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AN ANALYSIS OF OSA JOHNSON - NOTED FEMALE EXPLORER

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Frederick Michael McCreedy

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

May 1998

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It is only fitting and proper to cite the encouragement of my parents, Fred and Jean, for an entire lifetime of guidance and support. They have quietly been the wind beneath my wings. They will always have my undying gratitude and respect for them as parents, teachers, and friends.

With deep appreciation, I recognize my wife, Nancy, and son, Michael. They alone share with me the scope of the time that was required to pursue my dreams and aspirations, the time that we were unable to spend together. Michael was more patient with me than I had a right to expect and Nancy always placed my needs above her own. For their love, I have truly been blessed.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS BY
FREDERICK MICHAEL McCREEDY

AN ANALYSIS OF OSA JOHNSON - NOTED FEMALE EXPLORER

"An Analysis of Osa Johnson - Noted Female Explorer" examines the life of the wife of famed African explorer Martin Elmer Johnson. It is the story of a love affair between two people who also shared a mutual love of animals and nature. Osa was initially the concerned wife who looked out after her husband and attempted to safeguard their lives in the early years of this century in a continent fraught with dangerous carnivores and instant death at every imaginable corner. She progressed from this to a position of leadership, shared with her husband, as they truly became a team of explorers dedicated to professional research by film.

It can safely be concluded that Osa, while not an accepted equal to Martin in his work, (women photographers were little used or recognized in those days) clearly faced the same dangers. She lived the same life of deprivation, performed much the same routine work and obviously earned the professional recognition she later received for her accomplishments. Fame, worldwide notoriety, and wealth meant little to this diminutive woman whose stature in her chosen field has eclipsed all who came before or after her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iv
 Prologue	 1
 CHAPTER	
I: OSA'S ADOLESCENCE	3
II: MARTIN ELMER JOHNSON	10
III: SOUTH SEAS HONEYMOON	19
IV: AFRICA	36
V: LAKE PARADISE	61
VI: TANGANYIKA AND BOY SCOUTS	113
VII: THE AFRICA OF PYGMIES AND GORILLAS	139
VIII: LAST AFRICAN JOURNEY	155
IX: BORNEO	170
X: THE LAST SAFARI	184
Epilogue	201
Glossary	205
Sources	211

PROLOGUE

The weather that day was anything but typical. Kansas in January is usually noted for cold, snow and winds that seem to penetrate not only your coat and clothes but clear down to your bones. That day it had been sixty-two degrees. Clearly not an average January day in Kansas. This would be a day for children to play outside in the sunshine after school. The two young boys at the corner of Twelfth and Central planned to do exactly that.

The boys were young enough at ages five and seven, to explore their neighborhood world which consisted of the twelve hundred block of south Central and Malcolm streets by themselves as they tried to find something entertaining enough to hold their attention. They played kick the can for a while as they walked along the block, but that was not enough excitement to keep them occupied for very long. They found a stray dog and chased it until it ran off without them. Then they saw the big, black funeral car followed by a lot of other cars heading for Elmwood cemetery. The oldest boy, Steve, said they ought to go and see what was going on. The other boy, Mike agreed to go, but neither one told their mothers. Moms can be less than agreeable when it comes to the pursuit of excitement or adventure by five and seven year olds.

The two boys would cut through the yard of Bert James on down to Logan Hunt's house where finally next door in the Paul Davis yard, they stood to watch. They couldn't see much, just some people standing around a tent and talking. They noticed a lot of flowers spread on the newly dug grave. They watched for a while but this too proved to

be less exciting. One thing young boys will not do is to stay somewhere for long that is not exciting or where they are not having a good time. This place proved to be both and the boys promptly left. They found a rabbit behind the Patterson's house and the race was on. It lasted exactly one block which returned the boys to Steven's house. It was now dinner time and all thoughts of fun and play were put on hold.

The boys would little realize what they had witnessed that warm day of January 12, 1953 was the final resting place of the greatest female explorer the world had ever seen. This woman, who had traveled over one and one half million miles in her lifetime in search of adventure and excitement, was to be laid to rest a mere seven blocks from her birthplace at Seventh and Malcolm streets in Chanute, Kansas.

CHAPTER I

OSA'S ADOLESCENCE

Osa Helen Leighty was born at her home at the corner of Seventh and Malcolm streets in Chanute, Kansas on March 14, 1894. Her parents were William Sherman and Ruby Isabell Leighty. As a child she occasionally got into trouble from her father for the many times she came home with a stray dog or cat to add to her menagerie.¹ Osa loved most animals and hated few besides rats and snakes. The family at her house on Malcolm street consisted of her parents, a younger brother Vaughn, and her grandmother Nancy Ann Taylor who lived with them. Osa was especially close to her father, perhaps because of their frequent outings together. He taught her to fish in the muddy water of the Neosho River east of Chanute where she caught crappies and perch.² He also taught her that any noise was taboo while fishing and if she wanted to catch fish she had to remain still.³ Her father also passed on to her his love of hunting in teaching her to hunt jackrabbits. That she was a bit of a tomboy was perfectly acceptable to her father. When she was three and four years old she liked to perform for people. Her mother would take her to lodge meetings where she would recite poetry.

She later played piano in school where her mother reported she wasn't much of a student. They both loved their daughter and were quite happy with their little "Osie".

¹Osa Johnson, Bride in the Solomons (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), 23.

²Osa Johnson, Four Years in Paradise (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1941), 95.

³Ibid., 240.

She dreamed a dream of little girls everywhere as she thought of growing up and having a little home where she could raise a family with a garden plot like her father's and with a house full of children to boot.⁴ She attended school at Murray Hill and sang in the church choir at the First Presbyterian Church.⁵

Osa's childhood was a happy one. She and her brother Vaughn would hitch their little yellow sleds to Mr. Jerome's grocery wagon during the Christmas holidays. He would pull them along the avenues of snow and their day would be filled with fun and glee.⁶

Osa spent much of her youth in the instruction by her mother and grandmother in all the domestic arts. They taught her at an early age that to be a good wife her role was to be totally defined by her husband's wishes.⁷ Her grandmother had come to Kansas from Arkansas in a covered wagon, was married several times and moved often. Her aunt, Minnie Thomas, was a cigar smoking circus performer who rode horses bareback. Her mother Belle was married at age fifteen and had Osa by age seventeen. What they showed Osa was a complete break from society which tended in that era to place the woman in the more traditional role of homemaker and obedient partner to her husband. They each taught Osa to be understanding, loving, and kind. She was also taught to sew,

⁴Johnson, Bride, 120.

⁵Johnson, Four Years, 35.

⁶Ibid., 205.

⁷Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure: The Wandering Lives of Martin and Osa Johnson (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 13.

cook, bake bread and to be resourceful, a trait which would have enormous implications later in her life.

Her childhood included long Saturday or Sunday bicycle rides out into the country with Helen Westfall to bring home wild flowers or odd pebbles they might happen to find. In the summers she would help her dad drop seeds into trenches in their garden and pull weeds whose growth always exceeded the vegetables growth. Her father planted a mental seed with Osa when he told her that the next best thing to doing a regular job to the best of one's ability was to simply plant a little beauty in the world.⁸ Her bosom friend, Babe Holloran had taken her baby brother, then age four, for a ten-cent portrait taken by a young photographer from Independence named Martin Johnson. He had a room at William's Opera House and charged a mere ten-cents a setting. Osa was determined to have pictures of her brother Vaughn taken by him. She was insistent that nothing less would do. Ten cents in those days amounted to a lot of money. Her father earned one dollar and twenty five cents per day and ten cents back then could buy a pound of round steak or perhaps a gallon of kerosene, a peck of potatoes or even the possibility of a couple of yards of calico.⁹ William decided to give Osa the dime and she prepared Vaughn for the picture by applying a white, starched, embroidered collar on him and carefully combing his hair. Then the two set off by wagon for the William's Opera House that hot September day. Martin would take his last photograph in Chanute

⁸Aylesa Forsee, My Love and I Together: The Stories of Six Famous Marriages, (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith Company, 1961), 138.

⁹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure: The Lives and Adventures of Martin and Osa Johnson (Garden City, New York: Halcyon House, 1942), 5.

of Osa's brother. The year was 1901, and Osa was seven, while Martin was a mature sixteen. This was to be the only time their paths would cross until Osa was sixteen and Martin twenty-five.

Osa would spend a large amount of time with her new friend and classmate Gail Perigo. They did everything together. They had no secrets from each other and planned, like many girl friends, to be married to their husbands in a double ceremony. Gail was a year older than Osa and both attended Murray Hill school together. Their principal, Billy Newell, once bet Osa a box of candy that she would be married within six months of Gail.¹⁰ The girls were inseparable and extremely close. As a teenager, Osa liked roller skating, dancing and singing. She and Gail often attended silent films shown in town whenever they could earn the nickel charged for the admission. She even volunteered many times to sing during the intermissions. Gail likewise had an excellent singing voice. She would be hired one day by Mr. Martin Johnson to sing at the Snark 2 theater in the city of Independence, some forty-five miles from Chanute. While there, Gail married Dick Hamilton. After Martin brought the show on the road, it played Chanute's Roof Garden Theater, at 112 East Main. This was a Saturday in April of 1910. Osa was just sixteen at the time and she and several other high school girls went to the afternoon show.¹¹ Osa was not interested in the show which consisted of slides and a lecture by Martin on his trip with Jack London, noted author, to the South Seas and their adventures

¹⁰Elsie Cunningham, "Daring African Explorer is Daughter of a Santa Fe Engineer", Santa Fe Magazine 27 (January 1933): 10.

¹¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 69.

there. The program was entitled, "Good-bye to the Golden Gate" which was a travelogue where admission was five and ten cents.¹² Osa did not like the talk of natives, the rough look of them or anything connected with it. She left early before the lecture was completed. It occurred later, while Gail took ill in Independence that Martin approached Osa to sing for his performances. It caused quite a stir within the Leighty family. Osa had never been more than thirty miles from home and never alone. Osa's grandmother was outraged at the idea, but Osa's mother seemed to accept it by a determination that Gail, now married, was herself a perfect chaperone.¹³ Osa entered the stage area at the theater and stood rigid with stage fright. It did not help that the pianist had the wrong music. While Osa was familiar with this particular melody, she was unaware of the words which went with the melody. She had the courage to stand her ground by refusing to retreat. She improvised by making up a song that rhymed love and above and moon with spoon. She then ended the song with a high note which she maintained as long as she had breath.¹⁴ From this display, Martin saw in her the intangibles of spirit and courage. He immediately sensed here was someone special. That courage had been manifest on the journey to Independence. She had received a lecture prior to the trip from her mother on the finer points of ladylike travel. She had been warned not to speak with strangers. Her Grandmother advised her to study the tips of her gloves if she were

¹²Chanute Tribune, November 17, 1984 as reported for the seventy-five Years Ago column dated November 17, 1910.

¹³Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 71.

¹⁴Aylesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 142.

spoken to and that a proper focus for her gaze should be the top flounce of her dress.¹⁵

Osa seemed to rise above all the hoopla and presented quite a favorable impression upon Martin. Upon her initial arrival, Martin was aware of the contrast in their physical sizes. He was six feet one as compared to her five feet two. They certainly did not seem to hit it off immediately, but time would tell an amazing change in their relationship.

Martin finally contacted the family with a desire to see Osa socially. This unsolicited overture, objected to strenuously by her mother, did advance Martin in the eyes of Osa. Her mother's objection to Martin's age, which made him much older and his worldly experiences, left Mrs. Leighty in direct opposition but agreeing to the contact nonetheless. The first meeting was on a Saturday and Osa spent all day fixing her hair and baking bread.

While their first encounter was not a total success, Osa consented to give Martin another chance. Their second meeting had Martin at the family house, after a later arrival, looking through the family photograph album. He soon spotted the photo of Vaughn he had taken years before and recognized it as his own. This did not endear him to Osa for she had always thought of that photo as a failure to represent the character she sought to have captured on film. When Martin left, the family voiced a disapproval which joined the original displeasure of her grandmother. Osa, on the other hand, was impressed with Martin's courage and independence and she had fallen in love.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 141.

Osa soon seemed to change. She had previously always been carefree and happy until now. This new found love seemed to leave her miserable. In an attempt to hide her misery, she saved up her crying until after the family had gone to bed and in that way she attempted to keep it to herself.¹⁷ The problem was of a short lived duration however. Osa soon graduated from the eighth grade on a Friday night and by the following Sunday, at age sixteen, she was married to Martin. Martin would later reflect that they talked things over pretty seriously and after she got a taste of his stubbornness and he caught a glimpse of her character they were married within two days.¹⁸

The marriage took place in Independence on May 15, 1910.¹⁹ When the two returned to Chanute to inform Osa's family she got cold feet. Martin, fearing annulment due to Osa's being underage, accepted a recommendation to travel to Kansas City, Missouri to have a second marriage performed as an additional protection against that possibility. When the young couple returned to Chanute to inform her family, Osa's father was furious. He spoke with Martin through clenched teeth and with fist in hand. He informed Martin that now he had her and he best take good care of her. His inference was obvious to Martin. Osa was now married to a man which had a wanderlust in his spirit. He had already seen a good deal of the world. His traveling itch was now dormant, but would soon reassert itself.

¹⁷Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 77.

¹⁸Martin Johnson, Safari: A Saga of the African Blue (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 209.

¹⁹Chanute Tribune, January 17, 1953.

CHAPTER II

MARTIN ELMER JOHNSON

The most dominant impact upon Martin's life would be his association with Mr. and Mrs. Jack London. Osa would also be effected by Martin's love of adventure and photography, both skills he honed while under the guidance of the Londons. This influence for Osa would represent the lack of a permanent home, a condition Osa had been taught meant the opportunity to raise a house full of children and a garden. The product of Martin's travels would also dash her hope for children. Martin would lose a testicle in the South Seas which meant that they could not have children. But true to her upbringing that her role would be defined by her husband's wishes, Osa did not let any of their problems have a negative affect upon their lives. The upside of Martin's relationship with the Londons would play a much more dominant role in Osa's development as Martin's partner in his work. Osa would pattern herself after Charmian London, a woman much admired by Martin for her abilities. Osa could and would become the lone individual Martin needed and counted on in his work. She would display complete agreement with him on issues concerning animal welfare and management, conservation issues, as well as face the same dangers. She would gear her life to the successful completion of Martin's agenda. A more dedicated wife in this regard could not be found.

Martin Elmer Johnson was born October 9, 1884. The location was Rockford, Illinois. Martin was named after his maternal grandmother's name. His family moved to Independence, Kansas when Martin was eleven so his father could establish a family

jewelry business. Martin suffered from poor grades and inattention during his youth. He was more interested in far off places than his schoolwork and his grades represented the mismatch. Martin left school in disgrace in his youth, due in large part to some composite photographs of instructors, manufactured to make them appear to be involved in compromising kissing liaisons with students. This use of photography had been an outgrowth of an attempt on his father's part to interest Martin in a hobby which was paid for by his father. This was also an effort to interest Martin in the family business.

Martin left school in disgrace and worked in the family business for a while but had no heart for the work. He often read the newspapers, used as packaging for Eastman Kodak film shipments, in an effort to satisfy his craving for travel and excitement. When this failed, he entered the photography field and traveled southeast Kansas and took portrait pictures to earn a living. This soon became humdrum, for Martin never appeared to be content with any practices once he had mastered them. Osa would later comment that Martin's life seemed always to have had a clear and clean design, with perfect instinct for selection. She felt he always knew what he wanted to do and then did it, regardless of the consequences to himself. She felt Martin thought life was as simple as that.¹

Martin displayed such a talent for free-hand drawing that it led to a job in Chicago in the spring of 1906 as an engraver. This was after he left home in an attempt to go to Europe and back on the \$4.25 he had in his possession. He was successful in this

¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 21.

endeavor, but he returned home to Independence with little else accomplished. While he was a great interest to the younger set of town for awhile because of this vagabonding abroad, Martin felt no great honor was necessary. He couldn't even be persuaded to discuss the four years he spent in his travels. Again working for his father he dreamed of more adventure and excitement which he could not find in a jewelry store. He continued to hope for another possible escape from the monotony.

He soon found that escape in an ad placed in *Cosmopolitan* magazine,² by Jack London, renowned author and adventurer. He was looking for a cook to sail around the world with him on his ship, the *Snark*. Martin seized the opportunity. He was ecstatic. He sent a letter to Jack offering his services and although he never found out why he was accepted over the thousands of others who had applied, often with better credentials, Jack London offered him the opportunity in a telegram he received on November 12, 1906.³ Martin now began to revitalize his life. He hired on at the local cafe as an apprentice cook and for two weeks tried to learn the art. He read books and committed family recipes to memory. At age twenty-two, he was ready to go around the world on a planned seven year tour of adventure. He left Independence, Kansas for San Francisco by train and arrived just after the San Francisco earthquake, April 18, 1906 at 5:13 A.M.

The *Snark* was being built during this period and the confusion caused a great deal of extra expense and delay to the Londons, Jack and Charmian. The day of the

²Mariam L. Mih, *Safari: A Short Travelogue of the Adventures of Martin and Osa Johnson* (Chanute, Kansas: Privately printed, 1961), 6.

³Martin Johnson, *Through the South Seas with Jack London* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1913), 3.

earthquake was to have been the day the keel of the *Snark* was to be cast.⁴ The goods needed could no longer be ordered in San Francisco and often times had to come through New York. Workmen became hard to get due to the urgent demands upon their abilities in rebuilding a demolished city. Wages soon soared skyward. Supplies sent by rail were lost in the sea of freight cars of supplies sent to assist the ruined city. This certainly posed a difficult obstacle to the building of the *Snark*.

It was during this time of delay that Martin came to know the Londons. He was able to get to know them better and he was fortunate to have the opportunity. He was like a big schoolboy; generous, frank, and even good natured. Charmain Kittridge London was similar to Martin in her personality and she was merely a grown-up schoolgirl. Martin soon found her to be a competent comrade as she displayed an ability equal to that of any man in their work. He expressed an appreciation of her as there was little to be done on board the ship that she could not or would not do.⁵

This adventure would provide Martin with later found blueprints for success that he would borrow from Jack London. He discovered the love of adventure was to be his life's work and that film offered him, the photographer, the same success that writing offered Jack London.⁶ Martin would have a wife that was capable of not only holding her own in any given situation, but was beyond that as she contributed greatly to the success of the endeavor. He would also write about their work, travels, and adventure for

⁴Jack London, Cruise of the Snark (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), 337.

⁵Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas, 18.

⁶Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 50.

income and interest. The combination would later prove to be as successful for Mr. and Mrs. Martin Johnson as it had been for Mr. and Mrs. Jack London.

The Snark finally was ready, despite all the production delays, and sailed on April 23, 1907.⁷ The initial trip to the Hawaiian Islands was difficult as the ship proved hard to handle, if not impossible, and very difficult to bring about. All aboard found themselves susceptible to great bouts of seasickness. In fact, Martin often was so sick as to spend days on end in his bunk. He tried several stints at cooking, his first ending in a meal which consisted entirely of onions, to little success.

The trip to the South Seas, after several months in Hawaii would cover a number of islands. They went to Molokai, the Marqueses islands, the Society islands which consisted of Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, Bora Bora, the Samoan islands, Fiti, New Hebrides, the Solomons, and finally Australia. Martin took many pictures of the islands and the inhabitants while Jack wrote a book, Martin Eden, several magazine articles, and short stories. Martin often printed his photographic pictures up till midnight. He gained great attention to detail in his new found art of picture taking which could later be applied to his chosen profession. He and Jack obtained numerous artifacts by trading and as gifts. Martin sent a great deal of those home to his father and they would later be incorporated at this theater, Snack II, in Independence. Martin found that his photographic supplies often spoiled in the humidity of the South Seas and required great attention to its protection in order to avert that awful situation. While Martin was busy in

⁷Ibid., 47.

this manner, he also was occupied in adventures of which he had only dreamed. He discovered the little used ukulele in Hawaii which he would have Osa use extensively in her later South Sea songs. Now he was struck by the contrast with Java as a modern South Sea city and the raggedness of the interior people which were so primitive. He discovered the people who were in fact cannibals, not only acted like animals but were in fact only one degree removed from animals in his opinion. They buried their old alive once they passed an age where they could still contribute. They had a practice of kicking out the teeth of their brides as a part of the wedding ceremony and were little, if any, in Martin's opinion, removed from apes.⁸

Martin endured difficulties which would have scared off men with lesser appetites for adventure. The trip not only saw natives which could and would kill for the mere blood sport of such killing, but also saw other dangers. There were centipedes which exceeded six inches in length, cockroaches which were so thick they crawled over the crew at night and had to be skimmed from the coffee and chased from the food.⁹ He contracted a yaw (which was an infection caused by exposure to poisonous coral by a scratch while swimming) on his right foot. It was a large sore, big as a dollar. He stated that it had started and was eating right into his leg. He found no medicine aboard which was capable of cure and knew there was no doctor for thousands of miles (or at least that

⁸Alice Cecilia Cooper and Charles A. Palmer, "Martin Johnsons: Bringing Maps to Life," *Twenty Modern Americans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 29.

⁹Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas, 285.

they knew of). He saw his ankle as well as his leg swell to twice the normal size.¹⁰ The accepted treatment at that time for medication of yaws was an application of Permanganate of potash which was any one of the salts of permanganic acid. This was potassium carbonate or hydroxide used to maintain osmotic pressure and ion balance. The other medical option for treatment was Blue Vitriol which was a copper sulfate and a stimulant uretic.¹¹ Martin at this time also contracted malaria which would have life-long effects upon his health. Martin felt this horse doctoring was the best they could do in view of where they were and the medicines available to them.¹² He felt the crew as extremely invalid at the time. It was also at this same time that Jack developed a new trouble. His hands began to swell up, they turned very sore and the skin peeled. His nails became so hard they could not be cut, but had to be filed instead. His feet were in the same condition. No one had seen anything like it before. To add to his worries, Jack was notified at the same time that his finances, due to a panic on Wall Street, were in serious difficulty. The combination of these problems forced Jack and Charmian to return to America to clear up both.

The absence of the Londons left Martin with a great deal of time available. He had two and one half months in Tahiti. This fortunate instance allowed him to work with three moving picture men sent from Paris by Pathe Freres to make pictures of the

¹⁰Ibid., 290-91.

¹¹Clarence Wilbur Taber, Tabers Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary, 2nd Edition (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1944).

¹²Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas, 313.

reception of the American fleet at Sidney, Australia. They had now finished that work and sought to make a cinemagraphic record of cannibals.¹³ Martin was entranced with the big professional motion picture cameras for they were the initial ones to which he was exposed. He hung around and asked many, many questions about the operation of such equipment. Before the men could take the pictures in the Solomon islands they fell victim to the damp climate with island fever and had to recover before the trip was started. Their chemicals used to develop the movie film soon deteriorated in the tropical atmosphere. Martin was able to loan them some of the chemicals used on the ordinary films he used which allowed them to continue until they had to return to Australia. They gave Martin the focus of filming the natives of the South Seas in a more complete fashion in order to bring their story to life for the world.

Martin later entered the Sydney Homeopathic Hospital for medical treatment to heal his yaws and island fever. He came out much improved on that account. It was here that doctors operated to remove a testicle as they operated to remove swelling and venous drainage to it was cut.¹⁴ In late December 1908, Jack and Charmian came out of the hospital. They arrived in Sydney on November 14, 1908.¹⁵ They all went together to the great Johnson-Burns prize fight. Jack was writing up a newspaper first hand account of the fight, and Martin commented that the Australians were the bigger Negro haters than even were the Americans. After the fight, Jack gave Martin the original manuscript of

¹³Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 59.

¹⁴Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 40.

¹⁵Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas, 325.

his report of the fight. Martin would treasure it as one of only two writings ever given out by Jack London.¹⁶ It was at this point that the Londons would leave again permanently. After two years away on the adventure, Martin returned. He was the only member of the *Snark* to complete the circuit of the globe, returning via the Suez Canal and European Continent.¹⁷

Martin returned to his father's jewelry store in Independence and eventually successfully opened the *Snark II* with Charlie Kerr the druggist in town. This was in the summer of 1909.¹⁸ While Martin initially had difficulty overcoming his shyness, he eventually gave impressive lectures coupled with a slide show of soon gained renown to detail his adventures in the South Seas with the Jack Londons. This would mark a change in Osa's future as well as Martin's future. She would now be tethered to his destiny. They would always be going and seeing. Home to the pair would now quite literally be a schooner in the black Congo, or a safari tent, maybe even Paris or even an apartment on Fifth Avenue in New York, but always a place from which to be going.¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., 341.

¹⁷Alice Cecilia Cooper and Charles A. Palmer, Bringing Maps to Life, 28.

¹⁸Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 65.

¹⁹Ibid., 9.

CHAPTER III

SOUTH SEAS HONEYMOON

Osa would learn a great deal about herself and her relationship to Martin while on their honeymoon in the South Seas. She would discover that Martin's work would devour great amounts of his time and energy, both of which were precious commodities. This would in essence require Martin's complete devotion to his work thus rendering him a workaholic with an attendant lack of attention to Osa. She would accept this diminished relationship and find even greater ways to contribute to their team. She would now appear in front of the camera and accept her secondary role in an acquiescence to Martin. She understood the nature of their work, the savagery inherent to it and she learned the most enlightening part of all the discoveries made on this journey: Osa also loved the thrill of adventure. This discovery by her would ultimately yield the most positive results for the pair. Osa would contribute to Martin's work by relieving him of the drudgery of attending to monotonous camp details, a chore he did not like. She would allow him a greater freedom by accompanying him on the journeys and by not pressuring him to accomplish her life's goals. In this manner, Osa gave greater emphasis to his life and work because it became her life and work.

Martin and Osa lived for a short while in Independence, Kansas. Martin tried very hard to settle down and live with Osa like other normal couples, but this was not to be possible. He finally told Osa of his need to leave Independence before she had them

anchored to that place.¹ This came out after Martin picked Osa up from what had been a three week stay with her mother in Chanute. The two of them were quite close and this closeness represented a threat to Martin.² He explained to Osa his desire to go to the South Seas and make films of the islanders in order to make a film history of the people. They began this attempt at achieving Martin's new goal by selling their wedding presents to finance their start.³ This move would clearly have distressed other wives with less confidence in their husband. Osa seldom questioned Martin's intent or approach. The first place they went to begin making their show of his lecture and slides, coupled with her singing, was Humboldt, Kansas. This engagement netted them the exciting sum of eight dollars.⁴ Humboldt netted them such a small amount that they left for Kansas City and tried to enter the vaudeville circuit. The next two years saw them all over the country in little towns and cities trying to raise the \$4,000 Martin felt was necessary in order to finance their expedition. They had even slept on pool tables at Blackhawk, Colorado because they did not have enough money for a hotel room. They were required to wait for the room until the daylight hours when the men finally vacated the premises. They had to endure countless odors of tobacco smoke, staled by endless days of it, perspiration, and God only knows what else. The fatigue would soon set in to their bodies and Osa later claimed the borrowed hotel blankets made the pool tables as

¹Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 11.

²Osa Johnson, "My Home in the African Blue," Good Housekeeping 78 (January 1924): 49.

³Alyesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 143.

⁴Chanute Tribune, 12 June, 1932.

luxuriously comfortable as the most expensive suite to the young couple.⁵ They finally landed a job in Vaudeville and by April of 1914 they began to rub elbows with the likes of Chic Sale, Will Rogers, and Harry Lauder who were big stars of the circuit. This was the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit. For three weeks they played New York. Martin got bored with the life and finally managed to land a job as a technician with the Orpheum's expanding motion-picture department while in New York. Once he had learned as much as he could about the technical aspects of cinematography such as how to shoot it, develop it, and take care of it, then he and Osa were suddenly ready for that first trip to the South Seas. The stars they had lived and worked around actually helped to finance their trip.⁶ This was after Martin once threatened to return the pair to Independence when he found out Osa had sublet their apartment in her attempt to help with their finances. "We're going back to Independence," he shouted. "If you think I'll let you turn into a scrubwoman, you'd better think again!"

"And if you think that because you married me you can't do the things you did before you married me, you'd better think again, too!"⁷ Osa was showing herself to be not only a partner in their marriage but a voting partner as well.

Now for the first time Osa understood completely that while Martin did indeed love her, she was the one who would have to adjust and adopt a new set of values. Her dream of a home and family would vanish. She was well aware that Martin would lose the

⁵Osa Johnson, *I Married Adventure*, 97.

⁶Douglas Preston, "Shooting in Paradise," *Natural History* (December 1984): 15.

⁷Osa Johnson, *I Married Adventure*, 101.

spark from his life if he were forced to work in his father's store.⁸ Although they had improved their standard of living, Osa also worked the Vaudeville circuit (where she became known as the Tomboy of Honolulu. The audiences were not sure if her work was gibberish or not, while she assured them they were the real Queen Liluo Keeona stuff).⁹ They together decided in May of 1917 to head to San Francisco as a departure point for their South Seas adventure. Martin talked to Osa extensively of the London's. He stated not only the respect he had for them, but in unspoken words he stated his full respect for Charmian as a fine wife to Jack.¹⁰ They spent several days with the London's, saw the Bay area including Oakland, met Charlie Chaplin and finally left June 5th for the South Seas. On the ocean journey Martin expressed concern about exposing Osa to the perils of the journey and the people. Osa simply set an end to the notion of a taboo on white women in the area. She said that she was going where her husband went, regardless.¹¹

They reached Sydney, Australia on June 26th desperately low on funds. They possessed but three cameras, one was simply a hand-cranked motion-picture camera, and two Graflexes.¹² Martin had underestimated their expenses. They were able to secure a theater engagement of several weeks and soon replenished their money supply with

⁸Aylesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 144.

⁹Chanute Tribune, 28, September, 1915 for the Seventy-five Years Ago Column

¹⁰Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 105.

¹¹Osa Johnson, Bride in the Solomons, 2.

¹²Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 8.

\$5,000. They knew this would be sufficient, with prudent utilization, to last for at least two years in the Solomons. Martin still had to convince the territorial authorities to allow Osa to enter the area for they had great reservations about allowing a woman, even one as intent and dedicated as Osa, to go among the savages. There are over 900 islands in the South Sea Solomons alone and many of them possess tribes which still ate Long Pig. This was true even though the law forbid the practice. They had long established traditions which saw men sell their children for tobacco if they were unable to marry them off or if the woman was no good at work. He might even sell her off for Kai-Kai (eating on Malekula) to another tribe. This was related to Martin by Mr. Bell who was the Malaita commissioner. They would visit a goodly number of islands in their attempt to photograph a cannibalistic ritual in progress. They went to Paulau, New Georgian, San Ysabel, San Christobal, Santa Anna, Vao, the New Hebrides, Malakula, Guadalcanal, Savo, Tulagi and for their sought after photographs, Leueneua. On their first visit to a headhouse which housed skulls and other human bones, Osa stated that it seemed very silly to her. She thought grown men being so secretive as little boys over a grass shed full of skulls was petty. She also felt a need to crack their repression of women who were not allowed to enter those grass headhouses.¹³ That was not possible because she and Martin had made an agreement to always treat every primitive person with respect and to never knowingly violate taboos and as such to be observers and not reformers.¹⁴

¹³Osa Johnson, Bride in the Solomons, 54.

¹⁴Ibid., 55.

They soon found the lucrative business of blackbirding was a cause of much of the hostility aimed at whites in the area. Blackbirding was the practice of stealing natives by ships captains to sell elsewhere for slave labor and was common in the area and often led to the murder of whites for that reason. It was usually not reported because many of the natives were not kidnapped as often as they were either competitors of the chiefs or disliked for various reasons and sold to the unsuspecting captains to rid the chief of them as a source of trouble. Another practice of the area was the collection of copra, or dried coconuts which was the principal trade of the Solomons. The Johnsons paid a visit to the plantation of the Hardings who were associated with the Lever Brothers soap manufacturers. It was here that Osa took her best dress from the duffel bag to wear to dinner that evening. It was a checked gingham-taffeta blue and white with an organdy collar and cuffs. It completely fell apart in her hands. It appeared to have been cut from top to bottom as with scissors. Martin took one look and determined that silverfish were responsible. It represented Osa's last link to respectability and forced her to eat dinner in her breeches as others were forced to do.¹⁵

Osa was allowed to go fishing on the island and was back in her element. She caught sea bass, swordfish, snapper, mackerel, and rock cod. She also caught other things which were very queer looking and new to her. She caught fish which were scarlet but turned dead white upon leaving the water and were quite poisonous. She was stung by a scorpion fish which was reddish in color with dark and alternate light cross

¹⁵Ibid., 67.

markings. It had long sharp spines which were half as long as the fish itself, and looked so Strange that Osa felt compelled to pick it up to examine it herself. The sting caused such a swelling that she gave herself a stiff treatment of ammonia followed by hot water and permanganate of potash.¹⁶

Osa observed the natives in this area had a peculiar method of poisoning their spear points. They would thrust their point into a decomposing corpse and leave it there. Several days later when the process was finished, the weapon would finish off anything it struck. If the barbed point didn't make a ragged enough wound, the poison would finish off the victim.¹⁷ It was during this time that Osa commented upon Martin taking pictures of many naked, native women. She became quite sensitive to this and Martin had only to assure her that he did not find the women attractive. He categorically stated that he found them repulsive with their adornments of necklaces, anklets of teeth, shells, and bracelets. This put Osa's mind at ease and the matter was completely forgotten.

