational style.
3. Helping our children to walk in the truth and equipping and encouraging them to grow into kingdom leaders.
4. To live near a college campus and develop mentoring relationships that empower students and faculty anchored by a leadership role at a local church.
5. Owning a Jeep that we can cruise around town in and take on adventures.



“Life is not a problem to be solved, it is an adventure to be lived. That’s the nature of it and has been since the beginning when God set the dangerous stage for this high-stakes drama and called the whole wild enterprise *good*.”

Vague rumblings include:

- Something to do with the study and teaching of literature. Mr. Boyer, Dr. Kigar, and movies like *Dead Poets Society* speak to something deep in my heart that I have never fully explored.
- Beauty - art. It was my love of art and my desire to behold beauty that took me to Europe at 20. As a teenager I wrote a lot of amateur poetry - most of it was quite awful. I yearn to behold and create something truly beautiful, but what medium? Writing? Photography? Both? Something new?
- Travel to experience the cultures and histories of western civilization - all the way back through medieval Europe to first century Rome and Israel.

Journal 9.15.16

As I sat with Grant in the blind last night I was reminded of other parallels between hunting elk and hunting for what God has placed in my heart as a man bearing his image.

- Sometimes we confuse the cries of our hearts for an imitation.

The first night on the stand I heard a cow mooing (a moo-cow, not a female elk). Because I have never heard a real elk bugle or call before I thought the moo-cow was an elk. It made for a few minutes of excitement, but in the end I felt foolish. Was I the only one in camp who didn't know what a real elk sounded like?

A couple of nights ago I heard what I was certain to be a bull elk bugling. It was no moo-cow! As I waited for the giant to emerge from the aspen I heard voices. Two men from our hunting party were walking down the trail - they were the ones

bugling. They, of course, weren't elk, but they were intentionally imitating elk. I was fooled again.

The question remains – what are the distinct vocalizations of my heart? How do I know when it's the real thing?

- Elk have predators.

Talking with the outfitter today we learned that mountain lions roam the area and on occasion take down an elk. I found it hard to believe, but these cats can hunt and kill adult elk. When elk pick up the scent of a mountain lion, they move out of the area (they hide from the threat).



“They may be misplaced, forgotten, or misdirected, but in the heart of every man is a desperate desire for a battle to fight, and adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue.”

“It is fear that keeps a man at home where things are neat and orderly and *under his control*.”

“The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” – Frederick Buechner

There are predators that send my heart into a panic and scurrying off to hide. What are they?

The guilt I feel, or the fear I have of feeling it, when I might let the woman in my life down. I have looked for masculinity from my mom and then Sandi. I believed if I could come through for them and play the hero I would have earned my place at the men's table. There was no man in my life (until I was fifteen) to show me what a man was and to answer the question for me: “Do I have what it takes to be a man? Am I capable? Do I have power to effect change in this world?”

So, for many years I have looked to Sandi to provide this affirmation. When our marriage began breaking down about 12 years ago I realized she couldn't give me what I needed (I couldn't be the hero for her), and I resented her for it.

Do I still have a trace of resentment in my heart for her?

Gut answer? Probably. There are probably still expectations I have of Sandi being wildly happy and content from which I derive a sense of fulfillment. Sand is not always contented – stuff happens, things bother her and she feels compelled to talk about them with me. Our personalities and communication patterns wound me time and again in my place of woundedness.

I believe that God is making a surgical strike. Will godly sorrow lead me to repentance and life?

Another predator that comes to mind is feeling trapped – stuck.

As a boy I often felt trapped in a lose/lose scenario with my family. Stay together and experience the constant fighting and drunken rages. Leave and lose any chance of ever getting what I most wanted from my father – an identity and sense of belonging and power in a man's world.

The two things I hated most about my childhood:

1. Feeling trapped in the soul-grinding, hope-destroying cycle of addiction
2. Feeling out of control. I knew that the next explosion was just around the corner but I lacked the ability to forestall or prevent it.

Later that day...

I am sitting in the blind for our final hunt and Grant is in a stand about 100 yards away. We leave around 4 am tomorrow morning for the very long ride home. I have been talking with God tonight, and this is what I'm hearing...

As I look more closely into my heart I realize fear and stress have crowded out much of good that God has placed there. I have been so worried and stressed about parenting challenges and finances over the past few years that I just haven't had much energy or desire to pursue intimacy with God. I have felt more like a machine than a beloved son. So much juggling, so many plates to keep spinning, and so little joy...

I confessed my lack of trust and my attempts to carry these burdens myself as sin - and I asked God to forgive me and to lead me (by his kindness) to repentance and life.

I also asked God to search my heart for any seed of resentment I may be holding onto toward my mom or Sandi. My attempts at finding satisfaction and significance through rescuing them and playing the hero failed - and I went through a season of resenting them for their apparent inability to be happy and content enough through what I provided (yes - absolutely crazy, I know). My idolatry of them required their idolatry of me.



“Adventure, with all its requisite danger and wildness, is a deeply spiritual longing written into the soul of man. The masculine heart needs a place where nothing is prefabricated, modular, nonfat, zip lock, franchised, on-line, microwaveable. Where there are no deadlines, cell phones, or committee meetings. Where there is room for the soul. Where, finally, the geography around us corresponds to the geography of the soul.”

Other great quotes from *Wild at Heart*...

“So many men make the mistake of thinking that the woman *is* the adventure. But that is where the relationship immediately goes downhill. A woman doesn’t want to be the adventure; she wants to be caught up into something greater than herself.”

“This is why so many men secretly fear their wives. She sees him as no one else does, sleeps with him, knows what he’s made of. If he has given her the power to validate him as a man, then he has also given her the power to *invalidate him*.”

“What I am saying is that the masculine journey always takes a man *away* from the woman, in order that he may come back to her with his question answered. A man does not go to a woman to *get* his strength, he goes to her to *offer* it.”

“Women are often attracted to the wilder side of a man, but once having caught him they settle down to the task of domesticating him. Ironically, if he gives in he’ll resent her for it, and she in turn will wonder where the passion has gone.”

“The number one problem between men and their women is that we men, when asked to truly fight for her...hesitate. We are still seeking to save ourselves, we have forgotten the deep pleasure of spilling our life for another.”

“Most men, you see, marry for safety; they choose a woman who will make them feel like a man but never really challenge them to be one.”

“Why don’t men offer what they have to their women? Because we know down in our guts that it won’t be enough. There is an emptiness to Eve after the Fall, and no matter how much you pour into her she will never be filled. This is where many men falter. Either they refuse to give what they can, or they keep pouring into her and all the while feel like a failure because she is still needing more.”

“What makes pornography so addictive is that more than anything else in a lost man’s life, it makes him *feel* like a man without requiring a thing of him. The less a guy feels like a real man in the presence of real women, the more vulnerable he is to porn.”

“Those are the two basic options. Men either overcompensate for their wound and become driven (violent men), or they shrink back and go passive (retreating men).”

“The true test of a man, the beginning of his redemption, actually starts when he can no longer rely on what he’s used all his life. *The real journey begins when the false self fails.*”

“When you look at the structure of the false self men tend to create, it always revolves around two themes: seizing upon some sort of competence and rejecting anything that cannot be controlled.”