Photos by David and Lyn Hancock

As I shoved slimy fish down a seal's gullet, wrestled with a vicious bald eagle, rowed a little boat in the eight-foot swells of the Pacific and courageously put up with scores of mosquito bites, I realized how happy I was that I had married

THE IDEAL MAN

By Lyn Hancock

EVERY TIME I stumble back into civilization, energy drained and dirty, after a wilderness expedition with David, I vow that if I ever had the chance again, I'd marry a sedentary 9-to-5 office worker. But it only takes a hot bath and a good night's sleep on a mattress to make me forget the trials and tribulations of wilderness living, and to realize my tremendous luck in being married to "the ideal man".

By choice, my husband, David Hancock, is a wildlife biologist and film maker who feels there is an urgent need for the preservation of wild things — whether they are endangered species like the peregrine falcon and whooping crane, or patches of clean blue sky, or pockets of sweet smelling alpine meadow.

Since he feels that it is equally important to inform the public of the wonders they own as it is to study them, I try to tag along as field observer and photo journalist, believing that togetherness is the basic ingredient for a successful marriage.

I have always loved the outdoors, yet I little expected after marriage to have to dangle precariously over cliffs on a remote sea bird colony in the Pacific; to hack my way with a machete through nearly impenetrable rain-forest jungles; to learn on the instant to land a dinghy in a giant swell on a seaweed-slippery shore; or even to mother broken-winged eagles, sick seals, oiled murres, or orphaned cougars.

In fact, two months before I met Dave in Vancouver, I'd bluntly refused to visit the Bronx Zoo. I told my girl friend:

"Are you crazy? I stopped going to zoos when I was six. Let's try the Empire State instead."

Three months after that trip to New York I was married to a zoologist and within a year I was off on my first wildlife expedition. Where to? To collect puffins for the Bronx Zoo!

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Wherever you find a Hancock, you are bound to find some wildlife. At left, Lyn helps her husband, David, a wildlife biologist, to band a bald eagle.

PTO

Photos by David and Lyn Hancock

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"How would you like to be Mrs. Hancock?" Dave suddenly asked over the engine's roar

Let me tell you how it all started.

I wanted to arrive home in Perth, Western Australia, after my four-year hitchhiking jaunt around the world exactly at 5 PM Christmas Eve. To do that, I had to embark by ship in Vancouver. It was a few days before the boat sailed that Dave walked in to the coffee shop where I was working temporarily as a waitress. I served him coffee.

"What are you doing next weekend?"

"Well, it's my last one in Canada. I'm flying to a Howe Sound island in a friend's float plane," I explained.

"Would you consider going to my folks' farm on Vancouver Island and flying in *my* plane around the island on a bald eagle census?"

I gaped. Was this pure coincidence, or just a novel Canadian "line"?

Although I wondered what I was letting myself in for, I decided to cancel my plans in favor of his.

Next day we drove to Vancouver Island and my defences continued to crumble as my surprises increased. He *did* have a plane and he *did* fly around a maze of islands every two weeks counting and observing bald eagles. As a graduate student at the University of British Columbia, he was studying the decline of this endangered species.

But the plane trip was a nightmare for me. I hardly felt better when Dave commented that he'd never before been up in worse weather.

The constant change of focus between the horizon and the map on my knees, as well as the turbulent air conditions, were doing dreadful things to my queasy stomach. I was dubious about what would happen if I opened my mouth.

And then at a particularly bumpy moment, I could hardly believe my ears to hear above the roar of the engine:

"How would you like to be Mrs. Hancock? You could cancel that boat back to Australia tomorrow."

Hectic is hardly the word to describe the events of the following week. I was introduced to his parents; my boat passage was cancelled on the very day of departure; we enlisted the aid of a sympathetic and romantic bank manager; we went to see the university professors but fortunately they were all absent; we shocked my parents with the following telegram:

"Flying home. Please prepare wedding. Met the ideal man. Love, Lyn."

At the airport, we came to a sudden stop.

"Dave!" I wailed. "You forgot to apply for a passport."

Well, even Ottawa moved fast and we arrived in Australia where events continued to build up momentum—getting married, introducing my mother to frozen parrots in the freezer section of her refrigerator; spending a honeymoon photographing penguins and Arctic terns on Penguin Island, sea lions on Dyers Island, koalas on Phillip Island, lyre birds in Sherbrooke Forest, kangaroos at Taronga Park, gannet and booby birds in Hawaii.

On returning to Vancouver with my "ideal husband" of one month's meeting, I was presented with my first "baby"—a very emaciated and unhappy fur

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"Physical discomforts give way to mental anguish on climbs to the tops of cliffs"

seal named Sam. The experiences in raising Sam to his present mischievous and lovable self immediately initiated me into the life of a zoologist's wife.

Three times a day for a month Dave wrapped himself in two coats and two pairs of gloves, and wedged a snarling, squirming, furry seal between his legs and kept his jaws apart, while I squirted a plastic bag of fishy viscous mess through a thin rubber hose down into his stomach. Many a time the contents of the bag squirted all over me before I perfected the technique.

But this was simple compared to feeding Sam whole fish. I thought I'd made sure that David didn't study fish before I accepted his proposal. But he refrained from telling me everything he studied *ate* fish. All my life I'd detested the sight or feel of fish. I prayed that I'd never have to face the challenge of handling a herring.

For a couple of weeks I conned various acquaintances into helping me shove a herring down Sam's gullet but when I ran out of friends, I knew I'd have to do something to cure my antipathy.