The governor of Tulagi, Mr. Bermays, arranged for them to go with Mr. Markham for a bodyguard and guide of the area as well as ships skipper. This he did even though Martin threatened to cut loose from official sanction and go native if they forced a straw boss bodyguard on them. While they awaited the arrival of Mr. Markham, Osa did her best to cultivate her domestic side. They had been away over a year now and Martin had tasted few of his favorite dishes. Now with the opportunity and time to do this, Osa

¹⁶Ibid, 96.

¹⁷Ibid., 119.

began to cook for Martin all of his favorite meals. She fixed floating island pudding. She prepared fried chicken and lamb stew with dumplings. She baked cakes and experimented with nature foods. She also made their house look presentable enough to welcome the governor and others in for dinner.¹⁸ It was during this time that Osa prepared herself to assist Martin with their respective health issues by asking a nurse and hospital doctor to help her learn enough medicine to take care of them. They agreed and began by letting her visit the patients with the medical staff. They also gave her a quick first-aid course. Later they allowed her to assist in the application of dressings and other treatments. She became an unofficial nurse. Hours each day were spent with them at the hospital. The doctor even made up a special kit for them to take which included splints and medicines, as well as bandages for them to take along.¹⁹ Perhaps the most valuable thing he gave her was the advice to treat the natives with first aid only. He indicated she should not use drugs as natives had not seen them and would probably have some reactions to them. He felt that if this happened, Osa would be blamed for using magic. He also felt that the Johnsons would possibly be killed for their troubles. She faithfully worked with the doctor to learn the proper treatment for ailments such as infections, ringworm. Leprosy, elephantiasis, smallpox, influenza, venereal disease, abscesses, lung diseases plus a host of skin infections.²⁰ She learned that ringworm had to be treated with the strongest thing at her disposal, so she stocked up on tincture of iodine for that.

¹⁸Ibid., 122.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 123.

Coral cuts could be poisonous resulting in yaws. At some point, poison vines and vegetation could possibly be worse than home's poison ivy and it also required lotions or salves.

Once Markham appeared, their voyage began anew. Their hardships were many. It wasn't long before they found weevils in the crackers aboard ship. When she complained to Markham, he teased her about being squeamish. She felt he was entertaining and he amused her, but she also saw a side to him which allowed him, when excited, to swear more than anybody she had ever heard. She suggested the volleys of profanity were like high art, at least in her opinion. He appeared to her to impress the crew with these harangues. She also advanced the theory that his crew obeyed him more from affection than fear. She also learned why the natives loved Markham. While he was prone to curse them, they knew where his heart was. He never struck them to enforce an order or to obtain results. She conceded that to her this was the essence of breeding, good judgement and self-discipline. All thrashings were verbal.²¹ This implication would not be lost on the Johnsons as they adopted this philosophy with their own workers later on in Africa.

The ship offered little in the way of necessities. Osa had no cabin available in which to sleep. Martin slept on deck among the cargo, while the boys slept in the forward hold, but Osa was bothered by the ship tossing her about onto the sharp edges of the cargo.

²¹Ibid., 129.

She finally decided that she would sleep on deck on the flat surface of the hatch. She had them tie her to it each night to insure she did not get washed overboard.²²

The pictures taken by Martin up to this point were good portraits, but he still wanted the elusive cannibal feast pictures. They decided to try the islands of Malekula next. The Big Numbers, so named because of their clothes made of large pandus fiber called nambas were on this island. They were considered dangerous enough that Martin and Osa stayed on the neighboring island of Vao with more docile members of a tribe called the Little Numbers. The religious leader of the island was an elderly Catholic named Father Prin. He recommended that Osa stay away from the Big Numbers because of their savagery. It was decided at this time by Martin that Osa would perform best in front of the camera not on the view finder side. He felt that the image of a flaxen-haired American woman who was surrounded by cannibals and headhunters would be a sure fire ticket to arouse American audiences to rush to theaters. She also helped Martin in other ways with audiences. She was often able to assist him by coaxing other women to pose for him. She was most fortunate in her ability to grasp new languages; her understanding was almost immediate, and she quickly picked up Beche-de-mer which was the predominate language in the South Seas. She felt there was something which was simply fascinating about their strange language. She liked it so much that she and Martin often spoke it at home without the presence of natives. Osa even found herself thinking in this

²²Ibid., 132.

patois used in the tropics.²³ Osa was willing to assume the risks of challenging circumstances in Martin's work and that allowed their work to bind the two of them together. She did not aspire to equality in their relationship. She was faithful and dependable to Martin and his wishes. She cherished the values of her time where Charmian had challenged them. It would become, in time, a professional relationship which would be strengthened by their adherence to traditional roles. They collaborated as Mr. and Mrs. Martin Johnson the team rather than Martin or Osa the individuals.

The Malekula became the site of their most intense confrontation with natives. They landed their craft and were surrounded by Negapate's men. He was the leader of the Big Numbers tribe and was so frightening that they both hesitated to continue, once confronted by him. He was extremely black with large features and rippling muscles. They immediately felt he possessed the cunning and power of a predatory animal. He wore four gold rings which were probably obtained from the fingers of his victims.²⁴ They took many photographs as well as motion-picture film of the tribe for which they paid tobacco to Negapate. When they readied to leave, Negapate shook hands with Osa, but instead of releasing her, he held firmly with one hand, then began to run the other hand over her. He pinched her and prodded her profusely. In that instant, the Johnsons were fortunately saved by the timely arrival of a British gun-boat which was purely coincidental. They ran to the beach for their boat and left quickly.

²³Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 130.

²⁴Martin E. Johnson, Cannibal-Land: Adventures with a Camera in the New Hebrides (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921): 17.

The pair of explorers were again off to attempt to locate the cannibal feast which had been so elusive. Their photographic expedition and work finally concluded on the island of Tongoa, a stones throw from Espiritu Santo, and only forty miles from Vao.²⁵ It was here than they did finally capture the film of natives roasting human remains where Martin was also able to capture a head which had been impaled on a stick and left roasting in the ashes of a fire. It would now be time to leave the islands.

Upon their return to America, Osa and Martin used the film they had taken, along with the still photographs, to make a film history of the islands and people they had visited in the South Seas. It resulted in a film entitled *Cannibals of the South Seas*. The year was 1918. They soon toured with the film and lectured on their adventures but only as a means to raise funds for a return trip to the South Seas for more extensive work. The film would prove to be so successful that they returned to the island of Negapate in the next year. They would arrive with a compliment of three schooners with sixty-five trunks, boxes, and cases. Their crew consisted of twenty-six armed and trustworthy natives and three white men. This time Negapate behaved beautifully.²⁶

This second trip had begun on April 8, 1919 when Osa and Martin left San Francisco to return to the land of the Big Numbers and Negapate. Their intent, along with their increased numbers, was to spend more time with the trip and to more fully record the camp and lives of the natives in general. After their arrival, they went into the hills with

²⁵Ibid., 187-89.

²⁶Alice Cecilia Cooper and Charles A. Palmer, Martin Johnson: Bringing Maps to Life, 31.

the natives to visit their camp. Negapate became an almost constant companion to Osa. He would send her small gifts and food daily which convinced her of his good intentions. Osa and Martin would later discover a small, thatched native house remotely located from the village. Once they entered the house they found it to be a skull house full of the remains of passed ancestors and victims. This caused a great alarm for their safety. They knew enough of the rituals of natives to understand that the hut was both sacred and taboo to anyone, especially a woman, not a member of the village. The duration of this second expedition was eight months and it contained hardships previously not encountered by the Johnsons. On the island of Ysabel, Osa would have her servant Friday bring in plenty of fresh spring water to fill her canvass bathtub. It had been little used to this point, but she needed to give her hair a good scrub. She liked to wash her hair more often but that was often impossible because of a lack of clean water and the time which were both precious commodities in the bush. She stated that while she sometimes went weeks without being able to wash her hair, she was in constant turmoil over it. She could not possibly understand how the natives could go for years or forever without ever shampooing their hair.²⁷

Martin was constantly at odds with the elements during their second expedition. He would often work from three o'clock in the morning until sunrise, and after a hard days work in debilitating heat which could prove to be particularly agonizing. It was not uncommon to go through this exhausting schedule of work only to see the entire result of

²⁷Osa Johnson, Bride in the Solomons, 192.

the work ruined by sheer accident. The development of film often took forty-eight hours instead of forty-eight minutes and was always subject to prevailing conditions where tiny insects, or sand or even pollen might be blown against the films by wind and embedded deep into the film gelatin. Films were sometimes even subject to mildew which could also wreck the efforts of several days.²⁸ Of course this kind of work required a dedication which insured Martin became a workaholic. This was a path he chose in his love of work and his chosen profession but the long range implications for Osa, a white woman virtually alone in the wilds, were tenuous at best.

The practices and customs of the New Hebrides were something to which the Johnsons never became accustomed, even though they tried not to intervene with their particular brand of moral interpretation. They saw old people buried alive once they had lost the ability to contribute to the tribe. They once witnessed a barbaric ritual where a young girl, sold as a wife by her family, ran from the hated, new husband. The men of the village had gathered in order to pass judgment on her. At this time, a stone was heated in a fire until it became white hot. Then four men would hold the girl while a fifth man would place the stone in the hollow of her knee, then he would draw her leg back until her heel could touch her thigh and bind them together. They would force the girl to leave the stone for one hour while it slowly burned into her body. Then and only then was she released. They now were certain she would no longer attempt to run from her husband. While Osa was sickened by the ordeal, she and Martin both understood that

²⁸Martin E. Johnson, Cannibal-Land, 104.

to attempt any form of assistance for the girl would be to issue their own death warrants. The desire to strangle the man was only suppressed by Martin as he realized that the men were obviously savages on the scale of his own ancestors hundreds of thousands of years ago.²⁹

The Johnsons by now had spent eight months in the New Hebrides island chain and had exposed more than twenty-five thousand feet of film along with about one thousand still photographs. Their desire to record the life of the fast disappearing primitive tribal races of the earth was realized. They now had a net of fifty thousand feet of film for use in their feature film *Captured by Cannibals*. They had actually taken three times that amount of film but the hazards of that damp, difficult environment claimed a heavy toll. The main benefit earned from the trip was a discovery by Osa that she loved that type of work.³⁰

From that point forward, Osa and Martin would be inseparable in their work. They would be incapable of working independently of the other as their professional careers were intertwined upon the success of the pair. Successful marriages seldom had its partners so dependent upon the other. Few marriages worked as successfully as this one.

Osa and Martin would next take an expedition to Borneo, leaving Sydney, Australia in February of 1920. Their film company, Robertson-Cole, who was responsible for distribution of their films, expected this one also to be about headhunters due to the

²⁹Ibid., 108.

³⁰Mariam L. Mih, *Safari*, 11.

popularity of the first Johnson film. It would again successfully employ that theme, but to a larger extent it also included extraordinary footage of elephants, honeybears, gibbon apes, and orangutans which also graced the dark Borneo jungle. While Martin was arranging their first trip into the interior and trying to learn Malay, Osa was busy cleaning and rearranging their house as if they would be there for at least a year. She also took to shooting snakes in her garden with her .22 rifle. She tried to learn Malay in the evening while daubing her elbows to relieve the mosquito bites she suffered. She did this with a swab of cotton dipped in kerosene oil. She discovered that if she would daub this on her face, and arms as well, she could successfully ward off the insects.³¹

Once they reached the interior village of Sungai, Osa arranged to have a houseboat built for Martin. She had seen him work for countless hours in the Kinabatangan River and she wanted to improve their living conditions. She hired natives, led by Chief Hadji, to construct the houseboat to be ready upon their return from the headwaters for their return to Lamang. The houseboat even included a propane powered refrigerator on its front deck.³² It would be at the edge of that village that the couple found the pet that would become their surrogate child in the coming years. The rare gibbon ape was to be named Kalowatt and they bought it for three dollars as Osa's pet. They also owned, at that time, a half grown orangutan named Bessie and two cockatoos.³³

³¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 164.

³²Chanute Tribune, 12 January 1987.

³³Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 13.

After only a year there, they were ready to return to America. On their way home, in London and virtually broke, Martin told Osa they were down to their last five dollars. He had been in this predicament before but never with a wife to look after. Osa suggested they contact *American Express* to check on hoped for payments from their movie *Cannibals of the South Seas*. Martin indicated they had their address and should have already sent any money available. Osa questioned Martin as to how they could find the explorers since they were all over the globe. With that thought in mind, Martin contacted them and discovered proceeds of \$10,000 in his name from their picture. He then gave one thousand pounds (approximately equal to \$10,000) to Osa and told her he did not want to see her until she had spent every penny.³⁴

³⁴Osa Johnson, *I Married Adventure*, 188.

CHAPTER IV

AFRICA

Osa would enter into a new position of responsibility in their photographic record keeping of Africa. She would now be responsible for shooting enough animals to keep their porters supplied with meat. While this initially was more the result of Martin's inability with a gun until she would later be classified as a marksman. This change of responsibility also required her to step behind the camera in order to protect Martin's life, which was an ability Martin took for granted and never questioned as he supplied Osa with numerous opportunities to save his life. It would become the expected rule with him.

While Osa exhibited the qualities of a dominant hunter and partner to Martin, she also cultivated her feminine side while in the bush. Osa was overtly aware that Martin might lose sight of her as his wife if she possessed only the qualities of a great white hunter. She not only practiced her beauty treatments, she elevated them to an art form never before witnessed in Africa by any woman.

This era would see additional efforts by Osa to assist Martin in his work. She would cultivate a new found ability to make photographic records of more mundane animals thus freeing Martin to concentrate his efforts on other more vitally needed areas. This oftentimes required her to great risks, alone at secluded, remote waterholes in conditions which were extremely challenging to her. While she professed a fear of the practice, she never asked Martin to exclude her from it. This role of female photographer was seldom

credited to Osa. She was not only one of the first females to perform this work, but was one of the only females of this era to perform as a photographer. She always felt the need to allow Martin to determine her role as his wife and partner.

While this short time in Africa allowed Osa to establish homes for short intervals, she was quite openly up to the task. She established homes with gardens no matter how short the planned interval for the couple. In her mind, the establishment of a residency could only be validated by the planting of a garden. Her ability to add a little beauty to the world wherever she was became one of her quiet strengths and led indirectly to the improvement of Martins world.

The travels by Osa and Martin led them down paths which seemed destined to forever change their lives. Such was the path which saw Martin become a member in 1921 of the Explorer's Club. This induction was based upon their travels and experiences in the South Seas and Borneo. It would be in this club that they would meet Carl Akeley, famous explorer, sculptor, and naturalist as well as inventor. It would be Akeley who would convince Martin to travel to Africa to photograph the rapidly vanishing herds of game before they could be snuffed out by the advance of civilization. Martin decided to indeed make this his life's work and Osa complied with his wishes as she usually did. The Museum of Natural History in New York City could help sponsor the Johnsons in exchange for photographs and film footage to help them supplement their existing displays and museum pieces. The history of African animal photography was that of few men over the years. Lord Delamere, Mr. E. N. Buxton and C. G. Schillings work at the close of the nineteenth century in German East Africa all contributed the first

photographic evidence of the plethora of animals in that land. The initial successful work in night time flashlight photography was conducted by Lord Dugmore in British East Africa. The advance to motion pictures in Africa was led by Paul Rainey. His waterhole pictures were a revelation to a thirsty public. After Rainey came James Barnes with Cherry Kearton to improve upon that photographic journal. Birds of the Nile pictures were produced by Bengt Berg. These predecessors of the Johnsons all combined to produce photographs, which while lower in quality, created a real interest from the public with a need to achieve a more lasting record for posterity. No where was there a mention of finer photography in Africa. It was at this juncture, coupled with the fear that civilization would not allow Africa to remain a zoo for the world, that the American Museum of Natural History longed to create a life history of the continent.¹

Martin and Osa left for British East Africa for the first time in the summer of 1921. They took a ship at Naples, and in seventeen days arrived at Mombassa on Africa's east coast. This was a more leisurely and romantic voyage and offered them a slower pace which they seemed to greatly enjoy. The trip from Naples would wind from Port Said through the Suez Canal, to the Red Sea and down the east coast of Africa to Mombassa. Once there, they would take a train, complete with running water in each compartment car.

This train left Mombassa at 4:30 P.M. and traveled the three hundred and thirty miles to Nairobi, arriving there by 10:30 A. M. the next day, averaging only eighteen

¹Carl E. Akeley, "Martin Johnson and His Expedition to Lake Paradise," Natural History 24 (May 1924): 286-87.

miles per hour during the journey.² Both Osa and Martin were there to shoot animals on film. There was an unspoken hatred by the two of men who slaughtered animals for the sake of sport. They felt the abundant wildlife which roamed those great plains could be ideal for their photography. They were sure the plains offered the advantage of a full sweep to Martin's camera. They were to be proven wrong in that assumption.

Nairobi lies three hundred and thirty miles from Mombassa and is located near the equator. The language primarily used in the bush was Swahili. The altitude there is six thousand feet above sea level, consequently the mornings and evenings were quite cool. They would also be accompanied by Martin's father who was seventy years old at the time. He had been inspired at the time by Carl Akeley's descriptions of lions in Africa. Much to everyone's surprise, including his own, he decided to accompany his son and daughter-in-law on their journey. He also offered financial backing to Martin which proved to be the initial portent of legitimacy of Martin's work by his father. This opportunity also supplied Martin with an important ingredient in the form of a 'good old fashioned dose of self confidence.' John Johnson soundly doctored Martin with this blend of belief anytime Martin expressed doubt about their venture, or his capabilities. The elder Johnson constantly supported Martin and let him know that he believed in his work and more importantly, that he believed in Martin.³ This period of time was judged as the golden age of photographic exploration. Admiral Byrd would conquer the poles at

²Ibid., 35.

³Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 14.

this time, William Beebe explored the depths of the oceans and the Piccards took to the air in balloons.⁴

The expedition was also taken by Kalowatt, the silver gibbon ape, who would accompany the Johnsons everywhere leading to their distinction world-wide as the people with the ape. In Nairobi the Johnsons found servants who were to be with them for many years, some as long as eleven years off and on. They would develop a great relationship with these men and a mutual respect would grow between them. This respect would slowly diminish Martin's prior tendency to employ racial sight-gags and slurs in their movies. As Martin's respect for the people and their societies increased, the racial balance became more even-handed.⁵ They soon found that every native which worked for a white had to follow certain rules. The natives were responsible to have on their possession a kapandi which was a bit of paper usually contained in a little tin case which bore their name and name of their tribe, along with their father's name, name of their last employer, and the reason for the native leaving that employ.⁶

They would employ a native named Jerramani as their headman. He came with the history of lion hunts with Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. That in itself was enough of a recommendation for Martin to hire him. He was able to exercise control of their safaris. Martin often commented that to treat an African fairly, not to be indulgent but to be fair, would invariably obtain his affection and his services. This practice would follow the

⁴Paul F. Long, Martin Johnson: "Pioneer Photographer," Kansas KanHistorique (October 1980): 8-9.

⁵Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 202.

⁶Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails in Africa (USA: Grosset & Dunlap, 1924), 35.

Johnsons through all their years of exploration. They also hired a number of other blacks within an hour after their arrival in Nairobi. Many had letters of recommendation which were scarcely little more than left-handed compliments. Some employers stated they never saw the person steal, or that they were fairly good in their work. Since the Johnsons were unfamiliar with wages or divisions of labor in work in Africa, they sent all the natives home for a day while they sought employment advice. They would look favorably upon these black servants as their "happy and affectionate children".⁷

The Johnson's home in Nairobi was Osa's responsibility and opportunity to create a stir among the local white citizenry. Osa had two great flower-beds made and she set out a number of quick growing tropical flowers of red, white, and blue as if to indicate to everyone that while they were not at home in America, their home, wherever it might be, would be American.⁸ The white citizenry of Nairobi included a number who made use of the Johnson's developing facilities. This group included Major Duggamore, world famous photographer and explorer. He had taken some of the best still pictures ever taken of African animals. Carl Akeley also went there in the Johnsons absence to develop his pictures of gorillas which were the first and foremost taken of the animals. He would also leave Martin one of his cameras he developed for the taking of animal pictures which allowed the rapid removal and replacement of lenses of different focal lengths reducing the need for additional equipment. It helped to insure the success of

⁷Ibid., 31.

⁸Ibid., 31.

many quality photographs which might have ordinarily been missed due to lack of time to exchange lenses. An additional visitor who aided the Johnsons at Nairobi was Stanley Taylor who worked in the fingerprint department of the Bureau of Native Affairs. He was able to supply the Johnsons with useful information concerning natives and their ways. He also allowed Martin to store their negatives in the department vaults which were the only fire-proof vaults in Nairobi. The primary individual that visited the Johnsons at their home was Blaney Percival, a game warden, who assisted them in organizing their first safaris. He would assist them in the ways of the animals gained in his twenty years of experience as a game warden. He would also share with them the secret of Lake Paradise. This lake was in the animal Eden of Kenya colony. It was an unknown lake which was not on maps of the area and offered Martin and Osa an opportunity to study animals previously undisturbed or hunted by man. They were ecstatic about the opportunity. While difficult, it was with great gentleness that Blaney Percival convinced the pair to take exploratory ventures into the Athi plains around Nairobi in an attempt to allow them to determine their skill levels in living in the bush for extended periods of time without being too far removed from civilization if needed.⁹

For the first time in their careers as explorers, they found a developed need for firearms. In the South Seas and among mild mannered Borneo animals there was little need to kill. The great mammoths of Africa combined with the savagery of lions, tigers, and leopards concerned not only their safety, but their very lives. It was also determined

⁹Ibid., 45.

that on long safaris they could not possibly carry enough food to take care of their needs without killing to feed themselves and their porters. Their porters were only allowed to carry sixty pounds at one time and then for only fifteen miles per day. Posho, or ground corn meal, was a staple of their diet, but was to be subsidized by meat at intervals. This requirement forced the Johnsons to learn to hunt.

The African requirement to pass a drivers test proved to be a large hurdle for Osa. Martin passed, with little difficulty, a test which basically only required the operator to start and stop the car, go forward back, and to turn left or right. She nearly rammed a tree in forward, then backed the vehicle up against the wall of the police station, and when ordered to turn left, she accelerated straight ahead into a squad of askaris drilling on the parade ground. The police chief informed Osa that she passed as a requirement to get her to leave his area and to eliminate the risk of injury to his men.¹⁰

The Johnsons were collectively responsible for a loss of face by their native headmen at the onset of their safari. The only opportunity for achievement for a headman to acquire fame was for him to vicariously obtain it through his master. They were not allowed to use the weapons they were responsible to clean and carry. They were required therefore to acquit themselves with the glory earned by their bwanas. To accomplish this, their masters must be a good shot and must never run away from trouble. That allowed the headman to prove what a great man he was by his association with his bwana or bibi. Unfortunately, the Johnsons proved to be exceptionably poor

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

marksmen. This took even more glory away from Osa, for as memsahib, she already suffered from the degradation of being a woman. Martin could not bring down game reliably and Osa initially proved to be inadequate as well. Father Johnson merely used a .22 rifle which could not bring down large game in Africa. It took an encampment at the home of a big game hunter, John Walsh, to learn that white hunters could earn up to \$1,000 per month. This fact convinced Osa that since Martin would have his hands full taking pictures, she would have to be the one responsible to learn to shoot game to feed the natives, and more importantly, protect Martin as he photographed wild game.¹¹ It became obvious that they could not afford a white hunter and continue their work for long. They went out into the bush and shot at but did not kill any game. This inability to kill any game continued for many days with them more depressed each day. Osa finally brought down a kongi. They brought it back to camp only to learn that their porters were all Muslim and would not eat the meat because it had not been hallowed to make it acceptable to them and their religion. As they continued to hunt, they devised a further separation of duties between them. This squarely left all the task to Osa. She accepted this responsibility as clearly and as openly as she always did when Martin needed her. She not only learned to be a good enough shot to feed their men she became skilled enough to be considered a marksman, even among skilled white hunters. She was present at Martin's side to protect him from charging animals and was used less and less in front of the cameras because of that need to protect Martin. He developed supreme

¹¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 206.

confidence in her ability, often placing his own life in explicit jeopardy with the knowledge that Osa was capable of extreme marksmanship at the last possible second of a dangerous camera shoot in order to save his life from a rhino or elephant.

Camp life on the Athi plains, a mere thirty miles from Nairobi on good roads, involved also becoming accustomed to the camp routines and acceptance of old attitudes toward their black servants. It was accepted custom in Africa to beat servants to enforce discipline among the natives. Going back to his days in the South Seas, Osa assisted Martin as they developed a different tack with the natives. Martin refused to beat servants and managed to live through the few crisis that occurred without resorting to a sjambok whip. An example of this was displayed one evening early on in the safari. Mpishi, the cook, was told he needed to obtain wood for a fire to prepare their evening meal. When he refused, saying he was a cook not a porter boy, Martin's father offered to secure the wood they needed. Martin immediately explained to his father to leave it for the cook. He said tersely, while not meaning it that way, that when a white man lost face with a black then that was the day his authority was gone. The cook understood. Martin's intention and the wood was no longer a problem. Nor was Martin's authority questioned again.¹² It was also at this time that Martin advanced his photographic knowledge of African conditions as he discovered it was impossible to obtain successful photographs with long focus lenses between eleven and three o'clock P.M. This was due

¹²Ibid., 211.

to heat waves reflected from the earth which distorted the pictures due to the mid-day heat. It also made anything besides close-ups impossible.¹³

It coincided at this time that they discovered their inability to get the kind of pictures of animals they wanted. They could not get close enough to the animals to produce the facial shots or the scenes of activity which they were looking for in their new work. It was decided by Martin that he would build blinds with the natives in order to get close enough to the animals to photograph them. He was only successful in the dry season when animals were forced to use the waterholes that they employed in their work with blinds. Once the rainy season began, the animals could locate water without the fear of attending waterholes which had to be frequented by all animals.

Osa managed to more than perform the tasks expected of her in camp. She washed, ironed, cooked and served. She explored along with Martin over difficult and often times impossibly dense jungle trails. At the end of the day they both returned to camp and Martin was often seen dragging himself in a virtual state of exhaustion while Osa, who had performed precisely as he did on many days, had enough energy left to oversee the preparation of the evening meal. Osa was also known to manage boats, motion picture cameras, and learned to take still photographs in order to fill in records deemed incomplete by Martin. It was her additional wifely duty to keep the meat larder filled. To do this, Osa went hunting or fishing almost daily. She normally was accompanied by Ferraragi. She found many streams and rivers to be overpopulated with fish which the

¹³Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails, 100.

black population was not properly harvesting, if at all. She often spoke of being able to catch more than two hundred pounds of fish in a single day from the Eauso Nyiro river near the camp.¹⁴ This was before the river became the Lorian Swamp as it flowed into the Northern Frontier.

Their camp in the Chobe Hills contained a sleeping tent of green colored canvas with a roof lined with red to protect them from the sun. It had an extra roof or "fly" to form an air chamber to reduce the temperature and had a canvas floor. They had specially made army cots which were wider and longer than usual and good mattresses. The furnishings were completed with folding canvas chairs, and a folding writing table. They also had a little bathroom off of one end which was complete with a folding canvas tub. They both enjoyed coming in from the field at the end of the day to a hot bath, with water warmed over the fire prepared by Mpishi, their cook. In this way they relieved the tension of the long days in the field. They tried to enjoy as many luxuries as possible in the field. Another tent close by was the dining room which was little more than a huge, thick tarpaulin roof complete with open sides. The dining room also contained its own folding table. Just beyond the dining room was a storehouse, another green-colored tent and lastly, a cook house which was usually a hut built by the porters in the style to which the natives were accustomed.¹⁵

¹⁴Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 252.

¹⁵Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails, 229.

Osa dressed comfortably in the bush. She usually wore khaki shorts and shirts, a broad-brimmed double teraj hat with a chin strap to hold it on, golf stockings which came up to her knees, and stout mannish boots. While Martin felt this described the dress of a boy scout, he acknowledged that he preferred Osa in this attire. He knew she was a pretty woman. Osa would occasionally wear a bright colored scarf to dinner which she could not wear in the bush because it would tend to startle the animals more accustomed to drab earth tones. She made it a rule while in camp to keep her hair well brushed and also arranged. In addition, she vowed to maintain her nails and beauty treatment regimen as though they were in the heart of New York and not darkest Africa. The intent was clear, she wanted Martin to always see her look her best regardless of the circumstances.¹⁶ Osa knew she planned to hold Martin and felt the way to do that was to keep her looks and to dress as femininity as possible considering the circumstances. While she might wear khaki, she also managed to have a gay handkerchief in her pocket. While she admittedly wore an ordinary hunting hat she saw to it that it was tipped at a becoming angle.¹⁷ All those attentions to detail were Osa's way of insuring that Martin did not begin to think of her as just one of his crew.

Evenings around camp would see the Johnsons dole out the posho to the natives. They used a cup that held one pound. Each native would get two cupfuls if no meat were available and one cup if meat were available. The headmen and their personal servants

¹⁶Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 252.

¹⁷S. J. Woolf, "Quarter Century of Jungle Adventure," New York Times Magazine, (April 21, 1940): 17.

got rice. They had to keep a close watch on the food supply and give it out in such daily rations because they said the natives were such poor planners and because they lacked foresight. They were convinced that if they gave the boys a weeks ration at one time they would eat it completely up in two days time. They also knew that no matter how primitive the natives were, the boys could not and would not steal.¹⁸

Night time in camp would see Osa and Martin in their comfortable cots with up to six blankets tucked in around them. The nights in the bush could be quite cold and they worried about the boys who slept next to the fire on the cold ground with little more than a blanket to keep them warm. Yet the natives had lived their lives like that and required little else in the way of protection from the chill.

The daylight hours were filled from early morning, around 4:30 A.M. until dark, with work. They would pick a waterhole usually at least five miles from camp and twenty five miles, with luck, from any other water source. Martin directed the natives to build blinds, always more than one, in order to achieve the leeward side of animals to avoid detection by them. The blinds were built to Martins specifications which were an ever-changing and progressively improved lot. They were built for comfort for the occupant. This was more often than not Martin, but Osa was occasionally manning the blinds at other waterholes, oftentimes miles distant from Martin, and left alone to fend for herself. She indicated that she took a great many pictures from blinds which compared favorably with Martins. The result of her fast photographic attempt would be,

¹⁸Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails, 235.

according to Osa, a disaster of the first magnitude. She had returned to camp after an extremely eventful day with what she hoped would be a perfect film reel. Their return to Nairobi for development found she had photographed foot after foot of just that, the feet of legs attached to zebras, gazelles, and ostriches.¹⁹

The blinds were oftentimes used for entire days on end. The walls were mere piles of stone. This would conceal the photographer from the animals and sometimes required the natives to go miles away to find enough stones to build them. When the walls were completed, the inside was usually seven feet in diameter to accommodate Martin's frame and cot for comfort in the hot mid-day hours when picture taking was not productive. It was during this time that they were allowed to rest. Next came the thorn-bush roof. Canvas was once tried, but wind caused the canvas to flap scaring off the animals. The thorn-bush was superior also because it was a familiar sight to animals. Anything new to the landscape could keep the animals away for days on end. Too much thorn-bush also kept animals away because they feared it concealed lions.

The blinds were entered by a stone wall passageway which curved at right angles in order to keep out uninvited guests. There were no windows to let animals peer into it, only an opening about four feet long where the camera was placed. Branches and thorn-tree twigs were placed around this to minimize movement which could terrorize the animals. Movement within the blind required slow, deliberate moves instead of anything quick. Sharp sighted animals might desert a waterhole where quick movements might

¹⁹Osa Johnson, "My Home in the African Blue," Good Housekeeping 78 (January 1924): 170.

conceal the presence of a lion. The lens additionally posed the problem of reflective light in the late afternoon if facing the sun.

The days were long, but usually productive. The day began as early as three o'clock in the morning when Osa and Martin were accompanied by up to twenty natives to take their belongings which included easy chair, camera, guns, lunch and a few magazines. Once located on site, the Johnsons would be ready for the day's shoot. They usually shook flour in the air to determine the direction of the wind and took a blind leeward. The days were hot in the cramped quarters and more often than not produced high quality photos and film of the ever elusive game. At the end of each day, the procedure had to be reversed and everything had to be removed and taken back to camp to insure baboons didn't get into the blinds and wreck the equipment. On days when Osa did not attend one of the waterholes she would normally go off on a ten mile expedition to hunt for meat for the natives. She had to go off that far in order to insure her gunshots did not disturb the animals. If hunting did not interest her that day, she might trek to a nearby river to fish.²⁰

Martin practiced a determination to destroy each blind and return the area to the pristine condition in which it was originally found. The reason for this was to insure that animals were not stalked and hunted from blinds he had constructed from which to film them. Martin stated that the animals had earned their lives with the pictures he was able to take and that they had given him.²¹

²⁰Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails, 247-8.

²¹*Ibid.*, 257.

