

# God, a Grizzly, & Me!

By Nikki Kronberger



**H**ey, sweetie! Do you want to go hunt a Grizzly bear?" I seriously didn't think it would ever happen, so I said, "Sure, why not."

We have an outfitting business, so Grizzly bear hunting isn't that abnormal, except for me being the hunter. This would actually be my first big hunt, and several things had to work out just right if I was going to be able to go out during spring bear season. Well, things did work out just right, but I guess that's obvious or I wouldn't be writing this story.

Lance was already out guiding a bear hunter, so I had to fly out by myself and meet him there. It gave me time to pray

and read my bible. I was absolutely trusting in the Lord to get me out there and back safely to my kids. I have to be honest, getting a bear was second on my priority list at this point. I was more worried about getting eaten by one! I know it sounds silly, especially being married to a guide, but I'd never been out living with the bears before. Needless to say, I had tripled my prayer time the week leading up to the trip. I found a few scriptures that helped me a lot, so I just kept repeating them to myself. "I long to dwell in Your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of Your wings." (Psalm 61:4) "The Lord is my light and my salvation - so why should I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1)





Not only was I trusting God for my safety, I also had to trust my guide, aka, my husband. There are a lot of hunting things that he doesn't think twice about, but they sure scare me. Landing on mountaintops that the pilot has never landed on before was high on the list. I have to say that after we landed (which was NOT a big deal for our pilot) I was so thankful to be back on the ground that I almost forgot my anxiety of being out in the middle of nowhere.

I got a little teary eyed when the pilot took off and left us standing there. Lance was all upbeat and eager to get the tent up. I, however, was overcome with a sense of just how ALONE we really were. It was a beautiful place, extremely

cold, and very isolated. This was when my faith in God's care and my husband's ability really kicked in.

You would think that 22 hours of daylight would make sleeping difficult but I zonked right out. Having no time reference, I roused Lance several times throughout the night, thinking it must be time to head out. I ached from the frozen ground and starting the hunt seemed preferable to lying there. Lance finally woke up and started breakfast at 7:30.

We soon had our gear gathered and were headed out. We walked and walked and walked. Then we came to a spot to





glass from. So we sat and sat and sat. We would repeat this pattern several times that day. We would also see the same moose cow and calf throughout the day.

I liked glassing for bears and thought I saw one several times. They all turned out to be rocks, stumps, or figments of my imagination. Lance was always very nice about looking at everything I sighted. I'm pretty sure he just gave me the binoculars and scope to keep me busy while he did the actual glassing.

About 8 pm that night, as we were making our way back to camp, Lance spotted two bears. I don't know why, but my heart started beating a little faster. He told me one of them was a boar, but we needed to get closer to be able to tell his size. He also told me they were a few miles away. "Do you want to go after them or head back to camp? It's your call."

I said, "That's why I'm here. Let's do it." I couldn't imagine getting up and doing this all over again tomorrow. If there was any way I could finish my hunt tonight, I was going to do it.

The stalk was long and it was hard. We hiked down a mountain, then up a mountain, then down again. We came to a river. It wasn't that big, but it scared me. So, I got first class travel accommodations, crossing on Lance's back!

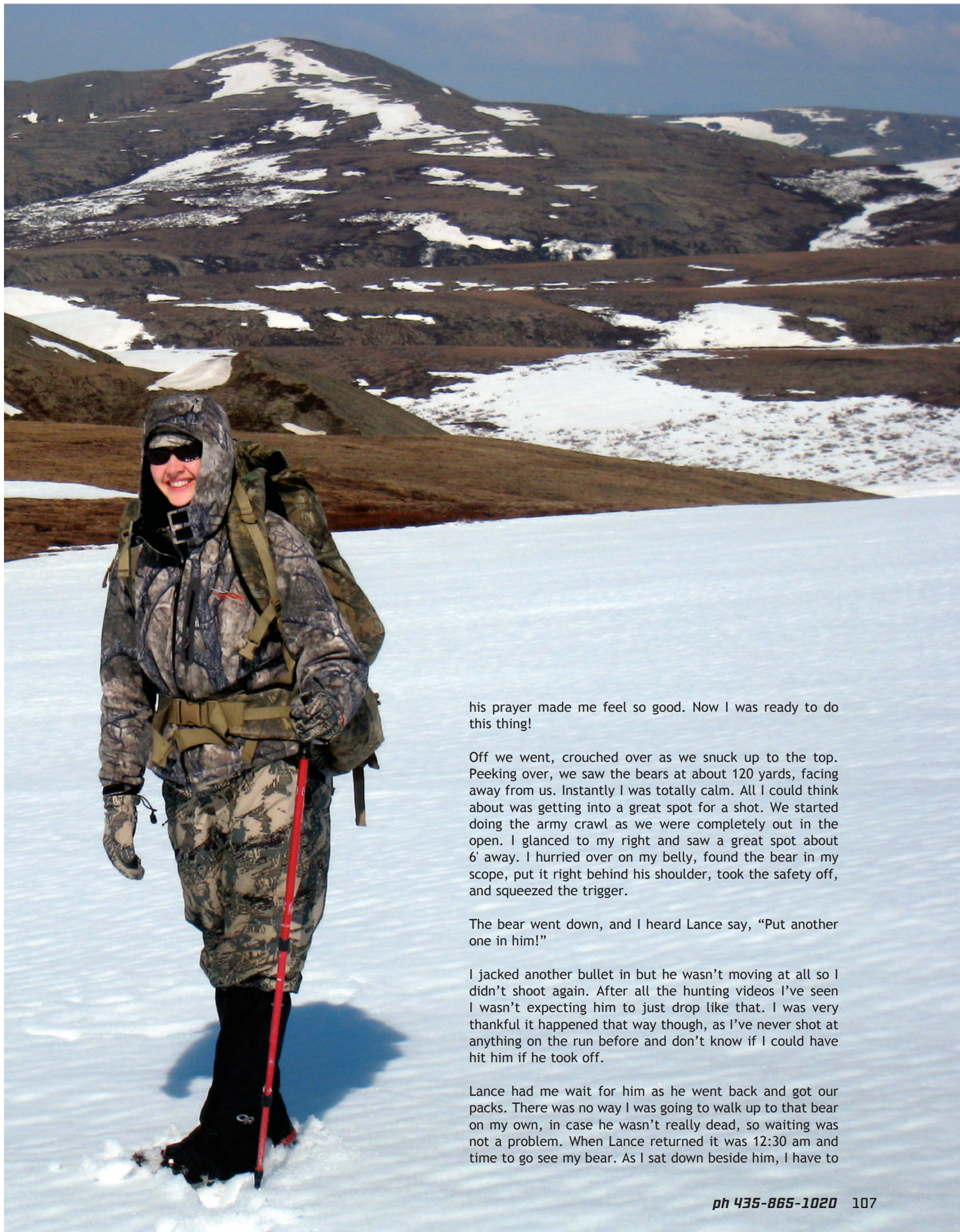
Back up another mountain and down again to another river crossing. Again, I needed another piggyback ride. I was not a happy camper at this point. I was so tired and after post holing through the snow, I now had wet feet as well.