While Dave was away at university I'd gingerly unroll a newspaper package full of herring and force myself to stare at those cold fish eyes.

Next, I would stretch out a hand to touch the fish — first with a knife and then with the tip of my finger. At each touch I would stifle a scream, and instinctively my hand would shrink back.

Trying to clear all thoughts from my mind, I would close my hands on the slippery scaly body and pick it up. It's amazing what women go through for love!

At the time of writing I can deal in tons of fish — as long as they're dead. As yet I've never suffered having to finger a quiveringly live specimen.

When Dave catches cod for his eagles, I pray he won't catch one while I'm standing next to him. One of these days, I'll probably slip into the water as the boat fills up with fish.

I'd always thought of marriage as the thing to do when you ran out of other ideas, but in *this* marriage time always runs out before the ideas.

It's on the summer filming and study expeditions that I sometimes wonder if I did marry the "ideal man". In retrospect, David's insistence on not nursemaiding me is probably the best approach. That way, things *do* get done.

For example, I had never rowed before, let alone in the open Pacific with eight-foot swells pounding surf on the rocky shore. But there was no way out of it, Dave informed me, as we approached my first precipitous, fog-shrouded sea bird island.

"It's dead easy. Just judge the swells correctly, get the bow as close as possible to the rocks, let me jump off with a load of gear, pull back from the shore against the swell, and come in again to collect me for the next load."

Well, with beginner's luck the movements I managed to make caused the correct sequence of events for the first load. In the second load, I teetered in broadside to the shore, scraped sickeningly against the barnacles, got sucked into the surge, and I then found my boat slued around to finish up in a bed of kelp. My husband's language wasn't fit to print and I considered leaving him on the deserted island or else dumping myself overboard to see if he would jump to my rescue. Of course the half hour after such an incident is spent in a happy reconciliation.

It seems the one kind of weather on which you can absolutely rely on trips to west coast islands is fog, constant misty drizzle or rain. I am almost always soaked. But physical discomforts give way to mental anguish on climbs to the tops of cliffs. I remember vividly one ascent.

The packsacks were filled and overfilled, then set before me. Looking at the smaller one, I asked innocently: "Who is going to carry all that?"

"You, of course. You've hitchhiked all through Europe with 40 pounds on your back. That's just the same weight. Let's go."

"I've hitchhiked on a level highway, not a 90-degree cliff."

"Well, you'll get used to it. Heave ho."

Instead of following Dave, who had forged on ahead, I tried to find the easiest route for my own unique climbing method — on hands and knees. Not trusting the slippery shale which crumbled at a touch, I tried crab-walking up a gully. Halfway up, the tripod, which was sticking a couple of feet above my pack, got caught in a crevice and I found myself stuck with hands and feet astride the gully, unable to move up or down.

Frustrated by trying to find alternate tiny crevices for toe and finger holds and always conscious of the thunder of the sea crashing on the

Lyn pumps a couple of quarts of fishy viscous mixture down the throat of a young sea lion, a necessary procedure until he learns to eat on his own.

rocks below me, I did the only thing left. I cried!

Dave returned.

"Now you don't want to get wet by dropping into the water, do you? Would you rather *swim* around the cliff and come up the other side of the island? Come on, follow my instructions and you'll get confidence by doing it yourself."

When we are showing our film Coast Safari, which depicts our adventures on the British Columbia coast, people often wonder how a girl could haul out of the water an adult bald eagle with a seven-foot wing spread. We have often seen bald eagles swimming their prey ashore when they have bitten off a little more than they can fly with. The eagle in the movie was very wet and in danger of sinking.

"Just grab his wing and flip him onto the boat but be sure to grab him before he grabs you with those needle-sharp talons."

As usual, Dave was trying the impossible — steering and adjusting the motor with one hand and checking the trigger of the movie camera with the other. And all the time yelling instructions and warnings to me.

"Pin his talons safely under him. Watch that wing. A blow with that wing butt will put you to sleep. Get hold of his legs so the talons don't get hold of you."

As David filmed and manoeuvred the boat into a good position at the same time, I shot out my hand and gripped the long flight feathers. In one continuous motion, two powerful wings, two slashing talons and a snapping beak burst from the water and landed on the boxes on the boat.

I tried to distract the protesting eagle with my own head movements, then by pulling his wing to keep him off balance until I had both legs and tail feathers firmly gripped in my fingers, his powerful wing butts tucked in at his sides, and his massive yellow beak pointing forward out of my reach. Tension over, we both grinned at each other as the film ran out.

There was a time during the filming of David's eagle studies when I was glad I don't carry a mirror with me. Not that I could have seen my face if I'd wanted to. For several days and several nights I had suffered 75 mosquito bites which covered my face and neck. Later, Dave confessed: "Kissing you resembles taking a dive into a barrel of pickles."

Both of us now work full time in the conservation field. Dave feels that the prime problem facing conservationists today is educating people to the values of our outdoor heritage — specifically pointing out how nature has meaning and value to them. To get more people actively involved in conservation, David, through the media of magazines, lectures, and films, shows how a biologist and his wife go about their studies. In short, adventure is his story. The fun and enjoyment his message.

I just can't get over how easily my life changed when I married "my ideal man". Not only was meeting Dave extraordinary, but every week of the last six years has brought forth a succession of extraordinary events which have welded themselves into the normal pattern of our life together. ◁