The most physically challenging aspect of the photography of wild animals also involved the most mentally challenging role as well. Osa was once filming rhinos and Martin was in apparent and obvious danger. She continued to film the episode because they had previously made a pact after a prior dangerous incident. The pact stated that whomever was at the camera would not leave their post and would continue filming the action until it was clearly obvious that the picture or the life of one of them had to be sacrificed. Martin had the highest regard for Osa's bravery and cool dispatch during these times of her visceral distress. He stated that "... for bravery and steadiness and endurance Osa is the equal of any man I ever saw. She is a woman through and through. There is nothing 'mannish' about her. Yet as a comrade in the wilderness she is better than any man I ever saw. She does not like rhinos. When she has nightmares, safe in our New York apartment, it is rhinos she sees coming up the fire-escape. But anyone who has ever met a rhino at close quarters will excuse her. Nobody loves a rhino."²²

Martin's father once objected to Martin taking Osa to a blind and leaving her alone. She professed to be scared to death (of hostile natives or wanderobos, the wildmen of the Northern Frontier. They were seldom seen, lived deep in the forest and only came out for game, wild honey or perhaps water.) In fact, she was more scared of them than she was of game. Father Johnson felt the risk of injury to an unguarded Osa was too great to allow the exposure to continue. He chided Martin verbally and told him that he categorically rejected the proposal to place Osa in harms way any longer. Martin proudly

²²Ibid., 271.

announced to his father that Osa was fully capable of taking care of herself and that he had every intention of allowing her to continue to be isolated from them to obtain photographs they needed in their work.²³

When the decision was made to finally attempt to reach the hidden lake that Blaney Percival had described to them, Osa and Martin began the arduous task of assembling the necessary supplies to make the trek. They faced an enormous challenge. They were looking for a small crater lake located in 160,000 square miles of remote desert. The most desolate possible region inhabited by mainly scrub brush. Most Kenya residents felt it impossible to locate a crater lake in the middle of a lush and dense tropical forest that was situated in the middle of some of the most extreme desert country in East Africa.²⁴ The distance to cover was approximately three hundred and thirty miles.²⁵ It involved a lengthy drive through the plains where no roads or bridges were established which would require them to ford smaller creeks north of Nairobi where they passed through the white settlement of Thika. The larger streams and rivers were an entirely different matter. Here the standard was increased requiring rafts for people and equipment where none previously existed. It was a time consuming, lengthy and dangerous undertaking. More than once people were nearly lost in turbulent water. When machines broke down they were required to be moved by either towing with the other vehicles where possible, and where not possible, to be moved by the hand power of

²³Osa Johnson, Four Years, 213.

²⁴Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land of the Lion, (New York: vantage Press, 1964), 145.

²⁵Osa Johnson, Four Years, 13.

the natives and the Johnsons, Osa and Martin alike. The price of success was always to unload these vehicles to reduce the weight of the things. Once accomplished, and the vehicles unstuck, the ritual of loading was again necessary in order to begin the journey anew. Nights on the expeditions were short as each person, native and white, had job responsibilities in order to attend to each and every detail of camp. Osa had personally devised a plan for organizing their chop boxes to increase the success of the cook on the trail. Each one was packed to weigh in at sixty pounds which was each porters limit. They also contained enough food for two people for one week. Osa indicated that to pack for an expedition required her to plan provisions two or three months in advance. She wasn't allowed to forget anything because there were no opportunities in the field to shop. Each porter was also required to know the contents so well that they knew exactly where to find it, and how to repack it to find it again the next time. This also kept the losses down when the boxes were lost or destroyed.²⁶ Osa also kept in each chop box a tinned tidbit or two. It also included a generous supply of dried vegetables. She used these in the field to flavor soup, or dill pickles to replace salad, or even dried fruits for pies.²⁷ At night they could hear frightened animals, terrified by hunting and marauding lions and other carnivores. It was not uncommon to hear the brays or other sounds of animals caught in this death sequence. If close enough, they even heard the ripping and

²⁶Fitzhugh Green, Martin Johnson: Lion Hunter, 161.

²⁷Osa Johnson, My Home in the African Blue, 169-70.

tearing of the flesh, along with the breaking of bones of animals oftentimes disemboweled alive by ravenous packs of hyenas or lions.

The Johnsons learned a great deal about animal behavior while on these expeditions. They learned that the hyena, for instance, was the only animal that no other animal, including scavenging birds, would eat. Hyenas were so mean an animal in their hunting that they would often kill indiscriminately for the sheer joy of killing. The Johnsons made numerous observations of seeing hyenas hamstringing animals or break the necks of smaller game for pleasure and not for food. They also discovered that any leather in their possession would be subject to hyenas at night. This not only included leather cases for binoculars, coats, the leather cases of cameras, and on at least one occasion, the leather seat covers of their automobiles. They even made the observation that lions hated hyenas so much they would occasionally attack them and even chew the feet off the hyenas on rare instances. Martin mentioned one hyena which was sighted walking around on four stumps where each of the animals feet had been chewed off by lions for interfering with the lion's meal.²⁸ They saw many native groups on their way to the lake. They seldom feared the natives because they were not hostile to whites. Natives feared and respected the white man and his miracles. They saw bush people, in large numbers. They visited Turkanas in their jail. These people were oftentimes viewed as a very hard people. They decorated their bodies with patterns, oftentimes quite elaborate in design, with a form of wounds called cicatrices which were fashioned by the cutting of slits into their skin with

²⁸Martin E. Johnson, Lion: African Adventure with the King of Beasts, (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929), 126.

sharp knives. The resulting wounds were then impregnated with dirt into the wounds thus causing an infection of the sores. This in turn would cause scars that formed the decorations. They were considered quite ornamental.

Once the plains were crossed the caravan came to the Karisoot Desert which required passage through a field of volcanic slag which was so sharp that it tore through the boots worn by Osa and Martin. Their water was almost gone at this point as most natives had failed to fill up at the last waterhole before the slag field as Martin had ordered. When a number of them tried to leave because of these terrible conditions, Martin ordered Jerrimani to use his sjambok, which was a part of every headman's equipment.²⁹ As they moved onwards across the parched desert they ultimately came to a line of green which stretched across the land. This was the Euaso Nyiro River which was the longest river not created by the rainy season on the Northern Frontier. There was no bridge across the river at this point. It took their group three days to ford the river and only then after they employed more than two hundred Abyssinian donkeys.³⁰ Just across the river stood a settlement of tin shacks and native huts called Archer's Post. This settlement would be where they would part company with Martin's father. This would be the last government outpost before Marsabit.³¹

The event which turned the tide in locating the lake was the hiring of a guide by the name of Boculy, an elephant tracker of much local repute. He could track the elephant

²⁹Fitzhugh Green, Martin Johnson: Lion Hunter, 195.

³⁰Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 159

³¹Ibid., 158-9.

from several venues at once. He could locate the spoor (dung) of the animal to ascertain their direction and he could view grass trappings and twig breaks to positively tell where the large pachyderms were headed. The Johnsons were very fortunate to find the lake. It was high atop a plateau inside a volcanic crater and unviewable from the surrounding valley below it. The mountains around this area included the N'Doto mountains located to the west of Marsabit in Kenya, the N'Groon mountains, as well as the nearby Aberdare mountains. The lake was shaped like a spoon. The Johnsons made the entire trip around the lake early on and estimated it to be about a twenty-five mile distance. The lake was in the center of a maze of jungle trails blazed by thirsty game. In the forests around Lake Paradise were eight or nine deep rocky waterholes. The wide trails led to them from the lake and passed through exceptionally beautiful land. Their waterhole favorite was Wistonia, which was a waterhole and a waterfall combination. There were others that they would use on the way, such as Ret, at the end of the Karisoot Desert, or Sunga on the Northern Frontier, Karo, Kissimini, Lasamis, Longaia, Longania, and Merille.³² The elephants had obviously used the lake for undisturbed centuries. Osa, upon viewing the lake for the first time, remarked that it was paradise and thus was born the name Lake Paradise which seemed to be the obvious choice.

The rainy season almost coincided with their arrival. This was in direct contrast with the dry season they had endured on the journey. During this dry period, a fine dust of alkali would sift into their eyes, food and their clothing. There were constant

³²Mrs. Martin Johnson, Jungle Babies (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), 96.

irritations from almost invisible little fleas which caused an itch which was very distracting. They were even occasionally attacked by flying ants for awhile. Boculy supplied them a fly swatter from the tail of a Colobus monkey.³³ Osa was now quick, upon viewing where they would set up a temporary camp, to begin having the natives prepare the ground for a garden. She brought out vegetable seeds and had her plot made within the first twenty-four hours of their arrival.

The Johnsons were to be at Lake Paradise for a period of about three months. They eventually left Mount Marsabit and the surrounding area in February of 1922. It would be here they killed the one elephant they would shoot in Africa, the head now resides at Willowrock west of Bartlesville, Oklahoma in the Frank L. Phillips Museum, and one foot resides at the Safari Museum in Chanute, Kansas.)

The work of the Johnsons would demystify tales told by hunters of the habits of wild animals. The tales the hunters told were always confused and contradictory to the actual animal habits because hunters were not scientifically trained to observe the animals in their natural habitat. Osa was enough of a student of animal nature to understand that even wild beasts were good tempered unless man frightened or tormented them.³⁴ Martin also observed that hunters usually told their tales from impressions gathered during the hunt where excitement and not logic or reason was the basis for interpretation. Together Martin and Osa were committed to show animals in their natural state, a state

³³Aylesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 160.

³⁴D. G. Ross, Martin Johnson and His Camera, 37.

undisturbed by fear or excitement. While they laid no claim to being naturalist by training, they were exactly that by application.

The equipment used by Martin and Osa to record the natives and animals was extensive and state of the art for the period. They had twenty cameras, ten for motion-picture work and ten for still work. Five of the motion-picture cameras were specifically modified in the Carl Akeley type which was for work with animals.³⁵

The journal undertaking proposed by Martin would be their most serious and arduous undertaking to date. He felt it would take sixty thousand feet of negatives a year in order for them to be capable of covering the subject matter and to responsibly capture the story they felt must be told. This story would encompass the African natives to include the life of their tribes, rituals and ceremonies, customs, feasts, and their everyday existence as well in order to capture the essence of what life was actually like for them. They were concerned that if they did not do this it would be forever lost as manners and customs were fast eroding in the face of the spread of civilization. The record was to be so expansive as to require five years to complete. They also planned to leave Lake Paradise on occasional journeys in order to round out the complete story of Africa. Obviously this was an undertaking of such enormity the likes of which was previously unseen on any level in Africa. It was also larger than the Johnsons had previously undertaken and as such, required more of a commitment from additional suppliers and backers than they previously employed. The return to America to prepare the necessary

³⁵Martin Johnson, Camera Trails, 337.

supplies and equipment to begin this labor of love also afforded them the opportunity to seek out these sponsors. They were to be partially financed as a protest against a number of films which were obviously faked natural history films.³⁶ This reference was to underscore a note by Theodore Roosevelt who stated there was a great temptation to construct wildlife sequences, in reference to the noted *Hunting Big Game in Africa* (1909) by Colonel Selig which had actually been filmed in a studio located in deepest Chicago, Illinois instead of Africa.³⁷

³⁶D. G. Ross, Martin Johnson and His Camera, 34.

³⁷Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 95.

CHAPTER V

LAKE PARADISE

Osa began to assume more and more responsibility in their professional lives for the logistical arrangements necessary to successfully conduct first class safaris. She would also be responsible for promoting a great romanticism which accompanied a safari with so many personal servants. It was here at Lake Paradise that she would display her resourcefulness, ingenuity, and industriousness. She simply placed all her available energies to the task of insuring Martin had only to concentrate on taking images and developing them. She attempted to control the other aspects of his life in the way of environment, diet, and running of their camps when he was injured to help Martin in every way possible. A man could not want for a better partner than Osa. She constantly tried to adjust, account and anticipate his every daily need, from butter molds and buttermilk to black-eyed susans to help Martin retain a relaxation from his hectic schedule.

Osa would help build for Martin not just a campsite at the lake but a real home. This home would have wood floors, lace curtains, painted walls, and even a bathroom. Osa's hope in all this was to help stabilize Martin's rest and therefore his health. She worked hard to build a home which was cheerful and attractive at the same time. She would create furniture with her own hands for Martin. All this was what she wanted Martin to have in a home no matter where that home was located.

When Martin was injured and required bed rest, Osa again claimed the yeoman's share of his responsibilities. She photographed the animals, developed pictures she had taken and accomplished his work duties as well (and to his high standards of excellence at the same time), ran the camp and attended to his correspondence as well. Nurse, dietitian, carpenter, photographer, logistics and purchasing agent were all titles which satisfactorily fit Osa during this period. Wife was the most important title she claimed. This love was based upon her respect for Martin as a man and her respect for his work.

The Johnsons traveled to Rochester, New York, to visit George Eastman of The Eastman Kodak Company in the late spring of 1923. They wanted to visit with him concerning a proposal for him or his company to sponsor the Johnsons trip to Lake Paradise. Martin felt they needed \$150,000 for the trip, and he estimated \$60,000 alone in the first year.¹ While Eastman agreed to see them, Martin later said they rushed through the proposal so quickly and that both he and Osa spoke at the same time, certainly giving Mr. Eastman the feeling that he was being pursued by a get-rich quick scheme. With that in mind, Mr. Eastman politely said no to any thought of funding them and quickly had them ushered out. On the train back, Martin was vocalizing his regret over the incident and their improper handling of it when Osa took complete charge of the situation. As in other times when the situation necessitated it, she was more than competent to stand up to the events and personalities in their lives and direct traffic so to speak. She told Martin they were going to get off the train and take the first one headed

¹Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 114.

back to Rochester to again see Mr. Eastman. Martin questioned why they would stand to gain anything over their first introductory meeting when Osa told him that as important as his work was they simply could not accept anything in the negative sense. She made Martin understand that Mr. Eastman was approached so often by people offering to make money for him that it was small wonder he was apprehensive about the first meeting they had just concluded. When they were again able to see Mr. Eastman that same day they appealed to him not as an investor with money to be gained from their work, but merely as an investor who would be given a nominal return on his investment which would merely represent an interest of proper percentage points. This proposal intrigued George Eastman and prepared him to understand that Osa and Martin were not offering him the opportunity to make money, for they knew that he understood that scenario, but were instead more correctly offering him the opportunity to participate in a venture, that while returning his investment plus interest, would also allow him to participate in that important undertaking. He agreed to invest \$10,000 along with numerous others including Martin's father, the Willys Knight Company, and Daniel Pomeroy of the Museum of Natural History in New York and the preparations began in earnest.²

The venture would be of gigantic proportions. The pair were scheduled to depart America on December 1, 1923, and they had numerous details with which to attend. They arrived in Africa and at Nairobi on February 21st. Their party would have more than two hundred and thirty men, two hundred of whom were house servants, porters,

²Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 219.

cooks, and gunbearers. They were also accompanied by six Willy's Knights, four motorized lorries and four ox carts, each driven by four oxen, five mule wagons drawn by six mules each. All to transport their gear to the lake.³ They had with them two hundred and twenty-five crates. They contained all of the necessary provisions with which to support practically any contingency the Johnsons might find. They had twenty cameras in all, ten still and ten motion-picture, guns for Osa as well as the gun bearers, ammunition, sheets and pillowcases, blankets, towels, aprons and dishrags, folding chairs, tables, cots, washbasins, washtub, mountains of soap donated by Sidney Colgate, and these were just the obvious commodities. They also brought airtight clothes boxes, filing boxes, chemicals to develop photographs and film, cooking utensils, enamel dishes, water filters, galvanized tanks, rain water tanks, pumps, a delco electricity system to generate power in the bush. They also needed Coleman stoves, flashlights, and crate after crate of canned goods to live on in the bush where no store existed. There were electric fans, butter churns, electric wire and fixtures to make proper utilization of the portable generator equipment. There were printing equipment for the stills they would take, fishing rods for Osa to use in feeding the men. They planned on the use of a fireplace for cooking and heat so they included bags of cement to build it and the chimney. There were box after box of nails, axes, shovels, crowbars and picks, rakes, seeds and hoes for Osa's garden requirements, as well as typewriters for the articles the two of them would pen from this animal workshop. They also had wire, scissors and

³Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 25.

shears, tow chains for the vehicles, extra motor car parts which would be unavailable on that continent, paper, pencils and ink to write manuscript notes by hand, magazines and books to pass the time in the bush and during the rainy seasons. There were also extra quilts, bed clothes and wearing apparel to fit the various seasons they might encounter. This compared rather overwhelmingly to their first expedition to the South Seas where they took two crates, one second-hand gun, an old fashion hand crank camera by Universal, several thousand feet of film, and one trunk.⁴

They hired their men upon arriving at Nairobi, a town of about thirty thousand people, nine tenths brown or black.⁵ They also rehired a number of men from their previous stay in Africa. The men received wages which varied from twenty-five dollars per month for Jerramani, Martin's gunbearer, and Ferraragi, Osa's gunbearer, to sixteen dollars per month for Joanna, which they called simply Mpishi which was Swahili for cook. The other servants received from two and one half to six dollars each per month.⁶ They constantly rehired natives even though others felt the natives incapable of loyalty or original thought. Martin and Osa developed a real regard for these men which translated back to the natives and crafted a bond between them unseen or experienced by other whites in Africa. They hired Bukari as the gun bearer. Aloni was hired as cooks helper. Blaney Percival, now retired as a game warden, consented to accompany them on this journey. The next few days were spent allowing local carpenters to outfit the trucks by

⁴Osa Johnson, Four Years, 15-16.

⁵Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 14.

⁶Osa Johnson, My Home in the African Blue, 168.

building bodies with compartments for carrying special equipment safely. The trucks were equipped to include beds for sleeping in on safari. Heavy wire mesh was included to insure against the loss of baggage. The cars were then uncrated and assembled. The truck to be used by Martin would be specially equipped to include a trap door to allow him to elevate a camera through and record while traveling. This work could now be done in this manner much faster than the previous method for setting up a camera. Up front in the camera car they had built a laboratory with which to develop film while in the field. It had a sink which was lined with black rubber. They traveled around Nairobi and passed the beauty shop where Osa went and the Norfolk Hotel where Paul Rainey, McMillan and President Roosevelt stayed while in town. They went to the game warden to secure their hunting licenses. This would involve a general license for conventional game, while limits on lions, leopards, zebra and hyena did not exist due to the abundance of those animals. The authorities required a special license for rhinos, elephant, ostrich or giraffe. The Johnsons applied for all the licenses because they could not plan for all contingencies and might be forced to shoot those animals in order to save their lives.

The Johnsons had supreme confidence in their abilities. They trusted their equipment, men, the vision of what they wanted to accomplish and how to extract what they needed from the African animals. What they both were very concerned about was Osa. Martin was concerned for Osa because he feared her years in the field would cause her to become lonely. Although she quite obviously loved to fish and hunt, and truly took a personal joy in the wild animals they photographed, there would be times when he was certain that would not be enough for her. He feared she would miss city life, her

friends, a social life, new clothes, dances and the theater. He feared that she might become ill with no other white woman anywhere in the region to call on them to help her out.⁷ Osa, on the other hand, was concerned that Martin would do exactly that and worry about her. Osa stated she was unhappy in New York. She said it made her want to be lazily luxurious. She wanted material possessions like the lovely, silken things she saw in various shops. She felt a need to be beautiful and alluring as other women she saw there. But she also felt in New York a desire to return to the simplistic wilderness where she could be the queen.⁸ Her greatest fear was that even though she also loved adventure and the pleasures they both found in their work, in addition to the hunting and fishing, Martin would fear she needed anything else. While she would admit in print after the fact to that being the case, she could not bring herself to admit to Martin that any of the female pleasures mattered in the least to her.⁹

As they drove on toward the destination of Lake Paradise, they passed several dangerous obstacles. Osa drove a truck loaded with cargo which proved to be all she could handle. She operated the vehicle around hairpin bends and in places where dangerous two thousand foot drops were common.¹⁰ The askari natives would often line up by the road to watch the caravans pass and their totos would run after them and shout jambo. The caravan went from Nairobi to Nyeri, an agricultural center, to Nanyuki, forty

⁷Martin Johnson, Safari, 21.

⁸Osa Johnson, My Home in the African Blue, 49.

⁹Douglas Preston, Shooting in Paradise, 37.

¹⁰Osa Johnson, Four Years, 38.

miles to the north. They next passed the Mt. Kenya district which was six thousand feet above sea level. Mt. Kenya, at seventeen thousand and forty feet with snow on the peak stood squarely on the equator and was somewhat of an oxymoron.

Osa had seen fit to pack for every possible occurrence including the need for fresh eggs for breakfast for Martin. She was absolutely the quintessential logistics officer. She had convinced him before they left to allow her to take several hens with them, although the number swelled to more than two hundred while they were at Lake Paradise. Osa fished to furnish the men meat while on their journey, and on one occasion took home more than one hundred fifty pounds at one sitting. The natives did not themselves fish, but they were more than willing to indulge Osa and eat the fish that she caught.

Martin hated taking their machines to the lake because he felt that they destroyed the atmosphere and that squarely placed him years ahead of any conservation group of the period.¹¹ While he attempted to beat the rainy season, Martin drove several legs ahead in an attempt to convey loads arranged for porters to pick up later and encountered many problems along the way, none the least of which was carnivores out for night hunting, rhinos which rooted in the sand at night, and last but certainly not least, birds which flew into the light of the truck and were blinded. Several of them managed to fly into Martins face since the truck had no windshield.¹²

¹¹Martin Johnson, Safari, 29.

¹²*Ibid.*, 32.

They encountered natural obstacles along the way as a matter of course in Africa but which might run off many other explorers. They found hornets extremely thick around the Eauso Nyiro River. They were returning to their base one day passing through some of the bush occupied by irritable rhinos. Several cars had been left at Merille, and had been colonized by millions of bees which moved in and settled down in the camera boxes which had been built into the truck bodies. The insects could be driven away from the machines but always returned. No matter what tactic the Johnsons used they could not rid the trucks of the bees. Martin then placed a mosquito netting over himself and attempted to scrape the boxes clear with a stick. The result was a swarm of bees over him until he could no longer see. That did not seem to bother Martin but it did bother the bees. That was until they found loose netting and got underneath it. Martin ran for all he was worth, tearing off the netting as he ran. The rest of the troop, Osa and natives alike followed him and as a reward for their efforts they all wound up with painful stings. Boculy had one eye shut by the swarm, and Martin's ears were swollen to twice their size in dimensions. The biggest hurdle to overcome was the newest revelation that after the attack, the bees once again returned to the vehicles and their homes. The next attempt to remove the bees again involved the netting as Martin covered himself with it. He entered the vehicle and drove it as fast as he could get it to go with one hand while scrapping out bees with the other. The result was no more bees. Until he stopped and they again returned. This result proved to be more than even the normally docile Martin could accept and he then employed the most radical plan feasible. He set fire to the vehicles

and burned out the bees. He did later admit it played havoc with the vehicles, but he was satisfied with the nearly four hundred pounds of honey they left.¹³

They were also bothered by spirrilum ticks, which are unlike their American cousin. They carry spirrilum fever which, once it develops, is quite deadly. Osa had found them on her blankets one morning and had a black eye from the pest. She and the others were fortunate enough to escape the fever.

Osa again proved her mettle near the Lasamis waterhole as she helped the natives carry their sixty pound loads to the bank of the river to help save time. She later took her 20 Ga. *Ithaca* shotgun out to hunt birds and downed fourteen grouse with one well-aimed shot. As they soon neared Lake Paradise, they again ran into Boculy, their old elephant guide near Isiolo. His employment would eventually lead Ferraragi and Jerrangi to leave Martin and Osa's employ because the Johnsons overwhelmingly believed in him, and placed such an enormously high trust in everything he said. Osa stated that to her the old man had a quickness and intelligence about him which distinguished him from any other African they had ever met. He could tell from the trampled grass, for instance, how many hours since elephants had passed that way. He knew that by the angle of the broken twigs in trees which direction they had taken, how many were in the herd, what sex they were, and was usually correct in all those things.

While Osa for years had realized their home would not be in Independence, Kansas, she had not, until now, been prepared for it to be in Africa at Lake Paradise. The area

¹³Ibid., 154.

was indeed beautiful however. The overall crater was nearly a mile long and about three quarters of a mile wide. From a height of two hundred feet in the north, its forested walls sloped down gradually to the south. It would be here that an orderly and wide game trail led to the lake. There was a four hundred foot beach of grass and bleached lava which completely encircled the lily covered lake. This would be where they would build their village on a ridge of nearly six acres. It was shaded by several tall mahogany trees loaded with Spanish moss.¹⁴

Osa pictured in her own mind her grandmother's voice telling her that overcoming difficulties was part of Osa's heritage. This place was to be their home for the next five years after April 12, 1924. This length of time caused them to take extra precautions to insure that they would be happy there. They had Meru boys to help with the building construction. They planned to have a home for themselves, not just a hut but a real residence, a mess shack, laboratory, stone house, drying houses for their films, along with rain-proof thatched huts for the native boys. They even surrounded their village with a boma as protection against dangerous game. It contained an entanglement of thornbush as deep as fifteen feet in places to discourage elephants which raided her garden for the sweet potatoes they craved.¹⁵ They went to the extra effort to use thicker poles for their buildings and to sink those poles deeper in the ground. They also built stout sets of lathe tied with strong jungle twine, then poured mud mixed with pebbles into those spaces

¹⁴Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 170.

¹⁵Osa Johns, My Home in the African Blue, 173.

between the lathe and added a finishing touch of buffalo, rhino, and elephant dung stucco. They even mixed the dung with clay to enhance the exterior and interior serviceable wall. This material eventually dried to the hardness of concrete.¹⁶ Osa thought the color was attractive especially when mixed near the jungle green and yellow of the thatched roof. The natives were very impressed. They themselves usually lived in huts of mud and thatch on hammered-out petrol (gasoline) tins. Martin refused to let the men's lean to become untidy. He made them clean up and also bury refuse and to trench the earth so that water would run neatly off during heavy rains.¹⁷ Osa had Martin and the boys double roof their dwelling to help keep it cool by virtue of the additional air space.

Osa took to the interior decorating of their dwelling to insure it took on all the proper vestiges of home. She applied a shellac of paint and glue to the interior walls. The whole was then papered with a rough calico sheeting (which oftentimes served as currency in British East Africa). Once this task had been completed she took the wooden cases which had previously contained Martin's photographic supplies and made a good quality flooring for their dwelling. Their living room was fourteen by seventeen and contained a fireplace, kitchen, and in back, a bathroom, since they had brought along their tub, with a big screened verandah in front. Osa, with little help from the natives, constructed the chairs used in their quarters. Martin and the natives constructed additional buildings for their sleeping quarters, a store house, laboratory building, a

¹⁶Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 278.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 155.

darkroom for him and even a guest house for any visitors who might chance to visit. Osa on the second day had her Kansas garden seeds, supplied by the Leighty family, planted in the garden just in time for the rainy season to begin. She planted beans, sweet corn, tomatoes, celery, turnips, beets, peas, carrots, potatoes, cucumbers and squash. Both Blaney Percival and Martin teased her unmercifully about feeding the birds all those seeds, but they were later forced to admit the oversized vegetables she grew in the virgin soil of her garden were of unbelievable size and quality.¹⁸

Osa soon discovered two rocks, one a white lime color and the other a rose pink, that when crushed together made a dusty pink plaster wash she used on the walls of their bedroom. She left the outside walls the same dark chocolate brown color of the original dried mud. She also painted her bathroom with extra coats of real paint until it gave a milky glow when the sunlight filtered into the house through the trees outside.¹⁹ She used additional carpenters odds and ends to make other furniture. Stripped poles made legs and supports. Animal rawhide she was able to cut into strips and thereby make seats and backs for their chairs. By simply nailing packing boxes onto legs she crafted their tables. The bathroom contained towel racks made from tree branches. She made clothes pegs out of antelope horns. What Osa did for Martin was to carve a home out of the wilderness for him. She used anything and everything at her fingertips to transform the home into everything she would have made for them in Independence, Kansas. She was

¹⁸Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 47.

¹⁹Osa Johnson, Four Years, 97.

keenly aware that they would live there for years and for that reason she wanted everything to be attractive and cheerful at the same time. Osa tried to construct everything with comfort and convenience uppermost in her attempts because she was aware that their health and relaxation was counterbalanced by her success.

Osa wanted Martin to view pretty flowers each day so she dug them up in the bush or on safari to return to her garden at home. She planted and grew orchids, morning glories, mauve salvias, pansies of various hues, black-eyed susans, yellow hibiscus, violets and forget-me-nots. All these were intended to help Martin maintain his relaxation in spite of his workaholic routine. She planted stumps with nasturtiums. She even had the native boys go to the lake to bring up stones to serve as edging to the flowerbeds and a small rockgarden. The curtains of their house were frilled sash curtains of homemade chintz to make their room gay. The bedroom floor was melded together film boxes which held their tinned food during the trip to Paradise. It gave the floor a crazyquilt of American advertising slogans which included the likes of *Heinz Tomato Catsup*, *Dutch Cleanser Bon Ami*, *Unguentine*, and the Chili Sauce that Osa stepped out of the bed onto each morning. She and their carpenter later spent the greater part of one day in planing the surface of their compendium of American marketing until it was a smooth, bare, wooden surface again.²⁰ The extent of Martin's decorating their African house was the few skins of game animals they had been forced to kill from time to time

²⁰*Ibid.*, 101.

which were laid down in the house. He also mounted buffalo heads and gerenuk for decorations.²¹

The house routine was relatively close to that which Osa and Martin had experienced in America. The natives, led by suku their chief houseboy, were required each morning to bring clear and sparkling water to fill the baths for Martin and Osa. They both especially liked their baths in the morning at Paradise. Then while Martin left to go to work and photograph animals, Osa would concentrate on maintaining the household and running the house in such a way as to insure it would not or could not be a source of annoyance for Martin. The care of their clothes was assigned to boys in a laundry. They had constructed the laundry at the same time as the other buildings. It was all done in large tubs they had brought with them for that purpose. The suds were a source of fascination for natives unfamiliar with soap or its intended purpose. They felt the washing of clothes which only got dirty again to be a nuisance. The use of real irons and natives who became trained to use them and the ironing boards carefully hand-carried into Paradise was a real god send to Osa, as well as Martin. Their adherence to maintaining their lifestyle while in the bush was a commitment they placed at the highest level.

Osa would receive help from Blaney Percival in the kitchen area. She wanted proper cooking facilities in order to be fully able to prepare Martin's favorite dishes and to insure the meals were nutritious as well as delicious. Blaney worked with the native

²¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 154.

boys to manufacture their own fire bricks. They next made an incision to one of the sides in their kitchen for the location of the fireplace. The fireplace foundation was built low and had at its top a chimney. They built a fireplace which was also extended out into the center of the kitchen much akin to a stone oven. On the one end Osa established a large oven while at the other, with the aid of some sheet iron, they made a rather crude range for pots and pans. The cook, Mpishi, was in charge of everything in the kitchen except Osa who freelanced whenever the mood struck her, which was often. She loved to bake for Martin because he was such an adoring customer of her culinary art.

This love of cooking nearly cost Osa her life one day. She had been in the bush on safari using a fire built around rocks to contain the fire when they heard an explosion. The bursting rock flew past her, striking one of the porters behind her, causing the boy a deep cut and burn. She was sure the damage would have been greater to her because of her relative closeness to the fire and the boys greater distance from it. This sequence would be repeated again later by the natives. Osa then reported she learned this phenomenon was in part due to the rocks themselves. They were rumored to be volcanic in nature with sealed in gasses which were prone to explosion when heated. The native boys would occasionally require nursing from Osa to tend their wounds from exploding rocks.²²

The pursuit of her culinary arts often saw Osa venture into the bush to locate tasty morsels of local flavor. The purpose was to vary the diet, add some needed fresh food to

²²Osa Johnson, Four Years, 104.

a diet consisting basically of tinned foods, and to stretch their supplies. Being constantly on the lookout for new varieties with which to experiment, Osa was still skeptical of foods located by the natives. This skepticism was proven wrong when the boys would eat the food first to reassure her of the safety of the item. She would go out and collect: wild asparagus, sometimes by the armload, wild spinach, mushrooms which were prolific in the jungle areas which had sufficient fungi, wild plums, both sweet and tart as well, an excellent brown honey, a berry similar to a blackberry which she thought sweeter than its American counterpart, wild raspberries and the most important find of all, a wild coffee. This wild Abyssinian coffee was a bean that offered the Johnsons an excellent brew. Osa would roast the bean in a pan and add a pinch of butter to brown it. Then she ground the beans. The ability to sustain themselves by marshaling the environment around them by Osa was nothing short of miraculous. Osa constantly displayed the pioneering stock of her grandmother in a most enterprising vein. She was a capable woman able to carve out a home for her husband in a remote and often inhospitable part of the world which was unsafe for others to merely visit, let alone settle into a homelife comparable to one in America. This was normal for Osa.²³

The boys employed by Martin and Osa were not always of the highest abilities or the same intensity or desire for work possessed by the Johnsons. Martin did nothing to neglect them or their health. They were his soldiers in his own appointed war and he treated them to insure their readiness. He inspected them medically on a routine basis to

²³Ibid., 104-5.

look for wounds or even sores which could escalate to something worse and keep one of his men out of action from Martin's employ.²⁴ The natives started out fine but soon developed a number of malingerers. They weren't any the first week at Paradise, only three during the second week, but by the fifth week, eighteen natives were too ill to report to work. Martin was resourceful enough to think of the boys as his children and to acquit their lack of industriousness to children feigning illness to avoid the work they hated. If the natives really seemed sick, he gave them quinine and whatever else they appeared to need; the malingerers were quite a different story. These people Martin dosed with a rather oversized tablespoon of powdered quinine coupled with four tablespoons of castor oil with which to wash down the medicine. The next step was to require each native to remain down for fifteen minutes to insure the medicinal properties were given the proper opportunity with which to work their magic. It may have seemed to be rather miraculous, but he reported only three visitors reported to his clinic the next day.²⁵

The additional buildings at Paradise were particularly useful for Martin's work, the first being the laboratory. Osa stated this building was high by design, as the height reached nearly thirty feet. It contained a room eighteen feet by twelve feet. The entire inside of the darkroom walls were hung with canvas painted red of a quite dark hue. Martin installed little red bulbs for light and was a zealot when it came to safeguarding

²⁴Fitzhugh Green, Martin Johnson: Lion Hunter, 155.