About 3 1/2 hours into the stalk I started feeling very defeated and just wanted to lie down and rest. We both realized we hadn't eaten for 6 hours. Wow, low blood sugar and long hikes are not my best friends! A Snickers bar later, eaten on the run, and I was feeling pretty good and excited as we got closer to the bears.

"Only 1,000 more yards," Lance whispered. We continued walking as we watched the bears traveling across the mountain in front of us. "Only 700 more yards!" I shrugged my shoulders and kept following him. We continued on and again Lance whispered back to me, "Only 500 yards to go." "You can stop telling me the distance. It doesn't mean anything to me," I snapped. I guess anxiety and exhaustion were getting the best of me!

We took off our packs and grabbed our rifles. The bears were over the ridge out of sight. "Be ready. You may have to pull up and shoot," Lance said. I jacked one in. Now I was extremely nervous! I envisioned peeking over and having two bears right in my face. Before we started over the top Lance took my hand and said a quick prayer. He asked God for protection, a steady hand, and a straight shot. Wow,





his prayer made me feel so good. Now I was ready to do this thing!

Off we went, crouched over as we snuck up to the top. Peeking over, we saw the bears at about 120 yards, facing away from us. Instantly I was totally calm. All I could think about was getting into a great spot for a shot. We started doing the army crawl as we were completely out in the open. I glanced to my right and saw a great spot about 6' away. I hurried over on my belly, found the bear in my scope, put it right behind his shoulder, took the safety off, and squeezed the trigger.

The bear went down, and I heard Lance say, "Put another one in him!"

I jacked another bullet in but he wasn't moving at all so I didn't shoot again. After all the hunting videos I've seen I wasn't expecting him to just drop like that. I was very thankful it happened that way though, as I've never shot at anything on the run before and don't know if I could have hit him if he took off.

Lance had me wait for him as he went back and got our packs. There was no way I was going to walk up to that bear on my own, in case he wasn't really dead, so waiting was not a problem. When Lance returned it was 12:30 am and time to go see my bear. As I sat down beside him, I have to





say that I was in complete awe and started to cry. This bear was so big and beautiful! His hair was about four different colors and at least 5" long.

Pictures taken, plus a short video for our kids, and it was time to start skinning. It was really cool watching the process. I was amazed at how fast it went. I guess I was still pretty excited and talked non-stop. I said something to Lance and he just smiled, and then reminded me how I always giggle when all the hunters come back to town and can't stop talking about their hunt. Now I understood why, because I had become one of them!

When the bear was all taken care of it was 3 in the morning. We had our headlamps on, but it still wasn't completely dark. Since it was really late and we were so tired, and the GPS showed that it was 8 miles back to camp, we decided to get as warm and comfy as we could until the sun came back up.

Here's something I never thought I'd say in my life, "I spent the night under a Grizzly bear hide." No, not a nice clean rug by the fire. This was freshly skinned, and we were lying on frozen tundra. I'm sure I smelled pretty ripe, I don't know where I ended and the bear stink began. We didn't get much rest until the sun came up and warmed my bearskin comforter.

If someone had told me a year ago that I'd be sleeping under a bear skin, out in the middle of nowhere and that I'd be happy about it, I definitely would not have believed them. I could see and feel God all around me. He was in the mountains, the rivers, the animals, and the enormous open sky. I felt Him holding me up, keeping me safe, and pushing me on during the hunt. I feel very blessed! I am so thankful for the beautiful bear that God gave me, and that Lance and I were able to spend time together on the mountain doing something that (now) we both enjoy doing.