²⁵Martin Johnson, Safari, 145.

his films.²⁶ He knew the chief photographic target problem in Africa was how to maintain the sensitized materials and chemicals. The equipment housed here was several large drying drums for prints, storage cases, tables and racks. The building had the benefit of running water which came from a well that had been dug about thirty feet down and located only three hundred yards from the laboratory.²⁷ This water was supplemented by a roof gutter and rain barrels for storage during the rainy season. Martin used vats to develop the negatives, with storage tanks and other equipment of professional quality because he would accept no less. He was keenly aware that excess humidity and temperature would adversely affect film and that these destructive elements had to be distanced from the film in order for it to remain stable. Martin was certain it was critical to develop his pictures on the spot so to speak. There could be no other opportunity to reshoot once they had left Paradise and the only way to know how successful a shoot had been required the film to be immediately developed. The only way to assure the water did not cause problems with contaminants which left water spots on the film was to insure a clean supply. Martin did this with the well water, the stored water and even water from the lake during the dry season. He had devised a scheme to bring up to eight hundred gallons a day from the lake by camelback and muleback. The system he adopted included a filtration system which would employ a charcoal and sand filtration followed lastly by a cotton filter. Once developed, the pictures required

²⁶Ibid., 200.

²⁷Ibid.

immediate attention. Martin would mend it and patch blank leaders at the ends. The arrival of film supplies from the Eastman Kodak Company each few months insured them a continuing fresh supply of stock. The shipment also included special drying compounds to combat the unique environmental hazards present in Africa.²⁸ Osa had the job of preparation of exposed film. She had to wrap each of the two hundred foot rolls of film in black paper to completely shut out damaging light or light sources, then place the film in tins which were then sealed with a melted paraffin wax. This was generally done at night to complete the film work done each day by Martin.

The electric light plant was the second building necessary for Martin's work. The portable generator, weighing in at around three thousand pounds was married to batteries also carried in by porters. The portable equipment used with the generator included batteries and spares and weighed in at over three hundred and fifty pounds.²⁹ The Johnsons were involved in a race against time when it was discovered that the batteries were up against the recommended time of April 12th for their installation to obtain optimum results. They and the natives worked furiously to complete the building to house the equipment in record time. Martin mixed the chemical liquid for the batteries, added it properly, and they were immediately tested. Everyone held their respective breath. The batteries were a full four days beyond the stated expiration for their

²⁸Ibid., 202.

²⁹Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla: Adventures with Pygmies and Gorillas in Africa (New York; Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1931), 76-77.

successful implementation.³⁰ The engines started off with the first turn of the wheel and the camp had electricity.

The need to keep some food cool was a daily concern for Osa. She worked with the natives to incorporate the bricks manufactured by Blaney Percival and his workers to line the walls of a spring-house she had sunk into the ground. The flooring was additional crates hauled into camp. It contained the traditional double thatched roof used to insulate for coolness. Martin strung a light into the dark so Osa would have light by which to work. She constructed shelves to hold her home-made preserves. She also stored their milk there to keep it cool and would occasionally place home grown watermelons in it to cool. Osa was so resourceful in attempting to cater to Martin's every need and desire that she even bought eleven cows from Boran herdsmen along with seven calves. This done, she was assured of an ample supply of fresh milk. She required the natives to sterilize their hands to milk the cows and devised a plan to strain the milk through cheesecloth which had also been sterilized to insure cleanliness. The result of this straining was cream which gave Osa the ingredient necessary to churn her own butter. She would usually churn from ten to fifteen pounds of butter each week. She even used butter molds when there was time in order to dress up the table for Martin.³¹

The experience of death would one day quietly steal its way into the idyllic camp at Lake Paradise. There was a native boy in camp who was prone to epileptic seizures. He

³⁰Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 277.

³¹Osa Johnson, Four Years, 236.

fell one evening into the campfire and was critically burned. The injury was to his leg which was burned so severely that it went clear to the bone. He lay on dirty straw on the mud floor in great pain. The natives did nothing to help him fearing the devil they felt he had within, so Martin and Osa attempted to help the child. They swabbed out his burns using laboratory cotton, treated the burns with carbolic acid, applied *unguentine*, and then bound up the wounds with cloth which was boiled before its use. It was of no help. The skin later fell off in large wads. They reported they worked on the boy for three days and nights to no avail. They had to relieve each other on this twenty-four hour watch, along with Ndundu, because they couldn't stand the stench of burnt flesh. The third day saw lockjaw set in and the boy died that evening in spite of all they had done to try to help him. The natives ran into the forest rather than help with the burial which Martin did by himself. The vision of the burnt boy would later haunt Martin when he was horribly burned.³²

Home life was the normal routine of the Johnsons while in the bush. They encountered danger even there. No place in Africa was secure from it, no individual capable of escaping it, and no inconvenience to escape it was too great. Their house had mice which kept their Persian kittens busy. Osa had been taught by Blaney to shake her boots in the mornings to insure no insects were lodged inside before putting them on her feet. There were also occasional confrontations with other fearsome creatures which Osa not only took in stride but came to eventually accept as the price of admission for

³²Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 71.

Martin's work. She encountered centipedes, one as large as nine inches, in her dressing gown and others in the food boxes. One evening at dinner, while eating a peanut soup, a delicacy she had resourcefully learned to make from peanut butter, a moth and several other small insects fell into her soup. Blaney merely suggested to skim them off, which she did. The bites of insects which at first were quite a concern for Osa, were soon of little or no concern. She learned to treat the bites with ammonia. As Osa saw the natives did nothing to treat their bites or stings, she also discontinued the practice of medicinal treatments and learned to take them without any concern.³³

The evenings often saw Osa don a favorite dressing gown or even her tailored satin lounging pajamas. She stated Martin was always quick to notice her small attempts at femininity and was appreciative of her for dressing for him. At weekly intervals she stole rainwater from his developing tanks to set and wave her hair. She might be in the heart of deepest and wildest Africa but she refused to look the part. The civility they retained in the bush was their resistance to cater to the hostile and often brutal land.

Weekly chores for Osa included the garden. She had to hoe it, and to attempt to keep the bugs, birds, caterpillars and animals out of it. The garden boys were equally diligent in this work. Osa was the one that set the tone for the boys. She had learned this craft at home in Chanute from her father who gave her the enthusiasm for gardening. She drew an inner peace from the attachment to her gardens, both flower and vegetable.

³³Osa Johnson, Four Years, 110.

She remembered the quote from her father that each person had the responsibility to plant a little beauty in the world.³⁴

The garden also afforded Osa the few confrontations with snakes that she would encounter. There were puff adders which she attributed with killing her kittens. The adders were night prowlers which fed off prey they found in Osa's garden. They grew to six or seven feet in length and usually possessed a fatal bite. She had once had to treat a native with an adders bite by lancing the wound, having a porter suck out the poison, and then a treatment with the old standby, permanganate of potash. This reminded her to constantly carry a walking stick while in the forest to pin down snakes. It also kept her from reaching into the grass while in the bush for fear of any unknown reptile which might be lurking there.

Once finally settled into their new home, Osa and Martin faced the daunting venture to record the film history of the lives and trials of the people, the animals, and the country. Osa knew Martin's desire to tell the whole story against the background of magnificent scenery with wide plains sweeping across the horizon as far as the eye could see; the mimosa groves and acacia trees which dotted the landscape; the beautiful mountain ranges surrounded by rich forests; the desolate lava fields and sand desert, and the swift rivers with their attendant hippos and crocodiles. Osa understood Martin's drive to show the life cycle of the animals unaware of and untroubled by man.

³⁴Ibid., 119.

Blaney, Martin, and Osa once discussed what they felt was the source of the water supply for Lake Paradise. Osa and Martin incorrectly guessed the water was held by the natural crater which trapped the moisture. Blaney explained to them that water held in this manner would soon evaporate. They next guessed that it was the result of underground springs which Blaney again dismissed. He finally, in order to keep peace in camp, told them the source was mountain rivers and underground streams which accounted for the continual abundance of water in what was obviously a centuries old animal preserve. It was against this background of game which prompted Martin to issue the edict that no game could be shot around Lake Paradise except by camera. The intent of this resolution was to insure that animals would not hesitate to take sanctuary in the crater. Martin knew that by outlawing any undue disturbance the dry season would force the area animals to return to the lake. This in turn would continue to assure their success with the camera.

The area around the crater was also abundant with game. A nearby river was so plentiful with fish that Osa was able to catch as much as sixty pounds of brown trout, sometimes in a single morning. The average size ranged from one and a half pounds up to six pounds. She even stated she once caught three trout on one cast. Her biggest catch there was a one day total of one hundred and forty-eight trout. No small wonder the natives considered her superior to their efforts when they seldom if ever fished.³⁵ Perhaps the even greater reason for Osa to fish was that Martin loved trout to eat.

³⁵Ibid., 150.

Unfortunately, he never proved as adroit or capable as Osa in fishing and usually left it to her.

Osa found newer supplies of fresh food at springs in the area. She located a vine which was like a four-leaf clover which she compared to spinach, and she also found wild onions. The onions she used in preparation of the natives meats in stews. They found few nuts except a dom-palm nut. The nut was sweet, similar she said to sugar cane and the boys would suck on them and chew the pulp for moisture at times when they found themselves thirsty. She also noted that elephants were very fond of them.

The most used pieces of equipment at Lake Paradise were Martin's cameras. The chief camera boy in camp was named Ouranga. He was also a laboratory assistant for Martin. They had ten cameras for still pictures and ten motion-picture cameras, five of which were the type designed and used by Carl Akeley. Martin mounted two motion-picture cameras together and had one set to record the usual number of sixteen frames per second while the other would record at sixty-four frames each second. The intent of this was to allow the study by scientists of animal behavior, movements and motions. The second camera was capable of capturing the slow motion which Martin felt gave scientists a detailed and close study of each and every movement the animals could possibly make.³⁶ He also employed a number of cameras and lenses specific to the various elements they were used in, such as high speed cameras for use in forest areas, or wide-angle lenses for plains used to capture the entire panoramic scene in one visual

³⁶Ibid., 174-5.

offering. He also had various others mounted with from twelve to seventeen inch lenses. There were portrait lenses for close-ups, and cameras operated by electric motors which allowed Martin and Osa to operate, with a lead wire, up to a half mile away behind a tree or blind. This also allowed them to photograph the rather shy creatures which stayed in the forest.³⁷

The work routine of Martin caused rounds of loneliness for Osa. He would bury himself for days upon end. The time was painfully slow and Osa had to have activities which would augment her time schedules and activities. This also had to include more than just gardening. She took to taking long walks into the forest as a stress reliever. She would gather various orchids and plants and occasionally just see and hear the animals she loved. Some of her time was spent on nearby mountain waterholes such as Chania Falls or other safaris by herself. It was here that she would take stills to help Martin fill in some gaps in his pictorial records of assorted animal families. While Osa often helped Martin in this area, she also developed film, set up shots, and in general helped out in any way that would help her husband. She was rarely granted credit for her work. The world at this time was still such a male dominated place that it never entered their minds to credit Osa for her work.

Martin like to keep his watchful eye on Osa as much as was possible. There were, however, times when he had to leave her. It was at these times that he asked her not to stray too far from camp unless she had Bukhari or another gun bearer with her. She said

³⁷Ibid.

she felt his worry and concern wasn't warranted, but she confessed that she felt much better when he did fret over her. It was the rare occasions when he proclaimed a need to protect her that gave her a sense of pride in his affection. Perhaps he didn't say I love you often enough to let her know how he felt. Many men, especially the rugged, outdoor type, often have difficulty expressing emotional feelings to their wives.³⁸

The field expeditions they went on were intended to film animals and events pertinent to the records they were creating. These trips also proved to be records of their lives and times together. They were a couple which professed many original thoughts for all time, not simply the time period in which they lived. They attempted exploits of great adventures. They lived and loved in a way merely dreamed about by the average couple. They were not searching for that cutting edge originality that today's couple intuitively seek, they were the cutting edge. They broke ground for both men and women explorers previously unheard of in any generation. They crafted a life together which stands today as a testimony to their love for each other, their devotion to their profession, and their love and admiration for the animals of the earth. Never before or since have audiences been afforded the opportunity to experience life in the dangerous wilds of darkest Africa that Osa and Martin brought to movie audiences. Unlike many others of their profession they would not resort to the use of trained animals photographed on Hollywood back lots or staged sequences crafted for the benefit of that audience. They offered audiences the real thing. They supplied stark realism and the brutality that only nature can supply in

³⁸Ibid., 185.

such action sequences. They never allowed animals to be injured for the sake of superior photography and felt truly sickened when they were forced to destroy any animal such as Osa often did when she came upon nature's method of insuring the survival of the fittest. It was not uncommon for Osa to shoot the predator when the young was involved, as she once did when an eagle captured a baby ostrich and then attempted to claim its prize. The pair today would certainly attract a following of devoted fans for their resiliency and indomitable spirit. They did not know the meaning of the word quit. They kept on in the face of adversity and hardship which would virtually defeat all others. This can be attributed to their abundant faith in each other, the perceived righteousness of their mission, and their belief in a just God.

While on expedition, Osa had terrible experiences which often left her scared and shaken. She once was soaking in a hot tub when a six-inch scorpion crawled over the side and into the water. She said she screamed, then went over backward and Martin came to save her and killed the scorpion. Another morning saw her unroll the tent flaps only to discover that the flaps represented a warm cozy spot to various night vermin. After that incident, the boys insisted that they do that particular morning chore for Osa to insure there was no repeat of their frightful experience. Another time on the Karisoot Desert, Osa found a cobra in a food box. It scared her so much she ran out of the tent while the natives returned and killed the snake. They used sticks and knives to do the deed. Because the boxes had been placed on logs to avoid white ants, Osa then had the boxes searched for fear of another undetected cobra. All forty boxes were inspected and twenty cobras only a day old were found and destroyed.

The safari meals Osa supervised often exceeded everyone's wildest imagination for its sumptuous spread. There would be partridge, or guinea fowl, gazelle or even a bit of antelope, which would be followed by a roast with vegetables. The end of the meal would signify the appropriate time for a dessert. Osa was keenly aware of Martin's sweet tooth and she constantly played up to his weakness. The fact that dinner was such an offering was not soured by the time taken to eat such a meal. They almost labored over the big meals which Martin would end with a cigar that he loved to smoke at the end of the day. They would then sit and just often listen to the night sounds of the birds and animals they loved.³⁹

The first Christmas at Lake Paradise, Osa rode her mule, Lazy Bones, in search of their Christmas dinner. She would experience during this search a scare previously unknown to her animal. The mule was quite skittish and even irritable that day. She at first thought he was just injured, but upon her examination she pronounced him fit and remounted. She soon discovered he had been scared by an adder. She quieted the animal to resume hunting and she eventually found a greater bustard to shoot for their meal. On the way home, she and Boculy almost ran into a leopard which had been resting from grazing, and they also narrowly avoided an elephant at the last moment. The bush was constantly full of perils.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., 193.

⁴⁰Ibid., 200.

One little known sidelight to the torturous thronbush used in camouflage for the photography blinds at Lake Paradise was the constant appearance of stinging black ants. The boys could look to find a little puff-ball, black in color, which was hanging from a thorn branch which would indicate an ants nest. They would sometimes even remain on thronbrush cut for the purpose of hiding a blind. This would allow the ants full reign over that blind. They would drop out of the nest and crawl over Martin or Osa and get into their clothes and hair. In any event, they made for hectic days spent in agony. Osa was well aware that when bit or stung she could not scream, cry out or make any sound whatsoever. To do so would spook the animals for heaven only knew how long. So she bore the pain in silence. Then, at night, to relieve her suffering she would dose herself with ammonia. The look of measles often accompanied these bouts with ants.⁴¹

One day she was so restless in the blind awaiting animals that she uncharacteristically allowed her imagination to run away with her. She became jumpy, lost all her enthusiasm and felt her courage slowly ebb away. At that point, she wanted only to return to her tent. She began to sympathize with herself, which while not only dangerous to do was a staple of fear. She questioned why she ever left Kansas, or even why she didn't marry someone who could give her a permanent home, cars and other material things. It was at this juncture that she answered her own inquiries, and the response held no surprise for her. She loved adventure as much as did Martin. She knew

⁴¹Ibid., 210.

the thrill of discovery and the discomfort associated with the life of an explorer. This thought calmed her fears and gave her a strength upon which to continue her work.⁴²

It was here at Lake Paradise that Osa learned to hate the rhinos. She felt they constantly sought her out to punish her alone above all others. Her paranoia was founded in her fear and not supported in fact. They did often charge both Osa and Martin. They were mean-spirited and ferocious. They were, however, not aiming their displeasure or hatred at Osa. They were simply hateful towards everyone, man and woman, equally. A favorite trick Osa would employ would be to climb the nearest tree during a rhino attack and simply out wait the animal. Martin stated she could wait in a tree for however many hours was necessary in order to see them leave. As often as not, the animals unusually charged at no particular sign of hostility from anyone. They sometimes came right into camp, Osa stated they were attracted by tents which were bleached white by the sun and seemed to appear, at least to her, as rhino beacons at night. When this would happen, she would verbally dress down the night sentries. She told Bukhari that Martin had enough to do to merely take care of his cameras and needed his rest after a hard day in the field without the added bother of the rhinos. After that night, long fires were commonplace. Osa even commented that a night at the waterhole without a rhino fight, usually over a female, was quite unusual. The animals would often gore each other with their great horns and cut each other causing large scars. She was certain their injuries could be attributed to the ugly disposition of the animal. The only way to dissuade one, sort of

⁴²Mrs. Martin Johnson, Jungle Babies, 31.

killing it, was to shoot into the ground near it to attempt to get it to turn its charge, or to stand up and scream to try to disorient the animal. Another trick Osa discovered was to shoot its horn with a solid nose bullet. This had the unique experience of giving the rhino a rather stiff migraine headache. The principal reason they were careful not to kill rhinos, except to save their lives or that of their native porters, was the rather self-serving reason that to do so cost them fifty dollars.⁴³

Osa experienced a rare opportunity on January 29, 1925. She was informed that the Duke and Duchess of York (later to be King George IV and Elizabeth) were in Africa on safari. They had stated a desire to meet with the Johnsons. Osa was sorry Blaney Percival would not be available to meet with them as he was in England for a visit which had been long delayed. Martin was busy with his work when Osa was ready to leave so they decided that she should go on ahead and Martin would join all of them later when his work was finished. Osa had taken great care to prepare for her journey. She decided, for instance, to take fresh vegetables to the royal couple, and had a large basket prepared with the gift. She was intimately familiar with long travel with only tinned foods and she was intent upon delivering a gift the royal couple would not only delight in, but use as well. As Osa drove along in her car, she felt fortunate that the road from Lake Paradise was improved from what it had been, with the possible exception of the rainy season. As she traveled, she tried to formulate her plans for conversations with the royal couple. She necessarily hoped they were a gracious and conversational duo as Osa felt certain

⁴³Osa Johnson, Four Years, 226-28.

she would be verbally inadequate in their presence. She reached the Eauso Nyiro River in just over five hours after her departure from Martin.

The requirement to ford the river was of little concern based upon her previous travels. This was something she had done numerous times with certain success. Upon arrival, her gaze caught the image of two white hunters with their porters, about a dozen in all, across the river just before she drove the car into the murky water. Nearing the halfway mark of the river, Osa's car suddenly began to sink into the water. She had apparently driven into a deep hole and with the water rising continuously about her, she continued to sit there helplessly until the water became chin high. At that juncture, the people on the opposite shore began to take notice of her predicament. A native boy swam out to her car with a rope. As soon as he had affixed it to the axle of her car, everyone on shore pulled like mad until she was rescued from the water. It was only then, and to her complete embarrassment, that she discovered the two white hunters she had previously seen were actually the Duke and Duchess. Osa was relieved to discover they were a warm, hospitable husband and wife who placed everyone at ease with their genial charm. Osa immediately felt a connection with them which soothed her unfounded fears. It was then that she remembered her gift of homegrown vegetables. Once the gift was retrieved and presented, the appreciative travelers offered a picnic in the relative cool of the shade trees which lined the river bank. A short while later Martin arrived. He had finished his work a little ahead of schedule and left to join them. The four of them had a picnic which was a welcomed break from the hum-drum routine of

camp life. Osa and Martin spent several hours telling the Duke and Duchess of their life and work at Lake Paradise.⁴⁴

Osa and Martin had a number of occasions when they simply did not get along with each other as all married couples do when working in such close proximity. Osa mentioned that the work which seemed to bind them together also served as a common base for them. It supplied them with so much in common that their few little tiffs were always over inconsequential things that were quickly and easily made up. They both understood that anytime people lived and worked in such close quarters there were bound to be disagreements. The arguments could run the gamut from Osa's interpretation that Martin severely disciplined the boys to a row over an imagined lack of attention. Osa, often feeling slighted, felt Martin was always so engrossed in his work that he had little time for her. She would often ride Lazy Bones off and take care of errands such as hunting food, or just leave in a huff. Upon her return, once she was certain Martin had been looking for her and was very worried, she admitted to a sense of feminine victory and increased attachment to the man she thought to be the kindest on earth.⁴⁵

Osa always maintained a menagerie of pets at their compound which would have strained the compatibility of conventional people. Osa and Martin were certainly not conventional and neither thought anything out of the ordinary about the quantity of the pets in the numbers they kept, or about the dangerousness of some of the animals. Osa

⁴⁴Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 290.

⁴⁵Osa Johnson, Four Years, 229.

was the one who found the pets, almost always when they were infants, who captured and returned them to camp, and who looked out after them. The pets supplied her with company, an avenue of entertainment, required a modicum of love in order to achieve a large amount of love in return, and helped her fill the lonely hours while Martin was away, either in the bush on expeditions or in camp developing film. She had, from time to time at Lake Paradise managed to hold onto the following pets: a lion, a leopard, two baboons, an aardvark, a fox, two mongoose, a baby elephant, a Tommy gazelle, a genet cat, a flock of guinea fowl and last but not least, several ostrich.⁴⁶

The animals also provided Osa the excitement of an outside commitment. She later used these animals as the models for the primary characters in her children's books that she wrote entitled Jungle Pets, Jungle Babies, and Jungle Friends. The books were enormously well received and spawned an even greater following of the pair among children. Her stated intention in the writing of the stories was that perhaps in some way to inspire a love of animals in those who read the works and to also evoke a sympathy of sorts for dumb animals that she loved so dearly.⁴⁷ One told children a story of African animals, playful by nature, and loving by design. She applied the same successful humanizing traits to the animals in her stories that Martin had so successfully employed in his books for years. A description of their baby elephant, called Pantaloons, was given which helped to understand the name selection. Osa said that although he weighed in at

⁴⁶Ibid., 232.

⁴⁷Mrs. Martin Johnson, Jungle Babies, iii.

about two hundred pounds, the loose hide he had on his legs gave an appearance that he was indeed wearing pantaloons. He later appeared in a motion picture and the public came to know him as Toto Tembo, which in Swahili meant baby elephant. Osa also included sections on almost all the interesting animals she encountered on trips or took in as pets. There was Wah Wah, the gibbon ape. She often took Wah Wah to bed with them. The result was an ape which felt secure and content and a husband who was not. Once the animal fell asleep, however, Osa moved him because he snored. She would place him in his own little bed in a box rigged for him. He would later be donated to the Central Park Zoo in New York with various other pets.⁴⁸ Osa described how they obtained a baby gorilla named Snowball from natives. Snowball and Teddy Tantrums, a chimpanzee, would fall victims of an upcoming nation-wide lecture tour for Osa and Martin. The animals were then donated to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C. The animals were to be placed in a large outdoor cage built especially for them with the requirement that they not be separated.⁴⁹ Snowball's name was given to him by Osa. It was one borrowed from an "...elderly darky named Snowball, who she used to know when she was a little girl and lived in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri."⁵⁰

The children's books by Osa were devised to find a vehicle for Osa, supplement their income, and interest children at the same time. They also were used to dispel myths about the animals that Osa knew the public didn't fully understand. For instance, she

⁴⁸Mrs. Martin Johnson, Jungle Friends, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1930): 37, 46.

⁴⁹Ibid., 67.

⁵⁰Ibid., 50.

told of the gentle gorilla, ones that truly sought peace and quiet and lived in remote areas of rough mountain areas to avoid trouble. This was in direct contradiction to the public's perception. The public had a vision of gorillas of ferocity, superhuman strength, and a murderous treachery popularized in books and movies of the era. Many of these pets were returned with Osa and Martin for a subsequent donation to the New York City Zoo and the San Diego Zoo. The purpose was to insure that children had an opportunity to learn first hand about animals.

Osa had difficulty accepting people who could not love animals. She usually credited her love of animals to her Uncle Joe Holman, her maternal uncle, who lived on the edge of the Ozark Mountains. He was especially fond of animals, particularly dogs. Osa claimed that Uncle Joe imparted his knowledge and love of animals to her. He taught her that animals, just like their human counterparts yearned deeply for affection and were in fact eager to give all of their love to anyone that would treat them well. Osa assured everyone around her that Uncle Joe was correct about that. This was not merely a belief with Osa, it was her way of life. She had a blind faith in the goodness of animals that exceeded her ability to reason.⁵¹ She felt animals, while deprived speech, were far from dumb. She acknowledged that this was due in part to the great amount of time she was able to spend with animals. Her views were not the accepted views of that or many other periods. She saw them as intelligent and capable of great perception and keen

⁵¹Ibid., 152.

awareness. She felt that they were emotionally similar to people. She saw constant times when they returned love for love and even hate for hate.⁵²

The lake atmosphere brought many photographic opportunities not found on safari including the abundance of game which came to the lake. Osa and Martin on one August evening complained that so many animals stayed awake at night that they had no opportunity to photograph them. So they devised a plan which could overcome that problem. They either camped out on a brushpile which was dangerous enough, or else they slept in a treetop blind. This treetop operation left them cold, uncomfortable and vulnerable to leopards. They often had great difficulty staying awake because of their exhausting work schedules. The additional hours were not always productive and that only added to their exhaustion. The great hope was to get a unique camera shot which would always tend to revitalize them and their waning energies. Their constant fear was rain which was extremely injurious and damaging to their cameras.⁵³ This was oftentimes the case as several thousands of feet of film could be ruined, with a single rainfall or else several dozen plates ruined.

Life in Africa could pose tremendous problems that were not always offset by their limited successes. The mental anguish from these setbacks were incapable of estimation and only the mentally strong could endure these hardships. Martin could restrain himself better than most when hours of backbreaking work and writing was forfeited because of

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Osa Johnson, Four Years, 258.

bad light, or a mechanical malfunction. There was one day however when Osa reported that the sense of loss for Martin was so great that even he could not stand it. He so lost his temper and composure that his judgment was temporarily impaired. He picked up the offending piece of equipment, in this case a jammed lens, and tore it off the camera closely followed by a throw of monumental proportions. Osa felt sick seeing one of their most expensive and useful lenses sail through the air until it hit a tree which smashed it into tiny pieces. The air became thick with the normal acrimony between spouses caught in this predicament and neither would address the incident for several weeks for fear of reigniting the wrath of the other.⁵⁴

A telegram arrived at Lake Paradise after their third year there which immediately created a great excitement. It said that the Johnsons would be visited by George Eastman, one of their principal sponsors, Mr. Daniel Pomeroy of the Museum of Natural History in New York, another principal investor, and Mr. Eastman's personal physician, Dr. Audley Stewart. The men had set out for Africa on March 13, 1926, and later returned to America on October 26, 1926. The men were going to pay the Johnsons the visit they had requested for some time. The additional purpose was to obtain animal groups for the new African Hall at the Museum of Natural History. The group would later join Carl Akeley in Tanganyika to study the Serengeti lions with him. It took little more than a week in the spring of 1926 to move the Eastman-Pomeroy things through customs and to plan the first safari. Unfortunately the road to Lake Paradise was hardly passable due to

⁵⁴Martin E. Johnson, Lion: African Adventure with the King of Beasts (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1929): 103.

the rainy season. This led to the planning of a safari to visit the Kodong Valley, about thirty-five miles south of Nairobi.⁵⁵

George Eastman wrote about his travels in Africa and later had them privately published for his friends. He discussed the trip up to Lake Paradise where they saw abundant game. He mentioned "...big herds of Oryx and zebra here and scattered groups of Eland (the largest of the antelope), gerenuks, Grant's gazelle, tommies, giraffe, dik-diks (the smallest of the antelopes, about the size of a pointer dog), lesser koodoos, impala and others. . ."⁵⁶ He discussed the men's fear that a woman in camp was a mistake, even one as reportedly efficient as Martin's wife, only to discover that all of the men were equally charmed by Osa. They collectively felt that she was the life of the camp. She out fished Pomeroy for trout, out shot all of them, cooked exotic dishes such as spur fowl fricassee, and did it all with such a *joie de vivre* that all the others were drawn to her side.⁵⁷ The visit by the Eastman group forced Martin and Osa to temporarily swallow their moral viewpoint on the unnecessary slaughter of animals, as all innocents must who are required to rely on the funds of a sponsor, when George Eastman killed a rhino for the sole purpose of obtaining a skin to place on his piano at home. Eastman was shown the best of all times as was Pomeroy. The Johnsons certainly were aware of the source of their cash, as in which direction was their cash flow, and

⁵⁵Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 296.

⁵⁶George Eastman, Chronicles of an African Trip, (Rochester, New York: Privately printed for the author-John P. Smith Company, Inc. 1927), 34.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 35.

they took every action to insure their backers had a splendid time while in Africa. Mr. Eastman was taken quail hunting near the city of Narok in July. He recorded a kill of over forty birds in just over two hours. The men were all lodged together in a visitors guesthouse built expressly for that purpose. The Johnsons had it located smack dab in the middle of an elephant trail heavily used by the elephants to visit the lake. It was reinforced to insure the men would not be disturbed by the near misses of the large beasts.

The visit was then moved to the field as a trip was taken to move the group to Tanganyika to visit with Carl Akeley. This was the home ground of the dreaded tsetse fly, an insect which proved to be a greater killer than either the adders or mambas. This arthropod was a plague to two-thirds of Tanganyika and spread the dreaded disease sleeping sickness to man and animals.⁵⁸ The party then ran into some people named Church who had been their companions on their ocean journey over. The Churches had killed ten lions for trophies but had not gotten the larger animals due to the time lost awaiting broken automobile parts. The field life of the Johnson expedition would prove just as arduous. They used, according to Eastman, local muddy river water to bathe and wash, but obtained their drinking water from over ninety miles away. The natives used sixty-gallon drums of water brought in to cook with, and they drank distilled water cooled in a canvas bag called a chagos. They had over one hundred natives with them and it required a great deal of hunting to obtain meat for that many porters. Eastman and

⁵⁸Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 119.

Pomeroy considered the situation ideal for the hunting they located among the plentiful hills teeming with thousands of animals.⁵⁹

Eastman was very impressed with the ability of the Masai tribesmen to hunt lions without guns of any type. They used the spear exclusively. It was a test of a young Masai and his bravery to kill a lion with only a shield for protection and a spear. They observed that once the lion population died out, as it was doing because of the over hunting of great white hunters such as Leslie Simpson, who killed two hundred and fifty-nine lions and Stewart Edward White who killed sixty-four lions by bow and arrow. This would eventually lead to a limit of five lions which could be killed by any one person. Osa and Martin, by comparison, would only kill two lions out of the thousands they would encounter in all their years in Africa.⁶⁰ This lack of lions would eventually lead the Masai to lose the art of lion hunting because of the lack of lions. Osa and Martin attempted to get film of the spearing ritual, but because of the great distances covered in such a short time, they soon discovered the reason that the record of such native accomplishments was incomplete. As soon as the lion retreated to his native donga where he could be obscured by the brush, it was impossible to secure film of the hunt. Carl Akeley admitted that he had only been partially successful filming the episodes years before.

⁵⁹George Eastman, Chronicles of an African Trip, 54-8.

⁶⁰Alice Cecilia Cooper and Charles A. Palmer, Bringing Maps to Life, 36.

The count of lions killed by the party stood at two for Pomeroy, two for Dr. Stewart, five by George Eastman, and the natives who speared six.⁶¹ The lion, superb hunter that it was, once was estimated to have killed more animals by night in Africa than the combined totals of all the white hunters in Africa in a years time.⁶² This still did not warrant the wholesale slaughter of the animal and the limit placed upon their kind curbed the death knell of the animal.

After the return of the party to Nairobi, they experienced a chilling episode which left both Osa and Martin heartsick. Osa rushed out of their hotel room after Kalowatt left by the window. She soon saw that he was playing on some power lines. Once he touched several other wires at the same time, he was electrocuted. He was about fifteen feet above the alley behind the hotel. A large crowd of natives gathered around and several laughed at the tragic incident. Martin lost control of his senses over that insensitivity and hit several of the men. He next proceeded to also knock down a white doctor that came out to see what the commotion was about. Osa, by this point, had fainted at the sight of her beloved pet on the wires hanging limp. She was carried to their room and Martin found her there sobbing uncontrollably.

Blaney Percival took that time to phone the power company to disconnect the electricity so the body of Kalowatt could be brought down. Martin wrapped the body of the ape in a blanket and took it to their room. He placed the body in the cage used to

⁶¹George Eastman, Chronicles of an African Trip, 73.

⁶²Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 131.

carry the ape. The rest of that evening Osa and Martin mourned for Kalowatt just as sincerely as if it had been their child instead of their pet. Around midnight, they could no longer stand the grief. They left the hotel in a car and drove straight to the Athi plains. Once there, they paced until sunlight when they decided on their plan from that point. They returned to the hotel, got the freshly laundered blanket of Kalowatts to wrap up the body. They next bought an officers tin dress case lined with rubber to place the body in for burial. They then drove out ten miles or so into the country to find a burial spot not soon destined for civilization. They selected a site under a large tree and had natives dig a six foot grave. They then buried their beloved pet and returned to town.⁶³

After the Eastman party departed in late September of 1926, the routine of everyday life returned to Lake Paradise. It would continue until one evening when Martin was attempting to take night photographs at one of the waterholes in the area. He wanted to enhance the visual images he was attempting to create, so he used sixteen radium flares where he usually employed no more than two. The shooting was cut short when Martin was injured by flares which ignited prematurely while he was setting them to trigger and he was horribly burned. He would prove unable to even take a simple drink of water to satisfy his craving because his lips were so badly burned and swollen. He feared the worst and felt a little sickened.⁶⁴ Martin was returned to camp and left virtually alone for two days until Osa returned from the bush. She found his face black with burned flesh

⁶³Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 286-8.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 283.

and powder. She set about to sponge his face with cotton and disinfectants. One of their assistants, John Wilshusen, helped her and she applied permanganate of potash in an effort to dress his wounds with *unguentine* and fresh bandages.⁶⁵ Then she did that two more times each day. It still resulted in Martin losing flesh and he was in critical condition for ten days. He was initially blinded by the burns and could not see for at least the first three days, this was in his right eye, while the left took two weeks more to again see. Once the swelling began to subside, he improved mentally as he began to lose the fear of death he remembered from the death of the native boy who contracted lockjaw. While Osa was the lone person capable of treating him day and night, she pushed herself to not only nurse him, but she read him magazine stories each day in an effort to keep his mind off the pain. Martin was racked with pain yet he also felt guilty for the work he was missing while he was bedridden. Osa also took on this new challenge, finding time to fit that work Martin was missing into her schedule. She also found time to work in the laboratory to develop prints. Martin had warned her about glossy velox prints which were prone to burning with over exposures to development chemicals. He also instructed her to not under develop her prints either. He felt underdevelopment washed out in appearance and was just as unappealing as an overexposure. Osa listened to all of his instructions and returned to him developed pictures that even he had to agree were excellent. The two hundred and fifty pictures had taken her much more time and expense in the way of paper and chemicals than she

⁶⁵Fitzhugh, Martin Johnson: Lion Hunter, 179.

admitted to Martin. She simply never told him about her failures along these lines. She also continued to work on Martin's correspondence while he was medically incapable of any work. She carefully attended to the many details of the day to day operation of the camp previously taken care of by Martin. She watched the camp and the native boys much more closely than she had previously. She wanted Martin to be proud of the work which she was doing. When the natives felt they could oversleep with the master ailing, or fail to work hard in the garden, or neglect any one of a thousand chores, they underestimated Osa. Not only was she fully competent to care for Martin and his work, she could also run the camp as well as a man. To say that Osa earned Martin's undying respect during this period goes without saying.⁶⁶

Osa would explain in Four Years in Paradise that it was impossible to set down in chronological order the things which happened to them while at the lake. She maintained that time, as it was known in the city, did not exist in the wilderness. This was because there were no newspapers, social calendars or scheduled events to set apart a day, a week, or even a month from any of the countless other time periods which followed in that countless procession of time. She noted that the seasons alone were capable of marking time and it was this which governed their work as well as their comings and goings.⁶⁷ This philosophy was also employed by both Osa and Martin in their writings. Dates were simply something that were not high on their list of

⁶⁶Osa Johnson, Four Years, 308.

⁶⁷Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 280.

importance. Subsequent to that philosophy, their writings contain few significant dates other than to mark either the end of one journey or sometimes the beginning of another journey, but seldom to mark the progress or significant milestones within a particular journey.

The fourth winter at Lake Paradise they set out to climb Mt. Kenya. This was on January 26, 1926, to film the snow and ice in contrast to the tropical life they had filmed to date.⁶⁸ This 17,040 foot peak had excited them with its bountiful opportunities for photography. As such the mountain presented a challenge to Martin which exceeded his previous accomplishments. It was an intricate problem to view a snowcapped peak squarely positioned on the equator. It was because of this contrast of nature that the German explorer, Ludwig K. Knapf, who discovered the mountain in 1848, had so much difficulty in convincing the world of his discovery.⁶⁹

The Johnsons brought additional provisions and hand selected their porters for their incredible stamina which would accompany them on the journey. They encountered little or relatively few problems in the initial three days of the ascent. They saw wonderful panoramas of scenic wonder such as steep plains. With scrub trees replete with Spanish moss and narrow strips of bamboo forests which began mysteriously and ended much the same before the timberline, the Johnsons continue their climb. They could, on the third day of the ascent, closely view the ice and snow of the peak. The

⁶⁸Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 235.

⁶⁹Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 154.

ascent would, however, end at this juncture. They would be near death in a relatively short time. They were completely unaccustomed to altitude or cold and they had vastly underestimated the elements. The effects of high altitude sickness were soon upon them. Once they realized they were sick enough to discontinue the shoot, they returned to a mission further down the mountain. They sent word for Dr. Irwine to come to their assistance. Osa appeared the better off of the two. Martin had a temperature which exceeded one hundred and four. The doctor diagnosed Martin with influenza and Osa as suffering from double pneumonia. In a short while she was delirious. The doctor became so concerned that John Wilshusen, their mechanic who accompanied them, was dispatched for Meru in the night to send telegrams to Nairobi requesting another physician. Once assured that Dr. Anderson was underway, John returned to the mission. At this juncture, the doctor stated the absolute need for a nurse. This again set John off on a journey to Nairobi. The one hundred and sixty mile trip took him about five and one-half hours. He found a nurse and returned in just under five hours. The nurse, Sister Withall claimed her hair was changed to gray from this trip. The two doctors and nurse now turned their attention solely on Osa. Dr. Anderson came to Martin and indicated he felt death for her was imminent. He requested Mrs. Leighty's address to wire her the news to save her the tragic shock when it happened. Martin later slipped in unnoticed to see Osa and discovered a ghastly sight. She was unconscious with opened eyes; ice cold towels were being applied; blue lips and such shallow and rapid breathing that Martin feared her death.

The next day and night the doctors continued the death vigil. Meanwhile, John had again been dispatched to obtain the services of a second nurse and of all things, an ice-machine, to treat Osa. He never faltered, left immediately and returned with the ice-machine and nurse in tow. Martin was convinced that the untiring efforts of John Wilshusen saved both their lives. He stated that for one week he never saw John engaged in eating or sleeping, such was his devotion to the pair. Osa and Martin did shortly regain their good health. Nurse Withall was retained to help Osa for a short while following the sickness.⁷⁰ The doctors soon approved of a safari out on the Karisoot Desert. They were again accompanied by John Wilshusen who brought the Willys-Knights cars down to the Chorgia Mission station and helped to construct a bed in one of the vehicles so Osa could travel while on the expedition.⁷¹

The results of the second African expedition was such a general feeling of achievement by both Martin and Osa that they each described the successes in their works. She explained the success in her book, Four Years in Paradise, while Martin used Camera Trails in Africa as his vehicle.⁷² It would be in her book that Osa would acknowledge the need for a bigger diversion than simply gardening. A loneliness would set in that according to Dr. Pascal James Imperato, their biographer in They Married Adventure, led to problem drinking on the part of Osa. He claimed that as early as 1920 Osa's brother Vaughn was an alcoholic and Osa had by that time displayed the initial

⁷⁰Osa Johnson, Four Years, 241-43.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 241-253.

⁷²Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 32.

tendency to binge drinking because of her loneliness. He stated that Osa would experience this depression and drinking illness whenever she would leave home for a separation from her loved ones. This would limit the detrimental public exposure since few outside of Africa would see this behavior. Dr. Imperato did specifically list a number of occurrences where Osa was publicly drunk and Martin was forced to endure a humiliation for her condition. The stress that degradation placed upon their marriage was an obvious weight Martin had to bear, which he did.

The weight of the surrender of even a part of one's dreams is often times experienced by marriage partners. That was particularly true of Martin and Osa's relationship. Osa would never be allowed to have the family she so wanted because of Martin's experience in the South Seas where he lost a testicle. Martin would sometimes fight to exorcize Osa from the demons of her drinking. Yet both partners had too much love for the other to allow their individual problems to become greater than their love for the other.

Eventually it would be time to end their stay at Lake Paradise. They left the lake in early December 1926 with few remorse's and with many accomplishments. They arrived after three and one half years in Africa in New York on May 16, 1927. They soon visited with friends and relatives from Kansas. Martin continued to finalize films made while at Lake Paradise and to work on lecture tours and writing contracts. They were at this time offered lucrative lecture contracts which Martin indicated exceeded six figures. The amount of money needed to continue their work staggered Martin. The work literally gobbled money in bundles. This opportunity to make such large amounts of money

of money would have made most couples immediately submit to those proposals. In fact, this success would have made many couples delirious with the endless possibilities. The point is Osa and Martin were not like other couples. When the offers started to roll in, they received word from George Eastman, in the form of a personal visit, that he wanted to meet with them in Africa to again safari with them. The possibilities of new adventures simply outweighed any financial reward. They could not refuse the invitation. Their business associates thought they were crazy, and told them this in no uncertain terms. Martin's reply was clearly indicative of the couples approach to life, "At best, life is much too short for all the work we've set out to do." He then smiled, "And anyhow, I guess money isn't very important to Osa and me. The point is that when you live in Africa, down close to the earth and the animals you acquire a different set of values than when you live in the city. Living anywhere away from the city would do the same thing, of course. And what makes it great, is that Osa feels exactly the same as I do."⁷³

It would be about this same time they learned of the death of Carl Akeley. The date was November 17, 1926. Once again, the Johnsons would set out for darkest Africa and life in the field would become home to Osa and Martin.

⁷³Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 305.

CHAPTER VI

TANGANYIKA AND BOY SCOUTS

Osa now began to assert more control into areas which had previously been the exclusive domain of Martin. She would be the commissary officer responsible for increased logistics. The once taboo fields of photography, artistic composition and compositions as well became open to her. Martin not only agreed to her additional photographic endeavors, he encouraged them as well. It was obvious Martin was capable of judging talent and developing it as well. Osa was indeed talented.

The visit by three boy scouts allowed Osa to amplify her maternal side for a while. She mothered the boys as if they were her own. She looked out for their safety and well-being much as she had done for Martin. It was reported by the scouts that it was obvious to them who the camp leader at this time was-it was Osa. To the scouts, she did everything imaginable that was necessary. She even gave advice and directions on photography to Martin. While the boys had read a number of works by Martin, they had little practical insight that Osa was also responsible for some of the high quality work which was turned out by the pair.

The stateside release of their work *Simba* would mark the initial public acknowledgment of a woman as a photographer, co-producer, and cinematographer. These were not hollow designations. Osa had earned these titles through hard work and a practical application of both learned and intuitive traits. This would also mark the

emergence of Osa as a public personality. Prior to this, she had been known as Mrs. Martin Johnson, the woman who was constantly pictured as the domestic type with a rarely seen courage. While this view was new to the public, Martin intended an even more glamorous presentation of Osa to the public.

The Johnsons accepted the invitation given by George Eastman to again travel in Africa with him. They departed America from New York on December 14, 1927, on the *Berengaria*. They intended a leisurely journey up the Nile River. They went with Mr. Eastman aboard his boat, the *Dal*, in early January. The trip would include several weeks aboard the ship in the enjoyment of each others company. They went together through the White Nile near Lake Albert in order to better view the elephant and white rhino indigenous to the area. The journey ended far too soon and Mr. Eastman departed Africa for the last time.

This now afforded Osa and Martin the time to complete two tasks which Martin had wanted to do for some time. They would make a record of the pygmies of the Ituri forest and make a movie of *Simba*, the lion, King of the Beasts. This return to Africa in the spring of 1927 to again visit Tanganyika to film and record the life struggle of the lion was a decision which came easily to Martin. There had been for some time a desire on the part of Carl Akeley to show Martin that unless provoked, the lion was perfectly willing to live in harmony with man. Lions took notice, certainly, that humans were in the area, but they made no openly hostile or overt action toward man. It would now be months later since Martin had discovered the illness Carl Akeley had while last with the

Johnsons had proven to be fatal to Carl who had died while studying the mountain gorilla.¹

When the Johnsons approached the Ituri forest, they were somewhat apprehensive about their photographic possibilities with the pygmies. They had previously seen similar creatures in the South Seas. They weren't sure if the natives would accept them. They needn't worried. The first meeting saw the pygmies huddled together in order to afford each other protection and they were quite nervous and shy around the Johnsons. They were such a secretive people that it was considered an accomplishment for the Johnsons to draw so many of them into the open. The group consisted of approximately forty terrified, often crying, pygmies. Martin tried to gain their confidence by outwardly being kind and by his use of comforting words, only to realize that they could not understand his speech. He next went about setting up his camera equipment to film the little people. One of the first visual differentiations Martin noticed was a lack of adornment or ornamentation of any kind. The people did not pierce either their noses or earlobes. This was certainly not the norm for African natives.² He also observed that the natives had a tendency to often over indulge in pombe (native beer).³ This was also not the norm for African natives. Osa and Martin spent a great deal of time as well as tobacco and assorted trinkets designed to win the trust and confidence of the pygmies. It was finally successful and both sides began the task of trying to understand the other.

¹Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 25.

²Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 25, 38.

³Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 68.

Martin made some observations in regard to the little people and he advanced the theory they became small because they lived in such a dense, tropical forest. He felt that this was why they did not receive the necessary sunlight. He also noted it might help to explain the very light brown coloring of the pygmies. He also stated that in the same Ituri forest they found an extremely small species of hippo, a dwarf buffalo, and the pygmy elephant. These discoveries lent an air of sanction of the lack of sunlight theory by Martin. On March 26, 1928, Martin sent for Bukari, their headman to help deal with the little people. Martin instructed Osa to ready supplies for their safaris and by ten P.M. on the twenty-eighth they had four months worth of supplies in their chop boxes. The efficiency of Osa could not be understated. She was a woman to reckon with in the matter of taking expert care of Martin Johnson. When they finally said goodbye to the pygmies, the trip had assembled about four tons of supplies for the safari to Tanganyika. They had loaded five of their best tents, guns, ammunition, spare gasoline for their vehicles, tarpaulins, chairs and tables, camp beds, eleven still cameras, in addition to three moving-picture machines, several hundred plates for stills, one hundred thousand feet of film coupled with the necessary developing chemicals. There were also typewriters to record their thoughts, medical stores in case of accident, for in African travel they found it enormously important to always have on hand a plentiful supply of antiseptic. This was necessary because the claws of all carnivores were tainted with bits of dead flesh which would enter any fresh, new wound they might inflict.⁴ The safari

⁴Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 158.

also required supplies for their toilet, and a phonograph. Once loaded by their porters onto two trucks and their large touring car, the Johnsons were ready.⁵ Martin commented at this juncture that a journey of this type was a difficult thing to accomplish without some afterthoughts of necessary times by Osa. The thing which probably irritated him the most was her request to take along about three dozen hens and a rooster thrown in for good measure. Bukari had the eight crates lashed on top of the already overloaded vehicle.⁶

The fourth day out saw the expedition reach the Serengetti plains. It was here they spent about three hours fording the Seraniq River which appeared to have vertical banks. Three miles from their camp they were forced to stop while several thousand zebras passed. Martin observed Osa's redirected passion for housekeeping while in the bush. Their home might be a considerable distance away from them at the time, but Osa managed to make the camp as tidy as though she were at home.

It was at this time that Martin re-evaluated their camp life and found it needed some changes. He remembered back when he and Osa were not well versed in the art of camping and living outdoors. They slept on the damp ground in blankets sewn together to form a crude sleeping bag. When the results of this lifestyle became rheumatism or pleurisy or the other ills associated with dampness that sleeping outside causes, they changed. They now had better sleeping arrangements. Cots with mattresses inside a fly

⁵Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 44.

⁶Ibid., 45.

roof to retain cool air for comfort. They no longer swigged down cups of thick, heavy coffee or ate greasy foods. They now ate splendid meals which offered a healthy diet and plenty of rest. To help insure their health in the field, Martin changed their previous philosophy and transferred all routine drudgery to the black natives hired at reasonable wages. He was attempting to rid themselves of all monotony and therefore the depressing effects that monotony could have upon their lives. He was intuitive enough to understand their line of work would not allow them to remain in any physical condition which was not tip-top. The camp life changed, after eight years in Africa, from being rough and laden with hard work into luxurious, albeit mobile headquarters for him and Osa. The most important change implemented by Martin in their camp life was his decision to no longer be subject to the haphazard whims of his various headmen. He alone would now decide the direction of the camp and the people it contained. Martin based this decision on their new found feeling that this experience mattered most to him. He would now lead the camp instead of being held hostage by the camp. He credited this newfound assertive behavior to their new and improved constitution.⁷

Safari life still proved to be a combination of existence by warding off life's ills, and hard work and dedication to their chosen profession. One of the strange anomalies of Africa, at least to Martin, was the effect it had upon their persons. Martin generally weighed in at around two hundred and ten pounds, in America. Yet only one hundred and sixty five pounds kept Martin going while in Africa. Osa, on the issue of weight,

⁷Ibid., 58-60.

was also consistent with this pattern. She weighed in at one hundred and thirty pounds in America, which could shrink down to one hundred and fifteen pounds while in Africa. They both credited the disciplined life and hard work with their removal of excess fat while in the field.⁸ The facts are that they both worked extremely hard while in Africa. They usually walked from ten to fifteen miles per day, rose early, worked hard and got plenty of rest. It was a prescription for healthy living.

Osa and Martin slept in rot-proof tents with trenches dug around them to carry off water which was unwanted in sleeping tents. Another vehicle was erected which did support a need for water. The purpose of this was to cause rain water to run off a sheet on poles which had been spread at forty-five degree angles. The sleeping tents had stones and poles on the ground which were designed to elevate their boxes and trunks above ground level and thereby avoid the white ants prevalent in this country. Mosquito nettings were masterfully arranged so that the Johnsons were allowed to raise or lower them entirely with a single pull of the leading string.⁹

The addition of an ice machine to the camp, obtained when Osa had become ill on Mt. Kenya, was an excellent move on Martin's part. He liked the availability of ice with only three minutes turning of a crank. Osa liked it because this machine allowed her to make ice cream for Martin with the ice that was excess.¹⁰ The native's meals consisted primarily of posho as their food of choice which Martin likened to the Oriental love of

⁸Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 230.

⁹Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 61-3.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 65.

rice. He also stated the natives would not take food from the table of their bwana. This was incredible to Martin for they often had sandgrouse or Franklin partridge, or bustard (greater or lesser), topi every five days which was often cut into prime steaks, liver or roast cuts. Breakfast had rice cakes, sometimes waffles and fresh eggs from the hens Osa had insisted upon. Osa even taught their cook to prepare and bake excellent bread as well as how to brew a coffee Martin insisted was as choice as any he had ever tasted in New York.¹¹ The pride of the camp was the butter (forty pounds of it) made by Osa for the trip. She churned it herself and then sealed it in glass jars with an almost equal amount of salt worked in as a preservative. When it was opened, she had only to dump the butter, work distilled water through it to eliminate the taste of salt. This provided Martin with another of his pleasures for he felt butter was necessary for the palate. He approved its use in cooking as well as spreading on breads.¹²

The love of animals had long kept Martin vocal about their slaughter at the hands of so-called sportsmen. He and Osa despised wanton killing and tried to support the establishment of game preserves in order to protect wild game. As people financially supported by the filming of animals that was the politically correct position for them to adopt. Martin and Osa took the philosophy to heart and redoubled their efforts to insure game was not killed improperly or needlessly. They killed only for food or in the extreme measure of Martin's photography in order to save their lives. Martin was

¹¹Ibid., 66.

¹²Ibid., 67.

officially listed as a game warden which worried Osa enormously for poacher's often killed game wardens to erase their crimes. They both felt a distinct commitment to wild game which proved rare. The true sportsman did not frighten or offend them for they knew that more game was taken on a nightly basis by lions than all the sportsmen combined for a year. Martin's position on excessive trophy hunting was clear:

I have long been opposed to the unnecessary slaughter of game. Publicly and privately I have arraigned the thoughtless sportsman who kills exclusively for no other purpose than to boast about his bag. It is a good thing for museums and some authentic personal collections to have specimens of wild game in view. The sportsman of moderate taste does no real damage. All tend to stimulate public interest in an unknown country and often redound to the benefit of the game itself. But to kill in the sense of destroy, to slay in the cause of conceit, is surely an offense against the Almighty and a symbol of human stupidity.¹³

The Johnsons were still somewhat sickened by the senseless cruelty they observed in the animals they photographed. Martin once commented he had seen a lion take down a zebra, hamstringing it at once to insure it did not get away, and while the zebra was still alive, the lion tore out the animal's stomach while it proceeded to eviscerate the helpless animal. Another occasion saw a pack of wild dogs catch a kongoni and begin tearing flesh from the rump of the animal before Martin could disperse them or even put the wounded creature out of its misery. It was not unusual to see a sick zebra being torn apart by vultures who picked the eyes out of the victim while it was still alive.¹⁴ The other exploits of lions, or rhinos connected with man always fell on man's momentary

¹³Ibid., 71.

¹⁴Ibid., 72.

lapse of attention. Once that happened, as it often did in the bush, especially when those people were unfamiliar with the animals, the results were positively disastrous.

Circumstances often combined to create humorous results while Osa and Martin were on the plains. They were, at one juncture, camped near the Seranio River in search of lions to photograph. It had been raining and was near mid-day when the pair decided to take their car and ford the river in search of work. As they approached the water, Martin felt uneasy since the water level was above that which he felt comfortable in crossing. Osa observed the water and insured Martin there was little doubt in her mind they could safely ford the river. Martin took her advice and immediately started across. Half way to the other side, the car became stuck and the motor died from the water which now appeared to be rising. They both sat there afraid to leave the car, for neither had brought any weapon to protect themselves should they be attacked by lions. When the level of the water rose inside the vehicle, Osa decided they should remain with the vehicle since it was rigged for their work in lion country while the other two vehicles were not so arranged. Once the water level increased to an even higher crest, they decided to put on rain slickers and get on top of the car to avoid the rushing water. They then decided to wait for the water to hopefully recede. In the meantime, a lion had shown up on the far bank and paced back and forth as he envisioned a dinner of Johnson steaks. When it finally appeared to him that no meal would be forthcoming, he left. After he left Martin reported that the second hour on top of the car possessed the expected light conversation one might imagine taking place between a husband and wife

which were isolated on top of a car stuck in the rain in the middle of an African river.¹⁵

Once the water level finally started to recede in late afternoon, they were finally able to regain the use of the car in order to return to their camp.

All was not love and flowers while in the jungle either. On the occasion of their eighteenth wedding anniversary, Martin forgot the day and Osa stormed off in a huff. She stayed away but returned later when told Martin was ill. When she returned she discovered he had suffered from another bout of malaria. She nursed him until he was again healthy enough to proceed on their journey.

Osa was the commissary officer for the camp. As was true with her other responsibilities, she took them with a seriousness previously unseen on any other safaris. She had over the years developed a system for packing their food supplies into chop boxes which made it possible to allow the cook to unpack virtually in the dark, if necessary, and still know where everything was located. Osa was even more stringent in this requirement as it now carried an even higher profile with her. He was required by Osa to place everything back the same way it was removed, in order to preserve the system, when they broke camp each day. This was not just idle work or a vague idiosyncrasy on Osa's part, as much as a system clearly capable of instantly telling them how much food they had left before she had to send back to base for more supplies.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid., 93.

¹⁶Ibid., 125.

Night photography evolved over the years with Martin from simple flashlights consisting of a radium flare attached to a trip wire Martin stationed next to the kill of zebra he had left to entice lions to be photographed while eating. There came one evening when the zebra was properly placed in relation to the flares and trip wire with the Johnsons inside their open car to attend to the shoot. Years past had seen them in tree blinds to avoid the animals. They now had advanced to the use of a car as a means to put distance between them and the lions. It would be the only thing between them and a pride of ravenous lions. When the lions finally arrived and got over their natural fear, the time was right for Martin to press the button to take the photos, once he had them arranged for a pose he wanted. He would usually do this with either a flashlight or a whistle to startle them into looking up. When he pushed the button to ignite the flares and trigger the cameras, the switch mechanism failed. Martin was beside himself. He saw the possibility of an entire days work being wasted. He sat there for a while mulling over the options when he finally indicated to Osa his intention was to get out of the car and approach a hungry pride of ravenous lions in the middle of eating their prey in order to find and repair the short-circuited switch. While Osa was sure Martin was heroic by nature, she hesitated to allow him to proceed. She pleaded with him to stay in the vehicle and to abandon the shoot, but Martin convinced her the lions were not hungry enough to pose a threat to him. He also carried a sawed-off Ithaca riot gun to pull off the ruse. Martin worked outside for about fifteen minutes when he found and repaired the short-circuited switch. He also noted the lions watched his every move. He returned to

the car and took the pictures which turned out exceptionally well.¹⁷ This excitement would later spill over to Osa who usually, sooner or later, would attempt to duplicate a great many of Martin's exploits.

The Johnsons had a respect for their native porters and headmen seldom duplicated among white masters in Africa. The pair was very democratic with the natives. Martin also had a philosophical side that saw him rationalize the actions of the natives. He rated the African low on the list of human races until one would consider his natural virtues which Martin felt could outweigh his vices. He felt that in the bush the nakedness of the native became a virtue, his plain diet an economy to model after, while he saw their instincts at nomadic life as a blueprint for travelers.¹⁸ In short, when placed in his own element, the African native measured up quite well. It was only when measured against others not in that same element that the natives fell short. Martin truly was a very generous individual to advance that proposition at the time he did. America, in 1928, was certainly not a land content to address its own obvious concerns with the black race. America had racist hatred which was openly condoned and publicly subsidized in the south. Lynchings were a common method of race control over the blacks exercised by a civilized white population trying to insure a continuing subservience to whites by blacks. For the Johnsons to not only allow black natives to control parts of their lives and in many cases to place their personal safety and very lives in the hands of natives presented

¹⁷Ibid., 152.

¹⁸Ibid., 162.

a racial trust not often viewed during this period of America. Martin on a daily basis allowed natives carrying guns to surround himself and Osa and reportedly felt no fear of the consequences of those actions. It simply did not enter into the picture. Neither he nor Osa ever stated any fear of injury from their native headmen or their porters as well.

Osa and Martin would spend an inordinate amount of time in Tanganyika filming the records of lions. Although Osa became quite bored with the work, Martin knew that the scientific study which this opportunity presented was invaluable. The lion at this time was still king of his domain and of the jungle. This position gave him much to offer the visual researchers that was previously unknown. The pictorial records turned in by the Johnsons saw them film more than four hundred lions in all.

While the two remained guarded in the presence of lions, they also learned to respect them as well. They knew enough of their habits to understand just when to continue filming and when to pack up and move on in a discretionary manner. They understood that lions were much more dangerous when hunting at night than day, that lions were much more safe to photograph after a kill than before, and like all animals, it was best to give a wide berth to any lion with a cub it was trying to protect. With all that wealth of information safely in tow, was it any wonder that they felt it acceptable to allow Osa to photograph lions alone at night, next to a fresh kill. This was in fact just what they did. Osa killed an older, sickly zebra during the day and as night drew near, with the aid of several natives, positioned the animal to take flashlight photos. Martin was to remain at camp because he was again sick with malaria, which left him unable to argue with Osa about the relative safety of her intended shoot. She went out the distance required and

sat alone in the open car to wait on the arrival of a lion. Some time had passed when she detected the presence of an animal at the kill. When checked, she noted a hyena and ran the animal off. A little while later she heard the ripping of flesh and crunching of bones and knew instinctively that a lion was present. True to her profession, she activated the switch to ignite the radium flares and snapped the picture. Martin heard the boom of the lights being ignited and later said all he could think of was his precious cameras being out there exposed to the rain and his Osa being surrounded by lions. We can be sure he didn't place them in that order of importance when Osa excitedly returned to discuss her shoot.¹⁹

It so happened that the Johnsons would soon have the opportunity to experience life on safari with children, so to speak. The Boy Scouts of America, through great kindness extended by publisher George Palmer Putnam and David T. Layman, along with the Executive Head of the Boy Scout organization James West, announced that three boys would be hand picked from over six hundred thousand Boy Scouts. They would be judged by George Palmer Putnam, and Colonel Teddy Roosevelt, the son of the President. These boys were to travel to Africa and spend six weeks in the bush with the Johnsons, all expenses paid. The procedure saw over two hundred councils of scouts submit choices from within their ranks. A committee narrowed these choices to seventeen scouts which were later narrowed to seven which were chosen to be interviewed. The boys were brought to New York City for personal interviews. All were

¹⁹Ibid., 194.

Eagle Scouts, fifteen to eighteen years of age. Of this group, three scouts were selected, Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver.²⁰

The purpose of the expedition sponsored by Mr. Putnam was to draw upon the enormous financial success of the books written by David Binney Putnam about his trip to the arctic with his father, and the trip to the equator with William Beebe. The fact that a boy achieved such success with his writing was to be the basis for the trip, and the anticipated successful conclusion of this trip as well.²¹

On the ninth of July, 1928, the scouts arrived in Mombassa, and with the accompaniment of East African Boy Scouts were escorted to Nairobi to meet the Johnsons. The tenth of July saw them arrive in Nairobi to be met by Osa and Martin, the American consul, prominent citizens of British East Africa, and the Nairobi scoutmaster. Martin admitted to a great feeling of nationalistic pride upon meeting the scouts for the initial visit. The boys were definitely possessed with divergent personalities. Douglas Oliver was an easy going southerner, Dick Douglas was darker than Dick and somewhat reserved, while Dave Martin was a sturdy, northern blonde. The boys had also won the right on this trip to shoot and kill one lion each.

The Johnsons took their young charges with them on safari to what they called Lion Valley, which was a shallow donga but a few miles away from where they had gone to first see wild lions with Carl Akeley in Tanganyika. The boys were all successful in their

²⁰"Coconut Pies for Boy Scout Lion Hunters," Literary Digest 99 (November 1928): 36, 38.

²¹Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver, Three Boy Scouts in Africa (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), vii-xxi.

hunts and after some delays while their accuracy improved, they each finally killed their trophy. The last one to succeed in this was Dick Douglas, who then handed the rifle back to Osa and stated that with that chore completed they could now photograph the animals without interruption and in peace.²² The boys all credited Martin with a desire of purpose to preserve animals and their habitation areas. They also credited Osa as deserving exactly one half of that credit.²³

The boys had read enough of Martin's books to want to attend a night shoot. The Johnsons would go to great lengths to insure the safety of the scouts. Osa gave them clear and firm instructions about not drinking any water except the camps purified water, and she personally saw to it that they ate well and were able to get a good nights sleep. Her exercise of motherly instincts became a constant joy to her. She would later confide to her mother, Belle, that she wished she had a son just like them. Their visit would help Osa role-play her fondest dreams even in wildest Africa. The sadness she experienced when they left was obvious to all around her.²⁴ The subject of the night shoot kept coming back up. Martin and Osa thought this too daring for the young men, but Martin did work out what appeared to be a satisfactory solution for the boys to attend a night shoot with protection equal to their tender years, as well as Osa's tender heart. Martin took a truck and had a cage constructed in the back with a fence strong enough on the sides and top to protect the boys against a full grown lion. They then rigged up the

²²Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 241.

²³Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver, Three Boy Scouts in Africa, 21.

²⁴Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 150.

wiring for a shot and strategically placed a kill in the focus area of the cameras. Osa was still extremely apprehensive because the only protection the boys had in their cage would be from one lion; it would be useless should a group of lions attack at once.

The boys were put in the truck at about eight o'clock that evening, and they were given the firing wire along with instructions on its operation. Martin explained to them the first to show up would be the hyenas, but that he did not want them to waste film, especially on these old scavengers, but that he did want them to be on a sharp lookout for lions. He also notified them to wait until there was more than one lion to photograph, thus increasing the element of danger to the boys. When the firing apparatus failed and was not resettable by the boys, Martin claimed he had no desire to adjust it for them. The reaction of the boys to this disappointment was to roll up in their blankets and go to sleep. When they later awakened to a thumping noise, they discovered seven lions had the truck surrounded. One old lioness was chewing on a truck tire, while only twenty-five feet away were four others. These animals were soon joined by two more.²⁵ The lioness even went so far as to get up inside the truck.²⁶ While this was indeed a cause for concern, the boys eventually were able to weather the storm and stayed in the truck until morning and left the truck only when Martin effected their rescue.

This event proved their courage to the Johnsons. It would also afford them a later opportunity to again go on a night shoot with Martin and Osa. The scene with the truck

²⁵Martin E. Johnson, Safari, 85.

²⁶Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 243-48.

would again be repeated only with a slightly different twist. This time the lions carried off the batteries used to ignite the flares to light the perimeter for the cameras. One lion even rubbed its bloody mouth on the camera. This incident posed the problem of repairing the damage, which they again chose not to do, or forget the pictures and go to sleep, which they ignored, or watch Martin find and delicately repair two of the battery connections. While out with the lions about, the scouts noticed that Martin carried his sawed-off shotgun. They also stated that Osa carried her rifle to protect him as she stood outside the car.²⁷

The scouts played with the native boys in camp and teased the older natives. They delighted Osa by being children with her. It also appealed to her love of the little boy in Martin. She often saw him more excited over their smaller accomplishments than his larger ones. She delighted in this view of the small boy in Martin and loved to hear him tell them stories of his youth. The relationships in camp between the scouts and the natives were in the extremes. The scouts were leery of the native hair fashion which allowed an individual to glue to their head, by virtue of a mixture of mud, the shorn hair of their dead ancestors. Oftentimes these mud mired transplants would boast hair dating back more than a century. The other extreme the scouts saw was the native decoration of the body. The natives were decorated with large ornaments in their ears and they had their bodies streaked with paint. Men would carry clubs or spears or sometimes even

²⁷Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver, Three Boy Scouts in Africa, 91-2.

bows and arrows. The tribe most respected in the area was the Masai, the herdsmen who raised cattle and gathered a great deal of wealth from the sale of those cattle.²⁸

Osa often baked pies for the scouts and they advanced serious competitions for her attention and baking skills. The precedent had been established as a reward for the scout which had, on that day, killed his lion. Martin initiated a mock argument each time with the boys on what kind of pie should be served but the boys were allowed to win that argument.²⁹

On one occasion, the scouts shot and killed a warthog and stopped to let the skinner clean the carcass. This delay coupled with the immediate presence of water presented Osa with the opportunity to once again fish. The scouts all stated she fished anytime she got the opportunity. After fishing for just a short while, she hooked a catfish and in attempting to land it, the line pulled and then stuck. After Osa gave the line a yank possessing all of her strength, it was determined by all present that a crocodile had the fish and the line was immediately cut.³⁰ The area around their camp at this time was a tinga-tinga or swamp. It was ground that was swamp in the rainy season, but covered with long grass during the dry season. It made for some of the roughest terrain seen by the scouts. The ground was bumpy to travel and slowed all progress.

While out on the Serengetti searching for game to photograph, the scouts could see forty miles away to the extinct volcano Ngorongoro. When they discovered there was no

²⁸Ibid., 49-50.

²⁹Ibid., 47.

³⁰Ibid., 126.

game for ten miles they decided to return to camp. The next view seen by Osa would change all that however. Osa saw what she thought was a growth of a low, dark mass covering the earth. When she and Martin could get close enough to it they both realized this was an exodus of gigantic proportions. Martin described the numbers in the herds of animals as being in excess of ten million. The veldt was covered for miles in all directions with wildebeest and zebra. Martin would spend upwards of an hour attempting to correctly correlate the size of the herd to something he could equate to comprehensible numbers. They saw animals for thirty miles in one direction and fully ten miles more in another direction. The limits of visibility were the only factors reducing acceptance of the size and scope of this exodus. Martin, always the photographer, got out his camera and very slowly, for the next four hours, crossed the animal herd. They Johnsons were required to move so slowly in order to insure they did not spook the animals which could cause a fatal stampede. This time period saw them cross five miles of animals. Osa stated the noise from the animals was so loud as to reduce the communication between the two people to zero. She also sadly commented that oftentimes the slower babies were trampled by the mob of animals filing past. Martin later stated that many lakes were reduced to little more than muddy fields after the animals had drank their fill. The migration would have far reaching effects for recording the plight of animals and their movements.³¹ By the time of their departure

³¹Martin E. Johnson, Lion, 229.

from Africa, the scouts had known the thrill of seeing millions of head of game in the Blanketti River country of lower Tanganyika.³²

The scouts returned to America and reported seeing more game than they thought possible. They reported seeing lions, wolf, spotted hyena, wildcat, cheetah, leopard, serval cat, genet, mongoose, civet cat, wild dogs, foxes, jackal, hyrax (rock rabbit), buffalo, zebra, warthog, giraffes, okapi (of which whites had only shot four up to this time), antelope, gazelles, as well as the hartebeest which included knogoni, wildebeests, steinbuck, topi, duiker, klipspringer, eland, brabi, waterbuck, dik-dik, gerenuk, Thompson's gazelle, or tommy, Grant's gazelle, impalla, bushbuck, roan antelope and reed buck. The monkey family was represented by baboons and Sykes, while the birds were viewed by quail, sandgrouse, bustards, guinea fowl, storks, pelicans, partridge, geese, duck, ostrich, and other waterfowl.³³

The scouts listed a sort of awe with which they held Osa. They knew she was capable of running the camp which consisted of hundreds of natives, as well as the five whites. Douglas Oliver indicated Osa was close to a logistical genius in her ability to run the camp as smoothly as she did. She helped Martin set up cameras for various shots, and she consulted with Martin on locations and compositions of other shoots while the boys were their guests. In general, she was the efficient master in charge of all the important details of their trip.

³²Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 35.

³³Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver, Three Boy Scouts in Africa, 147.

The scouts now range in age from eighty-one to eighty-four and were interviewed to question a number of events as well as the relationships of the Johnsons with the scouts, their natives servants, porters and each other. The results received were entirely consistent with the recorded interpretation of the day of Martin and Osa. The research was conducted through the United States Postal Service from August 28, 1994 through October 26, 1994. One was unable to respond immediately as David Martin of Marro Bay, California, had required a recent surgery, but true to his word he did return the questionnaire one month later with answers about which he felt most positive. Perhaps he felt somewhat obliged to respond. He is today listed as a trustee of the Safari Museum, but he sincerely responded in all areas with answers which both indicated a high degree of both acumen and intuitive perception. In the case of Douglas Oliver, of Honolulu, Hawaii, a brief response was returned for most of the questions involved. He replied the reason for his brevity was his attempt to finish another book. A response from Dick Douglas was not returned, but he is still living as of this writing.

The other two men both responded that their national selection was indeed an honor.³⁴ The open ended question of whether or not they had difficulty in convincing their parents to allow them to head off for darkest Africa with all its attendant dangers was dismissed by Douglas Oliver and David Martin alike. Both men indicated they had the utmost support from their families at all times. Their parents never wavered in their

³⁴Douglas Oliver and David Martin, interview by author. 28 August 1994 to October 1994. Written correspondence.

support even for an instant.³⁵ David Martin indicated that the most startling part of the entire journey for him was the immense length of the journey itself.³⁶ He stated that the three weeks over and back added together exceeded the amount of time they were in Africa. Douglas Oliver also cited the long sea voyage as the most dominant portion of the journey.³⁷

The scout uniform would be their clothing for the duration of the visit but the outfit also included a pith helmet added while they were in camp. David Martin was emphatic when he stated the boys were all constantly guided through their daily routines. They were never allowed to go out exploring or to be alone unsupervised under any circumstances!³⁸ This would have been the result of Osa's concern for their safety. She would insure the boys were looked after just as though they were her own children. Neither of the men related the assignment of any camp duties or responsibilities while in Africa.³⁹ This was related to Osa's immense affection for the scouts. She wanted the trip to be a reward for them with little to dull the intense luster of the wonder of discovery. They were allowed each day to take advantage of Martin's photographic endeavors. David Martin made the enlightened statement that they were allowed to view the Africa

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

that was untamed before '...civilization moved into the area and spoiled much of the splendor of Africa.'⁴⁰

It would be the personalities of Martin and Osa where the men would bestow their greatest tributes. Douglas Oliver was more responsive on this question than any other. He was absolutely animated when he credited Osa with the picture of industriousness, cheerfulness, considerate patience, and ability as a tribute to her resolute personality.⁴¹ David Martin, on the other hand, felt Osa to not only be most gracious, but outgoing and friendly as well. His view of her was matched by countless others in America at this time. He also pictured Martin as a large man who always reminded David of his father, in stature as well as size. He indicated their chance meetings later in New York City produced a most cordial couple always happy to again visit with the men.⁴² After Martin's death, Dick Martin indicated he ran into Osa several times in New York City and he reported she was always most gracious and free with her time for him. The question of relationships between the Johnsons and their natives and servants was answered by David Martin. He clearly indicated a loyal, hard-working team of crew members which respected the scouts and the Johnsons alike.⁴³ This would also be consistent with their public personas at the time.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

While Osa was cited by the scouts for taking many pictures to help Martin fill in the gaps of their pictorial recordings, it was seldom that Martin acknowledged the work to be Osa's. In fairness to Martin, there was little precedent to require that recognition, and he always reported her excellent achievements, as well as accorded her constant praise for her hard work liking of the safari life and excellent marksmanship. However, it was not until the release of their movie *Simba* that Osa was publicly credited for her film work. The movie was released in 1928, and she would be credited as a co-producer and cinematographer. This was a rare coup for a woman at that time. The film industry was dominated by men. Martin was more receptive to this break from hide-bound tradition than were most men of that era. He had another woman, Lillian Seebach, do much of their film cutting and editing for them for a number of years. This had also previously been a male-dominated job. Martin was perhaps better able to view talent defined by ability rather than sex because of his association with Osa.

The release of this movie would also allow the Johnsons to share more of the press attention, which prior to this was usually focused more toward Martin. Osa had traditionally been depicted by the media as a domestic type combined with a courage rarely found in a woman. This new found recognition would require the press to view them more as individuals. Martin even began at this juncture to present an even more glamorous Osa to their public.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 127-42.

CHAPTER VII

THE AFRICA OF PYGMIES AND GORILLAS

Osa now developed her own books for children. She wrote her books, as did Martin, while they were at home in America. She also now began to garner national attention for her attire and was occasionally mentioned as a candidate for the list of best dressed in America. While this attention was flattering, it did not prove to be the equal of the attention Osa began to acquire from the feminist of the era. To these zealots, Osa was indeed a symbol of what modern woman could aspire to become. She was praised for her performance in the face of great and certain dangers and took it all in stride, as usual for Osa.

The work in Africa would be an extension of their previous works. Osa again was credited with more and more original works in the realm of photography. Modern researchers today often have difficulty pinpointing which work was exclusively Martins from this era and which have been done collectively by the pair, and which were exclusively the work of Osa. That would seem to speak volumes about the content and quality of her photographic abilities.

Osa at this time set out to make a permanent home for them at Nairobi. She worked with Martin to transform the house purchased for them with the assistance of Daniel Pomeroy. This house would indeed become everything Osa had wanted for the pair. It possessed a garden, orchard and flowerbeds of exceptional beauty and functional

development. Osa could be credited with a great deal of the results of this beauty for she was the partner with the flair for her green thumb ability. She also picked a location with such natural beauty that instinctively drew people to the property. Beauty and Osa just seemed to naturally go together.

The fourth trip to Africa taken by Osa and Martin began just a few days after the stock market crash of October 29, 1929. The depression would have little initial impact on their expedition because their assets had already been converted to equipment and cash for the journey. This time would end an unproductive period at home in New York where Martin wrote and lectured while Osa also wrote. In addition to her writing, Osa also allowed herself the added luxury of longer than usual hours for the female passions of bridge parties and beauty shops. She was fortunate enough to maintain her complexion and her looks. She also enlarged her liking of clothes which she wore well. She began to take on more national attention for her attire as one of America's best dressed women. Martin took her dancing often and they also attended plays together.¹

Feminists of the era drew valiant inspiration from Osa. She reflected a great deal of their struggles to prove woman to be the equal of man. They were able to see in Osa not only a paradigm for their movement, but also one who had successfully faced hardships and dangers on a par with Martin. These adventures were generally reserved for men alone. The feminists could not only take heart in Osa's ability to prove her worth in

¹Aylesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 164.

these endeavors, they also gave a great heroic significance to the fact that she had the opportunity to attain these achievements.²

The purpose of the Johnsons return to Africa was to again visit with the pygmies of the Ituri forest for an even greater in-depth study of them and to visit the Alumbongo Mountains in search of mountain gorilla families. They now traveled with an entire caravan of vehicles including seven cars and trucks. Two of the cars were camera cars especially designed to allow them to take pictures as they moved along parallel to running herds of animals. One other vehicle was a sound truck while yet another was employed as a laboratory and traveling darkroom.³

The fourth trip to Africa would begin with their traveling partners, George B. Dryden of Chicago, and his son Eastman Dryden, who later both proved to be excellent sportsmen while in Africa. Martin was chasing a new technology on this journey which was previously not attempted. The advent of sound in motion-pictures, as heard in *The Jazz Singer*, virtually obsoleted his style of work and raised the bar regarding what audiences in America would now pay to see. Martin was forced to embrace the new technology lest he fall out of vogue. The attainment of sound, with the new sets of rules and disciplines that were required would have far reaching limitations and results for the Johnsons. Martin hired three men to work with them on this journey: Richard Maedler, a sound cameraman; Louis Tappen, who was in charge of their sound equipment and

²Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 209.

³Alice Cecilia Cooper and Charles A. Palmer, Bringing Maps to Life, 36.

Dewitt Sage, who was assigned to the upkeep of the cars and photograph equipment. This would free Martin of any responsibilities in these areas.

The Ituri forest was first on the Johnsons' agenda. Here Osa found trees literally hundreds of years old. . . They had a dignity combined with a feeling of grandeur about them that made her think God could look down upon this handy work with pride.⁴ The understanding that there was something larger than man responsible for all this beauty was not lost on Osa.

The previous visit with the pygmies had only established Martin's desire to learn more about the queer little people. The forest offered a challenge previously unforeseen in sound recording. The pygmy home was so damp and so chilly that it caused batteries to deteriorate prematurely, wires as well as connections to corrode and break, film to swell, and insulation on the wires to develop cracks and become susceptible to leaks. An interesting note from Martin indicated that swelling of film was the biggest problem. Once the film would swell, it would interrupt the required perfect adjustments needed on sound film recordings which Martin had never experienced on his silent picture cameras. This, he indicated, was because it was driven by the shutter shaft. Apparently the mechanism which was responsible in large part for pulling the film along was required to operate accurately to within a fraction of a second. Film which was even remotely swollen would throw out of balance the delicate adjustments.⁵

⁴Mrs. Martin Johnson, Jungle Friends, 206.

⁵Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla, 79.

Martin decided that to sate his appetite would require them to spend a great deal of time living, filming, and working with the pygmies. To this end, Martin planned to bring in more pygmies, through their acquaintance with pygmy leaders Deelja and his son, Salou, to the camp area on the fringe of the forest than he had ever before seen gathered in one spot. Osa, who had been out hunting, returned to discover an animal skin, the Okapi, she coveted for its difficulty to obtain which had been sold to Martin by three pygmies. Although badly cured, the skins were an opportunity they might otherwise never again secure. Martin spent inordinate amounts of time with the little people. He was enchanted with their child-like qualities. To avoid frightening animals in the area, the pygmies often communicated with each other by way of whispers or even by winks. They often used gestures in order to limit the sounds they made.⁶ They did everything in order to be as one with nature. They seem to the Johnson's to have loved music, feasts, and celebrations which constantly called for drinking. They drank pombre, a native beer which they loved and which they drank prodigiously. The jungle, however hospitable the pygmies were, was not a forgiving environment for sound work in that period. A number of malfunctions began to occur simply because of and related to the high heat and humidity. The equipment suffered as well as the people. Leather was soon peeling off the cameras, tins filled with provisions began crusting, the lens combinations they employed kept clogging with moisture and the clothes they wore soon began to reek of mildew. Their health at last became an issue. DeWitt came down with jungle fever.

⁶Alyesa Forsee, My Love and I Together, 159-160.

Martin had two native boys who became so crippled with rheumatism they could not walk, and others within their group were also ailing. They had flea and gnat bites all over their bodies. Martin had a touch of lumbago which was common and biliousness was rampant.⁷ While they would have liked to stay longer, the equipment and health failures left Martin no choice but to move the operation. When they left, they had to build a bridge over a swollen stream which had washed away its previous bridge. The government felt the work would take eight days which Martin was sure they did not have. This prompted them to build their own temporary bridge. They crossed the makeshift structure and it was one half hour later that it was washed away by the raging waters. They returned to Irumu, then traveled over six hundred miles south to Lake Kivu. Here they would study the apes which were located ten thousand feet up in the mountains.

The location of the Alumbongo mountains would permit Martin to combine with Louis and Dick to produce the first movie ever made in Central Africa. The journey was long and arduous for the new men unacquainted with travel in Africa. They carried with them the pioneer sound equipment which would be used in the production they had undertaken. The portable equipment, with its batteries included, weighed in at just about three hundred and fifty pounds. Spare parts were also included on the venture since there were few opportunities in Africa to obtain parts. A case in point was the breakdown of a cam used on the generator. It took three trips of one hundred and fifty miles each way to Kilo to a mine machine shop where the Belgians repaired the part each time until it

⁷Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla, 60.

worked.⁸ The spares also included a complete electrical generating plant which weighed in at roughly three thousand pounds. This also allowed their field camp to be lighted by electricity, a first in Central Africa.⁹

Louis was always nursing the recording apparatus like an infant because of its intricate, complicated wires which were so difficult to repair. The equipment would operate quite well in the mountains. So well in fact, it had to be overcome in several instances. It would pick up distant sounds and amplify them many times over until the chirp of a cricket became a din of noise which was capable of drowning out an entire scene. The equipment in other scenes was useless because they could not get it close enough, in the case of lions, to adequately record their sounds. Winds became a threat which could also stop their work. While it might hardly be noticeable to the ears of the Johnsons or their men, it would often howl or screech with such intensity that it could resemble static from a radio. This constantly caused problems for Louis. He was repeatedly trying to adjust the gain to increase the volume of what was being recorded because animal sounds were always so low they had to be amplified. This would sooner or later conflict with the wind, or conversation even conducted in whispers by the crew.¹⁰

The group arrived at noon, October 10, 1930, in Lulenga Mission. It would take them ten days to make the ascent. The location of the mission would be the site of their first sighting of a gorilla. Martin would be totally overwhelmed by it. He had survived a

⁸Ibid., 79.

⁹Ibid., 95.

¹⁰Ibid.

great many frights and injuries while in Africa, but he claimed his first encounter with a mountain gorilla would indelibly stamp a scene in his imagination that would exceed them all.¹¹

The troop tried to follow the gorilla Martin had sighted. DeWitt led the way with his two .45 caliber revolvers in his hands which required him to pull his weight along with his elbows. Osa was next in line with her rifle, followed closely behind by Bukhari who toted an elephant gun. At the slightest sound the procession would halt immediately, in mid-step, in order to discern the location of the noise. After thirty minutes or so they discontinued the search.

That night in camp, DeWitt was involved in a very careless move. He left the relative safety of camp without a gun or flashlight. He got only about one hundred yards away when he was surrounded on all sides by the gleaming eyes of nine lions. He screamed for Martin, who although asleep, instantly jumped up to grab a flashlight and gun. Osa also got her gun and both went to the aid of DeWitt. The Johnsons got within eighty feet of the lions before they saw any of them flee.¹²

On the mountain they came by design upon Carl Akeley's grave. Martin had a great deal of respect for Carl. The help and kindness Carl showed Martin was a bond between the two men. Carl had often endorsed Martin's pictures and felt Martin and Osa were performing an extremely valuable service to the world. He was a key advocate which

¹¹Ibid., 135.

¹²Ibid., 161.

aided Martin's singular endorsement by the American Museum of Natural History. This would be the first time it had not only endorsed a motion-picture performance but also allowed the photographer to use that as a recommendation for his work.¹³

Carl had long been an advocate of protecting the gorilla population he feared was being over-hunted to the point of extinction. He successfully induced the Belgian government to set aside the mountain area as a reserve or gorilla sanctuary, later named *Parc National Albert*. Martin claimed he felt there was no possible chance of this over-hunting scenario ever coming to fruition. He based this opinion on his estimation of the size of the herds of gorilla after thoroughly researching at least nine different districts of gorilla populations.¹⁴

Akeley's gravesite was in such a state of disrepair that they felt an obligation to their old friend to effect some repairs to it. Osa transplanted vines and hardy plants in order to allow a natural shelter to protect his tomb. They insured the gravesite would properly watershed to minimize the long term effects of the ever present mountain rains and insured the fence they left would be strong enough to keep animals out. October 20th, 1931, they struck camp and prepared to descend the mountain. The long term effects of the cold were beginning to tell on natives not used to the cold. Martin reported he had to doctor three who had inadvertently cut themselves by using knives when their hands were numb.¹⁵ A family quarrel between Osa and Martin caused her to descend, without

¹³Ibid., Carl E. Akeley, "Martin Johnson's African Photographs," *World's Work* 46 (July 1923): 184.

¹⁴Martin Elmer Johnson, *Congorilla*, 160.

¹⁵Ibid., 174.

Martin, in a huff. She was halfway down before she stopped to wait for him and allowed him to apologize for his transgression.

Once down, Louis began to suffer from the effects of an attack of jungle fever. The Johnsons were anxious to further their work with the gorillas and left Louis there with Dick Maedler who was assigned to pay the bills of the expedition with money Martin had arrange to be sent to Kabasha. The Alumbongo mountain district would be the next to be explored. Osa and Martin frequently explored in areas where the topographers were not only behind in their work, they were often completely incorrect. This area named Alumbongo was not recorded by the government. They covered an area of forty-seven miles in mountainous terrain in just three days. In that altitude that distance was an enormous feat. Each time they went near the bush they reported sighting gorillas. The area was so congested they even flushed a pack an hour in a three hour walk.

Danger comes in many disguised forms to explorers. Osa and Martin discovered that fact one afternoon in the mountains while they stopped for a rest. Martin picked some taro plant and gave a piece to Osa. As they both peeled the skin to taste the inside, their mouths began to feel like it was burning. They both spit out the root. Unfortunately that did not stop the sensation. In fact, it began to spread to their throats. Without thinking, they both drank some water in an effort to ease the burning in their throats. This vehicle took the irritation right down their throats directly to their stomachs. Martin stated it seared their insides much like the effect lye has upon people. The irritation lasted approximately one half hour. Local natives later told them people

had been known to die from ingesting the plant. The natives, in point of fact, used it as a poison for their arrowheads.¹⁶

The troop soon located a young male and female gorilla in a tree. The accepted practice of the times was to capture the young by treeing the mother and baby, then shooting the mother and picking up the infant were they both landed. Osa would never allow anything like that to happen. At the urging of Osa, Martin employed a practice which proved less injurious to the captured animals. Once an animal was located in a tree, then the surrounding trees up to thirty feet away were cut down. The net effect was to isolate the animal and insure it had no avenue of escape other than down. The tree they were in would then be felled in a direction toward natives, complete with nets, who awaited them. Since a pair of gorillas had never been captured for scientific study, this observation seemed a conscientious idea to Martin.

It was no secret that Osa possessed a love and tenderness for small, defenseless animals. She practically attempted to raise every baby she located and to make pets of even the most dangerous ones. Osa and Martin once located and bought, for \$60, a sick and injured baby gorilla named Okero (later renamed Snowball) that they both knew was on the verge of death simply because Osa could not stand to see it hurting without properly caring for it.¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., 197.

¹⁷Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 163.

Their return to Nairobi was without incident. They had returned with the assistance of Daniel Pomeroy, who had purchased for them their first home in order to have a base to return to after their excursions. This secured roots in Nairobi and Osa wanted this. Her instinct was to have a real home with permanent beds, a garden for her to attend to and windows to place drapes over. As usual, Martin was able to offer little resistance to her wishes. He found a house on Lucania road they both liked which was on the outskirts of Nairobi.¹⁸ This would be their home and base while in Nairobi from 1927 until 1934. They settled on Nairobi which was more modern than most people understood it to be. The railway station had, for instance, a bar, newsstand, restaurant and displays similar to America. Outside the railway were taxis which traveled over well-paved streets which led to four hotels. There were two department stores, two barber shops which specialized in the permanent waves, so popular in America. There were modern drug stores, movie theaters, candy makers, a daily newspaper which placed newsboys on the street to hawk their wares daily. There were fashion houses which offered tailoring for men and Paris originals for women. They even had a branch location of an American film processing company. They boasted a fine race track and polo grounds. An airplane company even carried passengers all over Africa at reasonable rates.¹⁹

Their house was just four miles from the Nairobi post-office in a most pleasing neighborhood and was located within one half mile of a country club. The house had

¹⁸Ibid., 137.

¹⁹Martin Johnson, "Country Life in Africa" Country Life 59 (December 1930): 35-37.

four acres of beautiful grounds, with a two story house set back from the main road.²⁰

The house was remodeled in their plans. They added a combination garage and laboratory of pressed cement blocks. The woodwork was all done in native woods except the furniture. Osa instead had furniture made from the boxes which housed Martin's film and photographic equipment. The carpenters were amazed by this soft pine. The local timber of Africa they were used to working with was hard and even cross-grained. Martin claimed it was so heavy and hard it wouldn't even float. The laboratory was built ninety feet long and twenty feet wide. The darkroom had ruby lights for film developing and dark green lights for use with the newer panchromatic films. Martin had shelves located in every nook and cranny where there was room. He had twelve hundred gallon water tanks located at each corner of the house to catch soft rainwater. It was piped into the house for use in the darkroom. The doors and windows were all 180 mesh copper screening to keep out insects and dust, with bars on the windows to stop black pilferers.²¹ Martin even had one drying drum installed at one end which was large enough to hold two thousand feet of film. He employed a fifteen foot long teakwood sink to develop his pictures. The sink had water taps located at each foot of length. Tanks were used to develop film and were made of wood. He had six of these tanks. They each held sixty-five gallons of solution and Martin was capable of developing seven thousand feet of film with each tank.²²

²⁰Ibid., 76.

²¹Ibid., 77.

²²Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla, 259.

Osa had her opportunity with a garden which she made one of the most lovely in Africa. The grounds consisted of roughly four acres. One of the acres was devoted to use as an orchard. Other trees included gum, black wattle, Uganda flame, mimosa, and bamboo clumps. There were creepers on the grounds of bougainvillea and English ivy, white dahlias, carnations, roses and daises presented pockets of color as rich and diverse as any at home in America.²³

The grounds also had oranges, grapefruit, lemons, bananas, passion fruit or grenadilla, peaches, plums, pears, pineapples, paw paws (Papayas), strawberries, and alligator pears. They were not confined to the orchard alone and were scattered all over the grounds. The flowers were just as pervasive and the colors truly explosive. The scent was as aromatic as one might imagine.²⁴

Osa had a pen constructed at their home for the two gorillas they had captured, named Congo and Ingagi. The pen was seventy feet long and thirty feet wide, and thirty feet high. She spent a lot of time trying to train the pair with limited success on Congo, the smaller of the two, but she encountered difficulty with Ingagi. He struck her one day so severely that Martin acknowledged it caused a hearing impairment that bothered Osa for some time.²⁵

²³Martin Johnson, Country Life, 76.

²⁴Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla, 259.

²⁵Ibid., 239.

Their house also had the Delco light plant which ran heaters, soldering irons, coffee percolators, fans, knife sharpeners and an electric fridge.²⁶ They had a stove which converted gasoline into gas. The master bedroom upstairs had three large closets and a big wardrobe and linen closet. The high ceilings were paneled with white enameled wood. Each room was subsequently painted a different color intended to match the different furniture schemes. The upstairs bedrooms contained steel beds fitted with box springs, as well as mattresses. Carpeting was a feature of each room in colors which matched the rooms decor.

The south side of the house was highlighted by a beautiful view of Mt. Kilimanjaro, a mere one hundred and ten miles away while to the north some ninety miles was the panoramic scene of Mt. Kenya. Osa even had pictures from home on the walls, and she brought her china, glassware, table linens, silver, blankets, sheets and towels as well. They even arranged to have two radios with them, one for use in Nairobi, the other while in the bush. With these radios they were able to listen to Germany, Holland or England. If they cared to get up at four o'clock in the morning, Martin stated they could find conditions which allowed them to receive broadcast from America.²⁷

It was at this time that Osa had an ape, named Teddy Tantrums, which she treated much like a child. It was carried by Osa to its bed each night. Occasionally it would sit up with the Johnsons, much like a small child might be allowed to do. It was also

²⁶Martin Johnson, Country Life, 77.

²⁷Ibid.

watched carefully when it was allowed into the yard because of the leopards and hyenas which sometimes prowled the neighborhood.²⁸ It was a nightly occurrence for the Johnsons to sit around the house in the evening with the assortment of pets at their feet. The menagerie included a gorilla, two chimpanzees, and a monkey. This was certainly a different domestic scene than Osa would have imagined as a child when she thought about her future domestic bliss.

²⁸Martin Elmer Johnson, Congorilla, 244.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST AFRICAN JOURNEY

This period in Osa's life saw them employ a new method of performing the craft of their profession. She and Martin continued their work with the same dedication as before but with a heightened sense of intensity. The source of their new found excitement was their adoption of the airplane to their work. This watershed event in African animal photography would encompass both Johnsons. Osa would take up the practice because it meant another opportunity to help Martin, to aid in his work, and to contribute in whatever way she could to their increased success. While this event contributed heavily to their future potential for earnings, it meant one thing and one thing only in the field, and that was increased difficulties with logistics. This would obviously spell more work for Osa as she was the chief logistics officer responsible for attending to a great many details. This would prove no different as she worked with Martin to insure the camp needs were met.

As success reached the Johnsons, it meant a mellowing of camp life to Martin. Osa, on the other hand, would simply take the opportunity made available by their success to cater even more to Martin's whims and needs. She would not only prepare more feasts than before, they would become even more lavish. She took this time to attempt even more dessert preparations in the field, perhaps due to their increased exposure to the use of ostrich eggs in the preparation of desserts.

It would be a medical discovery which would force Osa to re-evaluate their lives and work. She would also face a personal crisis that would require some soul searching on her part before she could re-deploy her enthusiasm to again accompany Martin into the bush on their journey to Borneo. As always, she did not disappoint Martin.

The Johnsons had returned home from Kenya in June of 1931. They arrived back in New York aboard the *Excalibur* on July 3, 1931. The time at home in Kansas passed quickly. Martin had not told Osa that he had acquired a passion for a new interest. He now seriously considered flying as a means to cover territory more rapidly and thus to film more game. Admittedly, the longer Martin worked, the harder he tried to master new technology in order to please his audiences. That method was plainly visible with the advent of sound which in some cases doubled the work which was required. Martin indicated that these things were better left to learn incrementally because had they have come more as an aggregate requirement, he would have never learned the art of film.

This love of new worlds to conquer helped keep the Johnsons not only mentally challenged with the technologies that they learned, but it also kept them alert to what was going on in the world where progress was concerned. Their hiatus between visits to Africa saw them at home in Chanute, Kansas. This gave Osa an opportunity to again visit friends and family. Martin instead visited Vern Carstens who would ultimately teach them both to fly. Osa's first passenger after learning would be her father. It was a simple step from learning to fly an airplane to owning two Sikorsky amphibian aircraft. It was a simple step that is if you were Osa and Martin Johnson. Osa once later commented that she was reasonably certain they didn't go to the Sikorsky plant in the

spring of 1932 with the idea of buying anything but they left as proud owners of not one but two planes. It was apparent from the results that the intent was not lost on Martin as they visited the plant. Osa only knew what their intent wasn't, while Martin knew what their intent was.¹

Their next trip to Africa saw them leave New York on December 1, 1932, on the *City of New York*. This trip was logistically their most difficult. The details of this trip required a wide range including location of airfields which were few and far between, to the storage of petrol to fuel the planes in advance of their needs in a hostile country where a filling station was completely nonexistent. They landed at Capetown on January 23, 1933. With them they took Vern Carstens and Boris Sergievsky as pilots, Arthur Sanial and Robert Moreno as sound engineers, Al Moroway as a mechanic, and a great deal of precious cargo. Their equipment included cameras that were so valuable they exceeded the value of any cameras used in the past and the lenses alone represented an investment which exceeded fifty thousand dollars.²

The planes were soon modified for their intended use in Africa. One was a big ten seat plane called '*Osa's Ark*' which was painted with zebra markings, while the other was a five seat plane called '*The Spirit of Africa*' and it was decorated like a giraffe.³ *Osa's Ark* was the bigger of the two and originally designed to carry up to ten people at a time. The engines were two super charged wasp motors. Since the intent of Osa and

¹Osa Johnson, *I Married Adventure*, 345.

²Martin E. Johnson, *Over African Jungles*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 5.

³*Ibid.*, 8.

Martin was never to carry that many people, at one time anyway, they re-arranged the interior of the plane. They took out several seats and replaced them with a soft, leather upholstered couch built into one side of the craft. Opposite of the couch, they installed two chairs which when folded down would fit together to form another couch. This in fact made beds for the two of them. They next placed racks of every imaginable kind to stow their belongings. The plane was next fitted with a lavatory, and a gasoline stove with two burners and an oven was located and built into the plane. This allowed them to travel when they pleased for they now had sleeping quarters and a way to prepare food while they were gone. They had built-in storage compartments prepared and placed under the chairs as well as the couch. Baggage was located forward of the pilot's cockpit. Martin devised a well thought out arrangement at six points, inside and outside, where unipods were permanently mounted in order to mount cameras anytime, including inflight, that they wanted. This then allowed them the freedom to leave or return at their whim because they could land on lakes, or rivers or even streams. They were free to land on the plains virtually among the animals, where the animals were instead of waiting in a blind for the animals. This of course discounted the problems associated with this particular bit of thinking, for soft earth, rocks, and pig holes on land, alligators, hippos, and raging torrents of water stopped them at other intervals. While these hazards were plenty they were indeed much more free than ever before. They were no longer tethered to their supply base. They now had the ability to cover great distances. The game is

what was crucial. It's location was now simplified to a matter of a few hours to cover hundreds of square miles of territory to locate the game.⁴

Natives in the area would prove most trustworthy and helpful. British East Africa was home to a number of these tribal natives which included: Masai, Rendille, Samburu, Boran, Kikuyu, Turkans, Lumbwa, and Somali which were partly Arab.⁵ The natives were recruited with their jimbies and pangas (hoes and knives) in the preparation of the landing fields for the aircraft. Vern Carstens said they had seven fields to land located from one hundred to six hundred miles from their base at Nairobi.⁶ The Johnsons had made arrangements weeks before they left America to ship the 87 octane gasoline used in their wasp motors to Nairobi. The gasoline left New York and was stored in fifty gallon drums. It was then placed in five gallon tins upon receipt at Nairobi. This would make transport of the gasoline to remote outposts for use much easier. Once it reached the outpost, it would be transported by native porters and car until it was deposited throughout the region in places the Johnsons expected to fly. Martin reported the distribution of gasoline was easily the most difficult logistics problem they encountered in their aerial safaris.⁷

Martin once spoke of an old friend from Ceylon named Perera who was so black that Martin thought blue-black was his natural color. The Indian race had been introduced

⁴Ibid., 127-8.

⁵Ibid., 40.

⁶Chanute Tribune, 13 January 1953.

⁷Martin E. Johnson, Over African Jungles, 129.

into Africa dating back to the construction of the railway from Mombasa to Nairobi in 1898. The British imported the Indian workers to link the new province of Uganda with the coast.⁸ One day Perera awoke to find all of his cash stolen. He ran a hut which was made of smashed and flattened petrol tins called a duka. He sold supplies to travelers at a spot near Garbatulla, and he had saved his money to return to his native India. He knew of the world-wide depression at this time for it was prevalent even here. He would have to remain in Africa, continue his business, even though business was not very good.⁹ Perera had already notified the locals of the pending arrival of the Johnsons and their Indagi, which had caused a number of Borans and Somaljs to journey in to see an airplane. The plane did land there, but stayed only briefly before it left in search of elephants. Vern banked and turned often to allow Martin to photograph game, which they saw in numbers greater than even Martin had hoped. They saw one herd of elephants with more than four hundred head, and six other herds almost as large. The focal point of aerial photography became obvious when the animals did not seem unduly disturbed by the engine noise of the plane. Martin was overcome with a joy rarely witnessed before in his life. He was usually required to spend hours in order to get close enough to photograph even a single elephant and now he had the opportunity to film literally thousands of elephants in a single day.¹⁰

⁸Pascal James Imperato, Doctor in the Land, 18.

⁹Martin E. Johnson, Over African Jungles, 74.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 79-80.

Flying was not always safe as the small crew would later find out. It often caused heart pounding concerns on where to safely land in the bush. They intended to stay safely on course to remain near fuel, but the weather sometimes took them off course which resulted in near disaster to the entire group. Boris was flying the plane which had been frantically searching for some time for a place to set it down to refuel. They had flown past the targeted field and circled around to again locate it and fuel was lower than they thought possible. Boris estimated they had less than four minutes of fuel left in the pipes and carburetor when a lake was finally spotted. The surface was calm and smooth as glass when the amphibian was brought to a halt. A later examination of the fuel system would show there was just enough gasoline for fifteen more seconds of flying time.¹¹

Osa was once the unsuspecting target of lions. She was in the plane but had not yet opened the hatch. Martin was outside preparing the cameras for a shoot. When he was finally ready to shoot, Osa slid back the hatch, and began to speak to the lions which had now gathered outside around a zebra kill strategically placed for the filming. This was not a new tactic, merely a repeat of prior performances. This show would be different for both actress and lions, which began acting upon her first words. One lion, no more than fifteen to twenty feet away, began to head for the plane. Osa was fortunate enough to see the animal early on. She ducked while closing the hatch to keep the animal out of the aircraft. The lions however could still see her inside the plane through the heavy safety glass in the side. The lion then charged and crashed at an angle into the glass.

¹¹Osa Johnson, I Married Adventure, 347-48.

The animal glanced off. Being trapped inside did nothing to take the edge off Osa's fear, but it also did nothing to quiet her fear. Instinctively she grabbed the closest thing available to throw at the lion and she did just that. Martin saw the hatch slide slowly open and Osa's hand throw a cardboard carton of prepared biscuit flour. The projectile struck the lion and sprayed his mane with white. He ran away, but not before Martin recorded the entire episode on film.¹²

An opportunity to view the world from the top of Mt. Kenya presented itself in mid-January of 1934. Martin and Osa were asked by Vern if they would like to see the top of the mountain by airplane. The day was one of the few, clear days when there were no clouds over the mountain to hinder the thrilling view. The Johnsons readily agreed to the venture. As they approached the peak, Martin noticed the particularly numbing impact altitude had on the human body. He had difficulty even winding his Eyemo camera spring. He had to labor and pant merely to achieve that simple, ordinary task, and then almost to the point of exhaustion. The view from the air was spectacular as they rose in the air. They could see chasms of snow which extended down more than one hundred feet. They saw frozen lakes in several areas. Osa even located the exact spot where she and Martin had climbed to before their unfortunate illnesses which cut short their climb only eight years ago. While it was very thrilling, Vern noted the danger

¹²Martin E. Johnson, Over African Jungles, 117.

involved from updrafts which extended over the peak. This kept them back at a safe distance but failed to dampen their excitement or dim the view.¹³

The next filming done by the group would involve a community of baboons. Their antics fascinated both Martin and Osa, who made a daily ritual of their filming for three months. The baboons made their home in a grove of trees along the Euaso Nyro River to minimize attack from at least one side of their defense. The stones strategically located in the river allowed them to cross whenever they chose and gave rise to several funny dunking incidents among the less sure footed. There were times of extreme agony for the baboons as when a leopard would enter the area, nearly emptying the trees as the animals scattered in order to escape the animal and its hungry prowl. There were humorous times when the animals were merely acting out a sequence of events so human-like that it obviously touched the heartstrings of both Osa and Martin. They would film the animals for days on end until sheer repetition and ultimately boredom would overtake them. This would signal a change in venue while the Johnsons left to photograph rhinos elsewhere. The plan was to attempt to insure the baboons merely lived out their lives in front of the Johnsons and did not become actors for the benefit of the cameras. Martin thought it best to leave the area occasionally to perpetuate the spontaneity of the baboons. Osa, on one slow afternoon, when the animals were doing little to remain photogenic, concocted a plan to liven up the filming. There was one old demonstrative baboon they had named 'Big John'. He was the paternal leader of the city.

¹³Ibid., 145.

He was also noted for his tirades of rage at the infants fond of taking his food to incite his anger. Osa planned to arouse his anger and provoke him in order to obtain interesting and unique film footage. She counted heavily upon her newly made slingshot to accomplish the feat. The weapon was fashioned from her elastic garters but functioned as well as any made by mischievous boys. Martin indicated there were times when Osa could be somewhat tomboyish in her actions. This clearly was one of those times. She fired projectiles at 'Big John' until she struck him in the side with a pebble. There emanated from the animal a yell equal in volume to the distance he attained as he jumped simultaneously to the yell. This struck her fancy and she was quite thrilled at her ability to needle the animal into a photogenic rage for Martin's work. She decided to again shoot in the direction of the animal but she was wide of the mark. Another missile proved accurate as she struck him squarely on the ear. The animal went positively wild trying to find what or who was responsible. Osa laughed so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks. It also ended the game as the old baboon took up a new perch in the tree inaccessible to Osa's aim.¹⁴

Camp life mellowed now for the Johnsons. They were experienced hunters who took time out from their work to live a life of leisure in camp never before experienced by them. They instructed their native boys to watch for them at days end. They were told to have tea ready for the pair. After several cups, the Johnsons would retire to their tents for a warm bath which was made ready at their arrival. Once finished, fresh clothes

¹⁴Ibid., 186-7.

would complete their transition. Osa would in turn supervise the preparation of the evening meal while Martin prepared film for the next days shoot and unloaded film from cameras used that day. The gun cleaner, Orangi, was responsible at that time to unload the weapons and clean them each day whether fired that day or not. Once cleaned they were greased for the night to insure moisture or humidity did not damage the weapon. Osa felt very dedicated to this principle. Once their lives were on the line, as they very well could be each day, she wanted guns which were in tip-top shape. The Johnsons also allowed Orangi to have a gun at night for the protection of the natives. They felt he was capable of hitting an animal if the animal were large enough even though he was a poor shot. They hoped such a large animal would get close enough to the boys quarters for this. The boys all slept on the ground where snakes could be a problem. There were few snakes in Africa but the majority of those that were there were usually quite poisonous.¹⁵

The dinners now began to resemble evenings in America. They usually had a whiskey and soda or a cocktail prior to eating. There might be *hors d'oeuvres* such as caviar, stuffed eggs, or anchovies. Osa sometimes made Martin a paste he enjoyed of chopped sardines with spices mixed together in it. The next course might be soup which consisted of antelope or bird or fish meat, depending upon what she was able to harvest that particular day. The main course might be fried steaks, or fish, fowl, or even a roast of antelope. Tinned vegetables would be added to any fresh vegetables they could locate, including mushrooms, spinach or asparagus. Potatoes and onions were a staple included

¹⁵Ibid., 204-5.

on each expedition because they kept so well on the trail. They did require an occasional spreading out under a shade tree to periodically keep mold away from them. The use of prepared flour, tinned for them in sterile one-pound tins in America, would be used for biscuits, pancakes and breads. It was so complete that their cooks had only to add milk. Fruits were a daily menu item although tinned. Few fruits could be found in the bush except some figs Osa claimed were wormy and eaten only by monkeys. Breakfast might include pancakes or even eggs made from ostrich eggs found in their hunts. These eggs would generally make about four dozen hen sized eggs and provided Osa with the singular opportunity to also make puddings and cakes for desserts while in the bush.

West of Lake Albert the Johnsons again returned to the pygmies they had initially visited. This was the area which formed a border between Uganda and the Belgian Congo. This area included twenty five thousand miles of jungle. Once again with the little people, Martin decided to give airplane rides to the natives. He showed familiar things such as trees to the natives from the air. They were convinced these things were not trees because in their simple logic, a tree was something under which you stood and looked up, not down as Martin tried to convince them. Upon landing, Martin's experiences among natives were expanded. He saw natives kiss their children which had gone up in the plane with him. Martin stated that in his twenty five years of exploration, he had never seen the natives kiss or display any other such outward signs of affection.¹⁶

¹⁶Ibid., 219.

Osa fell ill at this time with what was found later to be a vaginal infection which resulted in bleeding. She had been less than energetic for sometime. Martin put her in their plane and flew with her and Vern to Nairobi. She was hospitalized and examined by doctors at the hospital there. Martin was mistakenly told she simply required rest from their brisk work schedule and hectic lifestyle. Martin felt rest would be best and was positive the place for her to get that rest was in that hospital. He arranged to have periodic reports sent to him by air so that he could return to camp and continue his work. While Osa did receive constant care and attention, she did not recover. On at least once occasion, Martin was sent word to return at once to the hospital. He was then told by the doctors that it was their considered opinion that she would be better left to the doctors of England or America. The African doctors, Dr. J. R. Gregory and Dr. C. F. D. McCaldin felt an operation would be inevitably necessary and that a specialist should be consulted.¹⁷ That news was all Martin needed to hear. They had been in Africa only eighteen months, much less than the time they originally planned to spend there, but Martin made preparations for their return to New York City.¹⁸ They departed Africa on July 15, 1934. Martin arranged for his secretary, Helen Joyce, to accompany Osa's pets to America. The menagerie included four cheetahs which were pets since birth, a tame leopard, an affectionate hyena, and a baby elephant. The animals were later donated to a zoo as was the normal practice of the pair.

¹⁷Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 179.

¹⁸Martin E. Johnson, Over African Jungles, 234-40.

The trip home was fairly uneventful. Martin would marvel at the distance they could now cover in *Osa's Ark* in a days time. The plane could cover ground that would require upwards of seventeen days travel by boat just a few years prior. The first night out they stayed in Khartoum. The next day saw a visit to Egypt's Valley of the Kings, and in particular, King Tut's tomb. They spent the evening at Luxor and left for Cairo in the morning.¹⁹

Their arrival in New York meant surgery for Osa to remove a benign uterine tumor. It would also signal a time of great turmoil in her life. Literally a week after coming out of surgery, a wire arrived from home telling her of her father's untimely death. William Sherman Leighty was on his last train run before retirement when he had been fatally injured in a train wreck. This news was certainly not what was needed to aid in her recovery. Now the illness and surgery she had suffered combined with the grief over her father's death and the separation from Belle and Martin (who attended to various funeral details) became an almost unbearable weight. An additional factor was added to the mix as she began to worry about Martin's health. She was constantly aware of his diabetic condition. Martin had appeared more listless and lethargic to her after finishing the work of editing their last picture. While she initially had felt he was more sullen and pensive, she would later discredit her theory in favor of one which credited his quiet behavior to their inactivity. The movie, *Congorilla*, was also to require more of Martin's attention as

¹⁹Ibid., 245.

he attempted to hold premieres of the picture at the People's theater in Chanute.²⁰

Martin agreed to a physical checkup partially to quiet her unfounded fears. Perhaps she also unknowingly feared the loss of Martin after the traumatic loss of her father. He would be pronounced healthy by the doctors. It was at this juncture that Osa was allowed to leave the hospital to convalesce at home. Her advice to Martin was to get their planes made ready along with the sound equipment. She wanted to return to Borneo.²¹

²⁰Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 42.

²¹Ibid., 48.

CHAPTER IX

BORNEO

The adventure in Borneo would find Osa now in a position of equality with Martin in their work. While he would receive the majority of the professional accolades for their successes, it would truly be a joint operation by the couple. Osa would assist in picture taking of the proboscis monkey; she would camp out with Martin along the route to the headwaters of the Kinabatangan River; she would again protect Martin as he photographed animals in dangerous situations. What she did differently on this adventure was to aid in saving Martin's life, while in the bush, by her inaction instead of action.

Osa, by this time in the professional life of the couple, had exceeded all expectations from Martin. She clearly did everything which could be expected from a male explorer. The couple could now return to the states to the acclaim of all their past critics. Most importantly, Osa had acquired the exploration capital to silence any critics which might have been left that only thought of her as the woman who stood by with a gun while Martin took photographs.

An extremely hot day on August 12, 1935, saw the Johnsons sail from New York bound for Borneo. They were aboard an old Dutch steamer, the *Kota Pinang*. It was the slow, romantic type of travel that the Johnsons loved. Martin had hinted at returning

again to Africa and Osa insisted they travel elsewhere and Borneo was the place they chose.¹

The pair was accompanied by their pet *Wah-Wah*, a gibbon ape from Borneo. The animal was not adjusted to the confinement necessary on the ship and may even have suffered from the effects of seasickness. Whatever the case, it was occasionally angry on the voyage. It bit Osa several times inflicting such viscous wounds that they required the attention of a physician. Osa had been bitten on one other occasion by a different pet gibbon. The bite was so severe that the doctors were forced to remove a portion of bone from her left thumb to insure that she did not incur osteomyelitis.²

After their arrival at Borneo, they attended to unloading their two hundred boxes and crates of equipment. They also were forced to attend to their plane, renamed '*The Spirit of African and Borneo*'³ They saw gobongs (canoes), sampans, and Chinese junks along with numerous small fishing boats under sail in the harbor. They arranged for housing while at Abai and set out exploring the area around them. They returned one afternoon from a fruitless expedition and Martin decided they would take an aerial trip over Sandakan and on to a well-known island that housed a colony of lepers out in the bay.⁴

¹Osa Johnson, Last Adventure: The Martin Johnsons in Borneo, ed. Pascal James Imperato, MD., Belle Leighty (New York: W. Morrow, 1966), 3.

²Ibid., 7.

³Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 187.

⁴Osa Johnson, Last Adventure, 29.

The task of hiring help was second nature now by the Johnsons. Martin hired a man Friday to attend to all of his countless thousands of details. The man's name was poetically Ah Fat Lee. They next hired a carpenter named Ching Wo and disappointing Ahamed Ali Sing whom they discharged only four months later. He was replaced by Jack Charley, an Eurasian who worked out quite well.⁵

As usual, Osa planted a garden upon moving into their house and raised radishes, carrots, green beans, potatoes, peas, lettuce, cabbage and tomatoes, which were almost completely stolen by area monkeys. Unfortunately the animals proved too expert for Osa this time. The white ants devoured what little the monkeys left. The land also proved too hard and the climate too wet, when coupled with the pest, for Osa to successfully farm in Borneo.

Journeys out into the bush provided the Johnsons with oftentimes more than they bargained. Osa met the Dunsun people which were the strongest ethnic element located in Northern Borneo. They had a custom of making potted meat which evaporated her appetite. They would mix herbs and barks with the meat of a dead animal. The next step entailed putting this mixture into a container which would be buried in the ground for six or more months. Once exhumed, she described the resultant necrotic mix as a jelly-like material which was capable of knocking down the strongest man. She even compared the results of that odor, unfavorably of course, to that of a skunk. It forced anything exposed to it to be washed or even disposed of forever. She also disliked the tribe for

⁵Ibid., 31.

other culinary habits she found equally offensive. For instance, they ate squirrels, rats, snakes, herbs from the jungles, and even monkeys. They were especially fond of cooked monkey. She principally railed when they would serve the entire arm of a monkey with the hand still attached which Osa claimed was so like that of a small child that the entire ordeal reminded her of cannibalism.⁶

The next tribe to be filmed by Martin was the Muruts. They used a blowgun called a sumpitan to inflict death on their prey from poisoned arrows. It was while filming the muruts that Osa noticed a new terror previously unseen in all their previous exploits: flying snakes. These snakes would fly from tree to tree whenever the natives would disturb them. Osa said that she saw over sixty varieties of poisonous snakes while in Borneo but these she feared the most for their ability to strike with absolutely no warning. She would also here encounter a twenty-eight long python on the rubber plantation of the Watt family. It was attempting to find its next meal when Osa located the snake. It was eventually captured with the use of a baited cage. Once it had devoured the bait, a small pig, the snake was captured by the narrow bars which would permit only its entrance, and not its egress. When Martin later asked her if the snakes had made her fearful enough to want to leave, she said, "If the natives can outsmart these snakes, so can we. I don't care if they fly, walk, wiggle, or crawl."⁷

⁶Ibid., 49.

⁷Ibid., 64.

The attempt to photograph animals in their natural state suffered a serious setback in Borneo. The Johnsons found the jungle undergrowth and bush so lush that they simply could not travel any distance without hacking at the jungle with parangs. This was definitely tedious and would also notify animals in advance causing a distinct lack of subjects to film for Martin. This lack of subjects helped to make up Martin's mind that they would now travel by river on a raft. As usual, Osa applied her talents toward making everything as pleasant as possible for Martin. The raft had a rattan table with six matching chairs. The table was covered with a white linen cloth Osa had brought with her from America. She made a centerpiece of white and purple orchids. The table was set with silverware, glasses, and plates from home. They were kept clean and in excellent condition on their excursions by Osa. One evening their pilot in Borneo, Jim Laneri, brought them a turkey. Osa made a sumptuous feast for them to eat. It contained green turtle soup, caviar, a cocktail before dinner, candied sweet potatoes, creamed onions, sweet peas, asparagus tips with a hollandaise sauce, a cranberry sauce and stuffing for the turkey. All this in the wilds of Borneo. It was a quiet reminder that order can come from disorder. Osa always tried to make sure Martin did not suffer any loss of the finer things of life. She even prepared a coconut cream pie for dessert.⁸

The climate at Borneo proved difficult for Martin's work. The jungles were dense, the rainfall prodigious. In eighteen months at Abai they experienced more than two hundred and fourteen inches of rain, prompting Osa to comment that Borneo did not have

⁸Ibid., 68.

a wet and a dry season, only a wet one. It would literally go for weeks with no break in the rainfall. The black cluster of clouds would remain dense over them. It would be so wet that safety matches not kept in an air-tight tin would not strike. Their clothing would often mildew and the machinery rusted rapidly from the humidity and its ability to completely and totally penetrate everything and everywhere. Martin complained in a letter to a friend at this time that they had wasted more than twenty thousand feet of film so far because of the heat and humidity of the jungle.⁹

The insects of the jungle were such a hindrance that they forever caused problems while Osa tried to overcome the household pests. One evening they had ants under the floor of their hut. When the boards were removed so they could find the ants, the Johnsons noted they sometimes exceeded two inches in length. The ants even awakened other camp members with the din and racket they produced. The problem was solved when a native poured hot ashes on them. Ants proved to be more timid than the scorpions though. Osa often commented on the scorpions that reached a length exceeding eight inches. Osa awakened one morning and went to the bathroom to brush her teeth. Prior to this, she placed her wristwatch on the washbasin. Once she completed washing her hands after brushing her teeth she reached for the black strap of her watch, only to see it move away from her. It was only then that she noticed it wasn't her watch she tried to pick up, but a scorpion instead. She took care of the pest with a flashlight in a way in which it was never intended by its maker.

⁹Ibid., 69-70.

Centipedes were present in even greater quantities than the scorpions. While not as poisonous as scorpions, they also attained a length often exceeding eight inches and some as long as ten inches. They had pinchers capable of inflicting a most painful wound, followed by the injection of poison. The night she awakened with one of the creatures on her ankle was one of the most terrifying visits she ever received. The creature was on her ankle. Osa possessed enough experience and savvy to wait until it crawled off to respond to her heart-pounding fear with a scream of unnatural proportions. The natives and Martin rushed to her side and had to use a parang to kill it.¹⁰

Elephants in Borneo were as difficult to photograph as they had been before the aerial photography of their fifth trip to Africa. The opportunity to find them always captivated Martin as it had since his childhood. Here they had finally reached the opportunity to film elephants in the wilds of Borneo and Osa was so apprehensive about it that she stood on alert for danger with her gun at her shoulder. Martin would try to downplay the situation, as he often did for the sake of getting a shot of elephants in stampede, and to downplay Osa's intent to shoot them if they came too close to Martin for her comfort. While she only shot three elephants in all their years together, Martin did not like to see them hurt. He felt them to be among the most docile creatures God had put on the earth. He saw in them a commitment to family rarely seen in the world along with an ability to live together in harmony as a species. The constant slaughter of them for their ivory was a source of irritation to him and something about which he often

¹⁰Ibid., 70-72.

condemned man as a hunter. The twenty elephants they were attempting to photograph that day were led by a great bull which caused Martin to want a good, clear picture of the herd. While Martin continually held off Osa from firing her gun to slow them down, they continued to advance until it became clear to Osa the time for stopping them by weaponry was pointless. She did what any self-respecting explorer would do in that situation. She climbed the nearest tree and once she reached the top, she noticed Martin had arrived there slightly before her. He had lost his pith helmet and leaned back to rest while they waited for the elephants to leave. It took several hours of uncomfortable time spent sitting on a limb twenty feet in the air for that event.¹¹

Travel in the jungle yielded other harrowing episodes where Osa unknowingly became the center of attention. The rain forest was home to an annelid, or leech that awaited all unsuspecting explorers who ventured out. Osa found her leech on the back of her neck after brushing the hair out of her face. It was soft and slimy and was attached to her neck while it sucked blood from her. She instinctively screamed. It turned out to be a rather large one measuring two inches in length. She also learned from Martin the best way to remove the leeches was with heat to initiate their release. If one merely pulled them off they left marks which were quite unsightly.¹² This jungle area was an ideal home for the leeches. Travel in this area involved wading through the waist deep

¹¹Ibid., 98-103.

¹²Ibid., 107.

stagnant water of a swamp. The pungent smell of rotting timber was so prevalent to Osa that it was sickening. They would encounter a herd of timbader further upstream.

Life along the Kinabatangan River saw activities in such bustling forms by animals of all kinds that Martin could not help but be drawn to it as a source for his filmwork. One of these types of animals was the always dangerous crocodile. They were so prevalent in some areas as to resemble huge timbers in the water. They posed such a hazard to travel that few dared to use the river for that purpose. Obviously this made the river the perfect vehicle for two brave explorers and their natives. Unfortunately a young native boy fell out of the boat during a rather swift rapids crossing. He was immediately swept underwater by the rapid water before again surfacing. As Osa watched in utter terror, the boy was seized by a large crocodile and taken under the water which began to boil with the twistings and turnings crocodiles employ in order to tear off chunks of flesh from their victims. This was necessary because crocodiles are incapable of effecting that intended result without that maneuver. When the animals returned to the bank, Osa took her rifle and began shooting them. She had shot quite a number when one Chinese boatman in the party beached his boat and decapitated the dead crocodiles. This was done in order to qualify for a government bounty on the animals. He then began to disembowel them for their entrails which were considered a delicacy to the Chinese. It also proved useful as an ingredient in a variety of medicines. When the abdomen of one

of the largest crocodiles was opened it revealed a human leg, bitten off at the knee from the boy lost from Osa's party.¹³

One of the principal animals Martin targeted to film in Borneo was the proboscis monkey. The ordeal to obtain the photographs would prove as difficult as any pictures ever secured by the pair and probably more personally painful as any they ever took. The trip up the Kinabatangan River supplied an overgrowth of jungle vegetation previously unseen by Martin and Osa. The jungle was so dense they had to crouch in their boat in order to propel themselves along. Every few hours they would stop the boats in order to take a much needed break which would involve hacking a clearing in the jungle to allow them to stand long enough to relax muscles caught in the grip of fatigue. It was at this time they discovered the water vines which grew in such numbers along the waters edge. They would slice into a vine to receive water stored there by the plant which remained anywhere from ten to fifteen degrees below the ambient temperature. The drink was cool and refreshing and allowed them an opportunity to mop their brow and collect their thoughts before they moved along in their journey. As they pushed further inland, the river became more and more calm but presented less and less of an environment fit to work in by the Johnsons. The low lying branches became such an obstacle that the only way to combat them was lying down in the boat. When this area of river finally passed and the foliage opened up they began to find increasing numbers of Nipa Palms. This was an encouraging sign to Martin for he understood the implications. The Nipa Palm

¹³Ibid., 116.

heart was a food source for the proboscis monkey and this indicated they were at last approaching the land to which the animal was indigenous. The land was also inaccessible which added fuel to the speculation that this monkey might be extinct. The joy of Martin and Osa was complete at this finding of these trees. They had traveled roughly four hundred miles by boat and raft, lived on their rafts for almost three weeks and also in pitched tents along the banks and now they had arrived at the land of the proboscis monkey. They had nothing left to do but to film the creature. To their delight, the monkey proved easy to find and they were able to achieve the first photographic proof of the animals existence in its own habitat.¹⁴

The discoveries did not stop with the filming of the monkey. They also discovered a form of tree-climbing fish on the same order as a trout or catfish. It was not related to a lizard or even a tadpole. The establishment of a vantage point based in bark was accomplished by the fish by a scale and fin combination which the creatures used their side fin structures to propel themselves on land. They were a brown coloring and about a foot in length. Osa often saw the natives eating the fish so she was certain it was a safe food. She also noted that the fish was not adapted to long stretches out of the water and also not capable of remaining long in the water. It was apparently one of those flukes of nature that had adjusted itself to accommodate the existent topography where it lived and

¹⁴Ibid., 153-56.

so learned to live on land when sudden floods left them stranded periodically in the roots of trees above the water.¹⁵

The natives located at the headwaters of the river were headhunters. They were of the Tenggaes tribe. They were quite fierce looking and acting as well. Martin calmed them somewhat by his gifts of tobacco which was enjoyed by all including their young children. While Osa was indeed frightened, she displayed courage by standing up to an inspection by their chief. She was quite a curiosity with her white skin and light colored hair. Her teeth with their straight edges became quite an interesting sight for the chief, whose own teeth and those of his women were black and filed to a point.¹⁶ To the natives, any enemy that ran in the face of danger was the lowest form of a coward. They respected Osa and her courage for standing firm in the face of such danger. Little did they know Osa's innermost thoughts. She was aware of the native logic on bravery from her earlier exploits in the South Seas and Africa. She also possessed one other additional insight about her situation: there was no where to run. The jungle would have prohibited them from escaping these natives if they had decided to capture the Johnsons.

The chief declared a feast to honor the arrival of the white explorers. Monkey was the chief food served and Osa obviously felt sickened by the sight of it. The feast included the usual dancing by the natives concomitant with other festivities to welcome them. On the sixth day of their stay, Martin suffered a serious bout of malaria, the legacy

¹⁵Ibid., 162.

¹⁶Ibid., 180.

of his travels with Jack London. The excessive exposure to damp and rain had his body racked with a fever that left him delirious and Osa at the mercy of the Tenggaras. She was filled with terror for Martin for she had limited amounts of the precious quinine with them and terror for her situation which offered little in the way of anything good.

Martin's temperature at once soared to one hundred and five, then up to one hundred and six degrees. Osa knew there were no doctors anywhere close which limited her work at hand to that of doctor and nurse. The medicine necessary to quell the attack amounted to about twenty grains of quinine each day. Osa had limited supplies, but felt she had a sufficient amount to see them through this immediate emergency. That was until she began to open the sealed packages. She discovered the dampness of the region along with the humidity had quietly seeped into the packages in her medicine kit and rendered the medicine virtually useless. The cardboard containers fell apart in her hands.

Everything was ruined. She took that occasion to break down and cry. It might have been the most feminine approach to the problem but it also served to supply her the best way to relieve the anxiety. Once the crying jag was over, she was faced with two decisions about their immediate future. Did she now take their welfare into her hands and attempt to take Martin back to camp while he was sick and could offer her no assistance? The alternative was to stay there and watch his condition erode since she had no medicine to turn the tide. She decided that she had little choice but to stay. The river was flooding due to the torrential downpours they were experiencing. Any attempt by her to wrap Martin in blankets for the journey would mean certain death for him if the boat should capsize, and for her as well in what would then be her ill-fated attempt to

rescue Martin. The dilemma was solved for her when the natives saw Martin's condition. They went into the forest and came back with herbal medicines which were applied to him by the tribes witch-doctor. Although she at first considered refusing this treatment, she soon came to realize it offered hope where there was no hope. She allowed the witch-doctor to work on Martin and discovered the natives had access to a natural quinine.¹⁷ Once Martin was well they left the headwaters and returned to their camp, eventually to leave Borneo.

¹⁷Ibid., 182-85.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST SAFARI

Osa displayed a determination to carry on the work of Martin as a memorial to him in death. She not only proved capable at this venue, but her own ability in this area was validated by her selection to land a film crew into Africa. This would be the only time an event of this magnitude would be led by any woman and Osa was the obvious choice because of her familiarity with the people, the area, and the animals. She was the leading authority in this area and it made perfect sense to the film producers to select Osa based solely upon her merits.

The accolades began to flood in for Osa as she became a woman for all seasons with her assault upon the American public from a multitude of directions. She wrote, produced films, directed a movie company, and merchandised herself with a line of clothes for adults and toy stuffed animals for children. She was also selected to the list of best dressed women. All of these accomplishments were done totally as Osa, not Mrs. Martin Johnson. This singular public personality would be the dominant personality in the mind of the public. This approach, orchestrated and directed by her agent turned husband, took Osa to the top of her profession. Yet, sadly, it left Osa unhappy. Success without Martin would continue to be shallow and unrewarding to Osa.

The Johnsons arrived in America on October 25, 1936, to find a lecture tour worth \$87,000 awaiting them. They were anxious to prepare their films and writings but the

tour gave them added excitement. This would be quite a reversal from Martin's first lecture at the *Snark II* where he stood physically frozen and was so tongue-tied he was barely capable of audible sound. Osa saw a new vitality in Martin. She knew the critics had hailed his photography of Borneo as his best ever. She felt the explorer in Martin had been content for some time. This was to be the best opportunity to satisfy Martin as an artist.

The first stop of the lecture tour at Salt Lake City, Utah, would prove to be one of the most well received lecture and film showings ever presented by the pair. Once it concluded, Martin would open a long anticipated dialogue with Osa in the cab ride back to the hotel room. It would concern the procedure necessary to adopt children. As was always the case, Osa was prepared for all eventualities. She had previously checked into the adoption requirements to determine what was necessary to adopt a child.¹

The next day was January 12, 1937. Martin and Osa were scheduled aboard a *Western Air Express* Boeing 247, piloted by W.W. Lewis. The flight carried only thirteen people on that ill-fated trip from Salt Lake City to Burbank. The pilot experienced fog and crashed the plane just fifteen miles from the San Fernando airport. After the crash, Osa, in tremendous pain from eight leg fractures and a concussion, asked the stewardess, Esther Jo Conner, where Martin was. The stewardess assured Osa that he was still alive. While he was alive at that time, he had suffered numerous injuries, including a concussion, fractures of both legs, multiple fractures of both jaws, a fractured

¹Osa Johnson, *I Married Adventure*, 370.

nose and severe shock. The crash scene was total chaos. Rescuers worked through the night with a six mule team and wagon to bring out the injured in the face of a snowstorm. They were carried by stretcher five miles down the mountains to where an ambulance was awaiting their arrival. They were then taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital via Highway 99 to Los Angeles. Martin arrived alive, but so many hours had passed and his trauma was so intense that he had little chance for survival because he was also suffering from, and untreated for, diabetes mellitus.²

When Osa first felt blood trickling down her face, she began to search through her handbag for face cream in order to repair her face.³ She was always cognizant of where she was and who she was. She simply would always attempt to be at her best no matter what that was at the time.

The word of Martin's death was released to the world. At age 52, the photographer-explorer-pilot had not died in the wilds of Africa under the murderous paws of a lion, or crashed in the Borneo jungles attended to by headhunters. He had returned to his native America and to its relative safety. Osa later commented Martin often stated there was more danger in civilization than in the jungle. This crash and his subsequent death merely punctuated that thought.⁴

Osa's doctors now feared she might not walk again. They only knew of the extensive damage done to her leg. What they did not know was her determination to

²Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 196.

³Chanute Tribune, 13 January 1937.

⁴Mariam L. Mih, Safari, 49.

continue Martin's work as a lasting tribute. Martin's body was held in a vault at the Little Church of the Flowers in Los Angeles until Osa was well enough to travel back to Chanute for the funeral.⁵

The funeral of Martin Johnson on February 27, 1937, was on a Saturday. It would completely overwhelm the small southeast Kansas community of ten thousand. The most famous citizens of Chanute had always enjoyed a place in the heart of the community and the town turned out to honor Martin accordingly. The Municipal Auditorium would be chosen as the site for the community memorial service. Osa would sit in her wheelchair in the wings with her mother, Isabelle, brother Vaughn, and other relatives together with a few chosen friends. A eulogy by Reverend John J. MacInerney portrayed Martin as a noble partner and even as a hero. In their married life, Osa and Martin had been together for twenty five years, made twelve expeditions and managed to circle the globe six times as well as expose in excess of one million feet of motion-picture film.⁶ The reverend placed Martin in a class with America's greatest citizens, also killed in airplane crashes, along side Will Rogers the humorist, Knute Rockne the coach, and Wiley Post the pilot.

The funeral had implications which extended far beyond the city limits of Chanute. It drew a battery of reporters, cameramen and support people from newspapers, wire services, and news teams around the country. Fox movietone news was represented by

⁵Chanute Tribune, 1 March 1937.

⁶S. J. Woolf, "Quarter Century", 10.

Jack Barnett who manned the large motion-picture camera for the event. Citizens of Chanute who had not seen one of the intricate machines curiously crowded around them. The shots by Mr. Barnett were later rushed to Kansas City where they were developed. Later the descriptions of the noted commentator, Lowell Thomas, were synchronized with the film. He would later define the couple as unique in the annals of travel and exploration. He noted they shared each others hardships, dangers, thoughts and experiences. He also stated few couples had so much and such continuous fun together.⁷ The pictures taken by Clarence Ham of the *Associated Press* and Louis Studna of the *Kansas City Journal Post* were later sent out to newspapers in the AP circuit as well as newspapers throughout America.

The funeral was kept low key. The service was held at the Presbyterian Church with two hundred and fifty in attendance. The services were performed by the Reverend Fred Shaw and Reverend W. T. Hunt.⁸ Martin's body had been taken for preparation to the Wilson-Johnson Mortuary prior to this. The pallbearers for the services were all family friends of many years and honored co-workers. They were: Dr. L.D. Johnson, James A. Allen, E.P. Merchant, Clarence W. Moody, B.S. Cofer, and Vern L. Carstens, their African pilot. The honorary pallbearers were close to Martin and Osa in a more professional sense: Trubee Davison, former President of the Museum of Natural History in New York, and former Assistant Secretary of War for Aviation, Jim Laneri of New

⁷Lowell Thomas, "The Story of Martin Johnson", *Natural History* 39 (March 1937): 157.

⁸Chanute Tribune, 27 February 1937.

York, Thomas Craig of the Eastman Kodak Company, Mayor Watson Stewart, A. A. Gist, and Alex Johnson.⁹ Osa chose a memorial verse from a Tennyson poem which well represented Martin's spirit of exploration:

Sunset and evening star;
And one clear call for me!
And there may be
No moaning of this bar
When I put out to sea,

For tho' from out our bourne
of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot-
face to face,
When I have crost the bar.

Most of the vast audience at the Municipal Auditorium did not follow the funeral procession to Elmwood Cemetery. Martin was laid to rest there in the Leighty family plot, against the wishes of his sister, Mrs. J. R. (Freda) Cripps of Enid, Oklahoma.

Osa was now President of Martin Johnson Pictures, Inc.¹⁰ She continued to work on the film material available to her from their work. She was also credited with giving more than one thousand lectures from her wheelchair while she healed.¹¹ This would serve to deflect the sense of loss she suffered at Martin's death. Osa also was to earn royalties from Twentieth Century Fox in excess of \$79,325. The money was for their film *Borneo*, by October 1938. In accordance with Martin's will, Freda received twenty

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Chanute Tribune, 8 January 1953.

¹¹Chanute Tribune, 7 January 1953.

percent of Martin's estate.¹² The film would be narrated by Lowell Thomas, hired by Twentieth Century Fox and completed by him in April of 1937. This narrative enjoined by the studio, re-employed older racial sight gags and sensationalism that had been seen in *Congorilla*. Martin had been successful in petitioning the studio to remove these episodes from *Baboonna*. Thomas described the workers of the Johnsons at Abai as the laziest people on earth who were bored to tears with work of any kind.¹³

Time would be the ally of Osa. The town of Chanute was fortunate enough to receive additional assistance in its behalf from Osa, who never failed to help when called upon. She arranged a showing of some of Martin's film at a showing attended by more than twelve hundred people. She then donated five to six hundred dollars of her receipts to the Chanute Christmas Charity Cause.¹⁴ While Osa would greatly miss Martin, she took the time to plan a return trip for herself to Africa. She returned as a leader of a Hollywood film crew to film on location for the movie *Stanley and Livingston*. The crew included twenty men coupled with twenty six trucks as a nucleus. They also employed groups of natives ranging from two hundred up to two thousand. Osa was the only woman present. She directed the native building of forty seven bombas in Ujiji where Stanley and Livingston met. She was also responsible to oversee the cooking and hunted buffalo to provide meat for the natives. The movie film noted she once drove an open

¹²Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 203.

¹³Ibid., 201-02.

¹⁴Chanute Tribune, 2 December 1937.

station wagon near twelve lions.¹⁵ Some of her friends would question why she would want to return to such hardship, peril, and privation as she sailed aboard the *Normandie* on June 16, 1937 for Africa. Her response to her friends was to indicate she was not courageous nor in any manner seeking danger or death. She was simply going home.¹⁶

Osa returned to the states after filming on the movie was completed. She immersed herself in a large number of written and film projects. She would at this time also bring lawsuits against the *Western Air Express Company* in the amount of \$502,537 for Martin's wrongful death, coupled with another suit for \$204,000 for her own injuries. She lost both cases on December 29, 1938. Her lawyer attributed both losses to Osa's dress, courtroom demeanor, and the mistaken public perception that she did not need any additional money.¹⁷

Osa later received accolades for her best-seller, I Married Adventure, describing her married life with Martin. These would come from the New York Times Book Review which stated the work was not so ephemeral as to be indexed one day and shoveled out the next. They indicated the work was unique with the human quality of a novel coupled with the permanence of social and exploration history.¹⁸ The book was later targeted as a Book-of-the-Month club selection. She set about her work and produced three movies in

¹⁵Chanute Tribune, 15 November 1937.

¹⁶Osa Johnson, "Jungle" American Magazine 124 (July 1937): 146.

¹⁷Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 206.

¹⁸Katherine Woods, "The Adventurous Lives of the Martin Johnsons," New York Times Book Review, (May 19, 1940): 5.

the succeeding four years: *Jungle Calling* in 1937, *I Married Adventure* in 1940, and *African Paradise* in 1941. She also busied herself with animal stories for magazines and nature books for children. These children's books were details about the animals Osa had captured and raised while on safari.

Osa in 1939 was named to America's twelve best-dressed women list by the Fashion Academy. The festivities were held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and included awards to Bette Davis for Screen, Mrs. Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt for Society, Alice Marble for Sports, and Osa for Adventure. She was recognized for her use of scientific knowledge of jungle attire in practical everyday fashion.

In 1940, Osa began a line of animal toys designed by her to be used in concert with the National Wildlife Federation. She had decided that this approach offered her the best vehicle in which to carry on Martin's teaching of the conservation of wild animals to insure they did not vanish once civilization moved into their territories. All these accolades, plus the clothing lines, enhanced by the public lectures, endorsements for various products, children's books and stuffed toys were moves designed by her agent to define Osa apart from her role as Martin's wife.¹⁹ These toys would also fulfill Osa's vision to inspire in children who bought and played with the toys love and sympathy for dumb animals of the world.²⁰ The animals were only part of the purchase price. Each of the eight different species also contained an envelope with wildlife stamps, which were

¹⁹Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 208.

²⁰Mariam L. Mih, *Safari*, 50.

contained in a booklet with a story written by Osa on the life and habits of the animal represented by the toy. The toy company even rewarded multiple purchasers (as a promotional ploy) with honors in the Osa Johnson Wildlife Club.²¹

Prior to Osa's selection to the best dressed women list, she had successfully launched a line of women's sportswear which was made from a fabric trademarked 'Osafari'. The line was to include slacks, shirts, skirts, jackets and shorts. The clothing buttons were wood and in the form of African masks. The line carried the label of Osa Johnson and came in many colors listed appropriately as Uganda Flame, Acacia Yellow, Kenya Blue, Masai Bronze, or KEDONG GOLD. She also in that same year attempted a line of gloves called the Congo which were made of pigskin and goatskin.²²

Osa searched for other vehicles to continue Martin's work in addition to his studio work. She also began to feel an element missing in her own life which was needed to again unify it. She discovered the missing element was the love of a man. She found that love in her agent, Clark Hallan Getts. They were married in a private ceremony on April 29, 1940, and in a public ceremony on February 3, 1941. Clark had been hired originally by Osa and Martin in the fall of 1936. He also handled writers such as Theodore Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson, as well as pianist Jan Paderewski.²³ Osa at this time of her life needed affection and the strong presence of a man who she could view as intently reliable. Clark filled those roles for her. He attempted to define Osa as

²¹Christian Science Monitor, 23 March 1940.

²²Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 207.

²³Ibid., 194.

a person independent from Martin. His desire was to help Osa achieve personal success independent of Martin's memory. Clark felt that the opportunity to do this was presented entirely in Osa herself and not necessarily in more adventures in Africa.²⁴

World War II saw Osa lend assistance to her country based upon her vast wealth of information of living in the jungles. With her assistance, the United States government prepared pamphlets for the military troops which were designed to instruct them in the correct ways to handle the natives in the jungle. They also included survival suggestions which were not only helpful but vital to troops stationed there. Osa did not forget her debt of gratitude to the British from her years in British East Africa. She donated an ambulance in her name for their use.²⁵ The war also saw a new ship, *The Martin Johnson* which was a liberty ship launched in California in 1944.²⁶

Drinking again caused Osa problems and led to her downfall with Clark. She had even accused him of stealing one half million dollars from her. After their divorce, quietly awarded in 1949, she petitioned the courts to again use her former name, Mrs. Martin Johnson, and this request was granted.²⁷ The marriage had been a disappointment to Osa, but like all other difficulties, Osa carried on in the ways she always had. She met adversity in life with a pluck and gritty determination that life goes on.

²⁴Ibid., 204.

²⁵Chanute Tribune, 24 January 1953.

²⁶Chanute Tribune, 14 April 1994 for Fifty Years Ago column.

²⁷Mariam L. Mih, *Safari*, 50.

Osa next signed on to narrate a television series based upon one-half hour segments of their films which were slated to run for ten years. The contract was to be canceled when she appeared on stage drunk. Her expenses began to mount and her income decreased as she had fewer and fewer lecture opportunities coupled with her business inexperience and her outdated film library of black and white films.

Her lawyer at the time, John Crane, would later become a live-in with Osa. He was a gambler that Osa's mother later claimed stole from Osa to pay his gambling debts. Belle's insistence that Crane duped Osa on some jade Osa had purchased years before in Borneo for two thousand dollars. This claim was based upon Osa's comment that he had told her it was soapstone and only worth three hundred dollars. This despite an appraisal of more than twelve thousand dollars by a jeweler hired years before by Martin.²⁸

Time and life would run out for Osa. She was found dead at her suite in the Hotel Woodard in New York City on Wednesday, January 7, 1953. The time of death was placed at between 9:00 and 11:00 A. M. Osa had been under the care of several physicians for hypertension and coronary artery disease. She was in financial straits and was involved with a gambler. These facts forced her to sell off prized possessions in an attempt to make ends meet. She had lacked any lecture or film contracts and as her debts had begun to mount, she was pursued by a long list of creditors. She was extremely close

²⁸Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 223-4.

to penury when she died. Her death certificate listed chronic myocarditis (heart attack) as the cause of death.²⁹

Her body was returned to Chanute by the *Santa Fe Streamliner* at 7:35 P. M. on Sunday, January 11, 1953. It had been accompanied by her aunt, Mrs. William Thoman and John Crane. The funeral was slated for Monday, January 12, at 3:30 P. M. The body would lie in state from 2:30 until the 3:30 services. Osa was survived by her mother Isabelle. Her memberships at the time of her death included: the Presbyterian Church in Chanute, American Museum of Natural History, Ninety Niners (women pilots), Society of Women Geographers, Business and Professional Women of Kansas, honorary member of the Girl Scouts of America, and an international honorary membership in Beta Sigma Phi sorority, Alpha Chi chapter. She was also the honorary chairman of the National Wildlife Conference.³⁰

Osa's funeral would not draw the nation wide media attention that Martin's death attracted some sixteen years before. Just as Martin's funeral, it would be attended by two hundred and fifty people. Thousands of others would file by the bier while it was in state. At least twenty schoolchildren were present at the funeral of the woman who had written many of the stories of their youth. The pallbearers were: F. B. Carpenter, William Baker, C. W. Brennan, T. F. Tier, Dalice Rush and Clarence W. Moody, the editor of the

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Chanute Tribune, 8 January 1953.

Garnett, Kansas newspaper. Those attending included Vern Carstens and Gail Hamilton, Osa's childhood schoolmate and longtime friend.³¹

Local police chief Tom Morehead increased security for Osa's burial with a police detail to direct traffic. She was buried in Elmwood Cemetery next to Martin. She had in her lifetime traveled approximately one and one half million miles and now was placed to rest a scant seven blocks from her birthplace.

While Osa's mother had been with her only days before Osa's death, and had in fact received several letters from her since, the woman had not indicated any ill health problems to her mother at that time.³² After the funeral, Osa left several items to the daughter of her late brother Vaughn, her niece Osayvonne Leighty, age 13, of Austin, Texas. An also large number of other artifacts went to museums.³³

The honors and accomplishments of Osa were properly noted by the press. She was praised as an explorer, writer, lecturer and motion-picture producer as well. Perhaps her most telling eulogy would have highlighted her credentials above all as that of a devoted wife. That fact is illustrated in Martin's notation on the dedication page of Camera

Trails in Africa:

"To Osa, The Best Pal a Man Ever Had.

For fifteen years, she has gone everywhere with me. We have done the Great White Way together. We have sailed together into the cannibal islands of the South Seas. We have explored the Borneo jungle together, and together we have lived among the animals of Africa. Osa had stood by

³¹Chanute Tribune, 13 January 1953.

³²Chanute Tribune, 7 January 1953.

³³Chanute Tribune, 14 January 1953.

me in every emergency. In Africa, she saved my life from the elephants of Lake Paradise. She has never failed me. And-what counts most-she likes it all."³⁴

Osa also commanded respect for her list of accomplishments which included ten books and numerous magazine articles. While she was known to employ the use of a ghost writer, Osa and Martin, who penned eight books of his own coupled with numerous magazine articles, had limited education and little opportunity to expand their knowledge except in the field. Martin had quit school at a very early age due to his photographs and Osa had only graduated from the eighth grade. Hardly a recipe for literary success.

Osa also possessed a great list of personal accomplishments. The accolades of the first woman explorer list were heartily skewed in her direction and plausibly will remain there forever. She was the only woman to be licensed and granted a big game license as the leader of safaris. She was the only woman ever accorded honorary membership in the Explorer's Club of New York City. There was recognition for her in Who's Who. The first woman who had explored South Sea Islands and who photographed the cannibals of those islands in the tropics. She became the first woman to cross an island of cannibals on foot. She was the first woman ever to enter the territory of the Tenggara headhunters. Many explorers boasted of their adventures in the jungles of Borneo, but few returned with proof of their experience. Osa had filmed evidence of her accomplishment. She was the first woman to fly over Borneo to film that jungle covered island, the first to ascend the headwaters of the Kinabatangan River in Borneo. The

³⁴Martin E. Johnson, Camera Trails, Dedication page.

honors were as convincing as they were powerful. She would obviously be the quintessential female explorer of that or any other generation. Her honors further described a life of danger, adventure, and a disregard for personal safety or comfort. She was listed as first to photograph the rare proboscis monkey, flying snakes and tree-climbing fish of Borneo. She became the first female pilot to fly over the South China Sea. Other honors listed her prior accomplishments in Africa where she was the first woman to photograph gorillas in their native habitat, pygmies in the Ituri forest, to fly over and photograph the highest mountains in Africa, to loop an amphibian plane, and as the first woman to head a movie company which made pictures in Africa. There was also a credit afforded her for her part in the capture of two of the world's largest gorillas, Mbongo and Ngagi, which she subsequently donated to the San Diego Zoo.³⁵

The lifetime together of Osa and Martin would inspire countless others. They became icons in a generation where greatness not only abounded, but was viewed with a worship akin to heroism. They were remembered in Ernest Hemingway's short story The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber, as the couple who debunked an image of darkest Africa by lighting up the silver screen.³⁶ Osa had later been given an honorable mention on the most popular television show ever *I Love Lucy* when Lucy, on episode #165 wanted to know if taking care of her son's cat, bird, and dog was how Osa Johnson started.

³⁵Chanute Tribune, 29 January 1953.

³⁶Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, They Married Adventure, 209.

The death of the final partner of Osa and Martin fame left a city intent on establishing a memorial to their memory. Chanute's memory of Osa was always characterized by the little girl who had grown up there proud of her hometown. She was always very generous of her time and friendship with its citizens. There seldom were requests for her time which went unheeded and she always had time to speak before a civic or church organization. Folks there lived in a life which was a throwback to simpler, less complicated time where character meant everything and the word of a person was their bond. Osa subscribed to that charter and lived that lifestyle.

The city of Chanute addressed several memorial possibilities from something as incidental as a picture at city hall to the purchase of Osa's birthplace at Seventh and Malcolm. Several attempts were made to establish an Osa Johnson Memorial foundation to purchase the home and then to convert the house to a fitting memorial. These plans were not well organized and fell through when the house was ultimately sold to Mrs. Hazel Wheatley.³⁷

Martin had earlier in 1935 been honored with the renaming of the airport in Chanute as the Martin Johnson airport. But now something more tangible was deemed appropriate for Chanute's own. Osa's mother had long maintained many articles from their adventures and many more were crated and in storage in New York.

³⁷Chanute Tribune, 14 January 1953.

EPILOGUE

The year 1959 saw the formation of a museum with the gift of a former *Santa Fe Railroad* freight storage building donated to the city to house the African artifacts of the Johnsons. On June 11, 1961 the Martin and Osa Johnson Museum was dedicated and opened after a full five years of planning.¹ In 1972, the noted epidemiologist, Dr. Pascal James Imperato donated a gift of West African artifacts. His relationship with the museum was a long and nurturing one. He had coincidentally been born on the day Martin was killed. His childhood love of Martin's adventure stories led him to return as a young adult to his native land of Africa where he revisited many of the Johnson's safari sites including Lake Paradise. Imperato knew this as *Gof Sokorte Guda*.²

The late 1960's saw serious consideration to the addition of a hall to include a permanent exhibit of African art. It came to be named the Johnson Memorial Hall of African Culture, opened on January 19, 1974. The year 1980 would see the museum add the Stott Explorers Library. It would feature volumes of natural history literature and original works on mammalogy, anthropology, and ornithology. The last addition to the Kansas museum was the Selsor Gallery of fine art in 1981.

Belle Leighty was left 800,000 feet of film stored in New York which would later be transferred to the Library of Congress Motion Picture Conservation Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio in 1958. There were also other films located in the

¹Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 227.

²Pascal James Imperato, *Doctor in the Land*, 169.

British Film Institute, the Nederland Filmmuseum and the American Heritage Center of the University of Wyoming. Glass plates and negatives were transferred from Eastman Kodak in Rochester, New York to the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House which now had 8485 negatives and glass plates copied in 1987 onto laser video disc. There are also several hundreds more at the American Museum of Natural History. The Museum of Modern Art has a large collection consisting of prints used promotionally with the films of the Johnsons. The colored slides used by them in their first lecture series are stored at the Jack and Charmian London collection of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, located in Santa Rosa. The last repository is the Safari Museum in Chanute, which has several thousand still photographs.³

The museum was moved in 1992 to the newly renovated facilities at the former *Santa Fe Railroad* depot at 11 North Lincoln in Chanute. This was the result of a civic drive to renovate the old depot by public donations after several failed prior attempts at bond issues. The permanent collections housed at this location offer a unique glimpse into the Africa of yesteryear. Martin filmed exclusively in black and white which was the medium of the era. He often expressed a desire to use colored film. Unfortunately, the advent of this medium for use in wild life applications was not developed to allow that to happen. Children of today have seen such films and generally express little desire to view materials which lack color. However, the appeal worldwide to the work of the

³Pascal James Imperato and Eleanor M. Imperato, *They Married Adventure*, 228-9.

Johnsons has been exceptional. It has been utilized by modern ecologists who seek Chanute out from their homes in Africa. Their purpose is to study the photographs of the Johnsons in order to make a determination on the amount of change that their countries have encountered in the last fifty or sixty years. The South Sea Islands have sent representatives to the museum to research clues to their tribal heritage which flourished when the Johnsons visited them, but which had now been lost through their civilized contact with man and his modern world.⁴

Osa Johnson was indeed Americas most noted female explorer, an able and accomplished photographer, pilot, hunter, movie producer, and devoted wife to Martin. She obviously surrendered her dream of the security of a home and the love of a family for the sake of their marriage. She also provided Martin with the additional assurance so necessary to put his mind at ease on her acceptance of his occupation and life's work. She was supportive to their mission to the determinant of her health and she always felt Martin to be the kindest and most gentle man ever. Her accomplishments indicated a life dedicated to a commitment of purpose she readily accepted. She was clearly the leading female personality in the world in this dangerous and male-dominated field of adventure. This field included men like Charles A. Linberg, Richard E. Byrd, Richard Halliburton, and Frank Buck to name a few. She and Martin pioneered several present day causes which included conservatism of endangered species, the establishment of game preserves to protect all species of animals, and the acceptance of blacks in a racist era in America

⁴Ibid., xi.

which saw little reason to champion the cause of racial opportunity. She also helped to demystify the continent of Africa, known by most Americans as darkest Africa, by a glimpse of her baking pies for boy scouts while on safari.

Martin was often categorized as a dreamer from a romantic mold. He was also a pragmatic and daring man whose innovations in his field obviously furthered the causes he supported. His work was uncompromisingly his life. His values placed work at the top of his priorities, yet he always seemed to struggle with his commitment to Osa. She was often described as the woman who simply accompanied Martin, or raised a garden, and as one who got into dangerous adventures which almost cost her life many times over. Yet she accomplished many of the same things as Martin. She explored the same places, suffered the same hardships, was exposed to as much danger and terror, was indeed more responsible for the smooth operation of their camps, and not surprisingly, received little public clamor, accord, or notoriety, except as the other half of the Martin and Osa team. They became icons to an admiring American public. Her rise to prominence was restricted by a society which hindered and held back accomplishments by women in male dominated fields.

The era of Osa and Martin as explorers was the last to be romantically linked to Africa. The era of the airplane would forever end the safaris with enormous contingents of natives and increase the pace of living there as it already had done elsewhere. Civilization had at last begun its relentless advance on that continent. This event closed the chapter on the Johnsons brand of exploration. Nothing would close the book on her brand of pioneering spirit.

GLOSSARY

Aberdare Mountains: A wooded mountain range in Kenya.

Acacia: A genus of woody shrub and trees of the mimosa family with flat, umbrella-like tops.

Archer's Post: An outpost on the northern banks of the Euaso Nyiro River in the Kenya northern frontier.

Askari: A native black soldier in khaki uniform and bright red fezzes.

Athi Plains: Flat plains land located near Nairobi.

Alumbongo Mountains: A mountain chain in the Belgian Congo not listed on any government maps. They were located near the village of Alumbongo where the Johnsons first sighted gorillas.

Beche-de-mer: An artificial South Seas language.

Bibi: Another term for bwana or master.

Blackbirding: The illegal running of or dealing in slaves in the South Seas.

Blanketti River: A river located in lower Tanganyika.

Blue Vitriol: A copper sulfate used to treat yaws or skin eruptions or skin ulceration.

Boma: A stockade surrounding a camp or village used for protection.

Boran: A tribe of nomadic herdsmen on the northern frontier.

Bustard: An African wild turkey.

Bwana: The Swahili word for 'master' or 'mister'.

Chobe Hills: Shaba Hills in Kenya, north of Nairobi.

Chania Falls: The beautiful waterfall discovered by the Johnsons on the northern frontier.

Chargos: This is a water container made of leather used at Lake Paradise to haul water to develop negatives.

Chorgia Mission: This mission is located part way up on Mt. Kenya.

Cicatrices: The scars worn by natives fashioned by the cutting of slits into the skin with sharp knives, then impregnating that wound with dirt to cause an infection in the sores. The resulting scars formed an artistic design which was considered quite ornamental.

Columbus: A monkey with long lustrous black and white fur which inhabit Mt. Kenya and other forests at high altitudes in East Africa.

Copra: Refers to the meat of a dried coconut.

Corrosive Sublimate: Is a derivative of sulfuric acid used to treat skin ulceration in the South Seas.

Deelia: A pygmy leader in the Ituri Forest.

Did-Dik: Is the name given to a Hindu or native tradesman; the 'duka' shop is the equivalent of an old American country store.

Dunsun: A tribe of natives in Borneo.

Eauso Nyiro River: Is located in the northern frontier.

Eland: The largest antelope in northern Africa.

Eyemo: The name of the camera manufactured by the Eyemo Camera Company.

Genet: The name of a small African wildcat.

Gerenuk: A nimble East African antelope which makes jumps of from twenty to thirty feet in length.

Gobong: A name given to canoes in Borneo.

Gof Sokorte Guda: A Swahili name for the crater where Lake Paradise was located.

Hallalla: The Mohammedan practice of cutting the throat of an animal so that its flesh will be 'purified' for eating.

- Hyrax:** The small brown 'rock-rabbit' of East Africa.
- Isiolo:** The government station on the northern frontier.
- Ituri Forest:** located in the Belgian Congo.
- Jambo:** A Swahili word for 'how do you do'.
- Jimbie:** A Swahili word for a hoe like those used to make the airfields used by the Johnsons in their last exploration of Africa.
- Kai-Kai:** A South Sea term for eating, usually applied to the eating of human flesh.
- Kanza:** A flowing night- shirt like garment.
- Kapandi:** A license issued by the government to native servants in East Africa. The term also applied to other licenses.
- Karisoot:** The famous desert of East Africa crossed by the Johnsons in order to arrive at Lake Paradise.
- Karo:** A waterhole inroute to Lake Paradise.
- Kikuyu:** An East African tribe of farmers and gardeners.
- Kinabatangan River:** The river located in northern Borneo.
- Kissimini:** A waterhole enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Kodong Valley:** Located thirty five miles south of Nairobi.
- Lasamis:** A waterhole enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Longaia:** A waterhole enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Longania:** A waterhole enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Long Pig:** A name given to the flesh of humans by people in the South Seas.
- Lorian Swamp:** A large swamp on the northern frontier into which flows the Eauso Nyiro River before it disappears.

- Lulenga Mission:** Located on the side of Mt. Mikenno where the Johnsons first sighted gorillas.
- Lumbwa:** A tribe of hunters used by Theodore Roosevelt in his African hunts of 1909.
- Marsabit:** A government station on the northern frontier.
- Masai:** A tribe of nomadic East African natives.
- Memsahib:** A Swahili word for 'mistress' or 'missus'.
- Merille:** A waterhole enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Meru:** A trading center and government post on the northern frontier.
- Mimosa:** A tree or shrub usually having spikes of white and pink flowers.
- Muruto:** A native tribe in Borneo.
- Nanyuki:** A white settlement located north of Nairobi.
- N'Doto Mountains:** A mountain range near Lake Paradise west of Marsabit, Kenya.
- Ngari-Ngari:** Another term for scratch-scratch fever from the South Seas.
- Ngormgoro:** A large crater near the Serengetti Plains noted for its abundant wildlife.
- N'Groon Mountains:** A range of mountains near Lake Paradise.
- Nyeri:** A white settlement north of Nairobi.
- Osa's Ark:** A skikorsky aircraft, a ten-seat airplane painted with the markings of a zebra.
- Pandus Fiber:** A fibrous bark from a tree in the South Seas used by the natives to work up as a garment.
- Panga:** The long sharp native knife used for cutting grass and bushes.
- Parang:** A long native knife used to cut grass and vegetation in Borneo.
- Patois:** A provincial dialect.
- Permanganate of Potash:** Refers to the salts of permanganic acid.

- Pombe: A native beer.
- Posho: A ground cornmeal which was a staple of the African native.
- Proboscis Monkey: A rare monkey found at the headwaters of the Kinabatangan River in Borneo.
- Rendille: A tribe of East African herdsmen and nomads.
- Ret: A waterhole at the end of the Karisoot Desert enroute to Lake Paradise.
- Safari: An expedition, caravan, or trip into the bush in Africa.
- Salou: The son of Deelia, the pygmy.
- Samburu: A tribe of northern frontier nomadic herdsmen.
- Seranio River: Located in the Serengetti Plains.
- Serengetti Plains: Located in Tanganyika. It was the location of most African lion safaris.
- Simba: A Swahili word for lion.
- Sjambok: A whip made from the hide of a hippo.
- Snark: The name of Jack London's ship. The name was derived from the German legend of a beautiful bird which German children were promised they would see if they behaved.
- Somali: A tribe of northern frontier nomadic herdsmen, partly Arab in their nature.
- Spirit of Africa: A Sikorsky aircraft. A five seat airplane painted to resemble a giraffe.
- Spirillum Tick: A large infection carrying tick; fever contracted from which is considered one of the most dangerous maladies in East Africa.
- Spoor: Animal dung or droppings.
- Sumpitan: A blowgun used by the Muruts in Borneo.
- Sunga: A village in Borneo.

Swahili: An 'esperanto' introduced by Arab slave traders, now used by and understood by approximately one hundred tribes in East Africa.

Tembo: A Swahili word for elephants.

Tenggaras: A group of savage headhunters in Borneo.

Terai: The name of Osa's oversized hat.

Thika: A white settlement north of Nairobi.

Timbader: A Borneo wild buffalo.

Thorn Tree: A popular designation of acacia and other trees found on the plains and desert with sparse foliage but long, sharp thorns, often growing to considerable size.

Thornbush: The small, scrubby bushes of East African plains and desert, bearing long thorns.

Tinga-Tinga: A Swahili word for swamp.

Toto: A baby or small child, in Swahili, also used by East Africans to describe a son or daughter of any age.

Tsetse Fly: A small fly of central and southern Africa noted for carrying the dreaded sleeping sickness.

Turkana: A savage tribe on the northern frontier living in the Lake Rudolph section.

Ujiji: The village in Kenya where Stanley met Livingston.

Ukulele: A small four-stringed musical instrument from Hawaii, similar to a guitar.

Wanderobo: A savage tribe of small-bodied East African natives who roam the forests, have no permanent dwellings and who live on game, fruits, and nuts.

Wildebeest: East African antelope, smaller but somewhat resembling the American Bison.

Wistonia: The Johnsons favorite waterhole and waterfall at Lake Paradise.

Yaws: Skin eruptions caused by exposure to poisonous coral by a scratch usually while swimming.

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