



Illustration: Alessandra Olanow

I Married Someone I Met on Safari

Excerpted from an article by Mark Ellwood

It's a giddy experience—meeting someone special while you're on vacation and sharing a brief romance in an exotic place. For some people, though, that holiday affair didn't end when the trip did; instead, it changed their lives.

David and Cynthia Bush had been married for more than 20 years when they met Donald and Nancy Williams, who had just celebrated more than three decades together, on a Micato safari in 2012. The two couples became fast friends, though they lived on opposite coasts.



Nancy: The safari was something my late husband and I had talked about for a while—he was probably more excited about it than I was—but we got there and it was the best trip we'd ever taken. It was for three weeks, across South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, and on the first day, we were paired in our Land Cruiser with David and Cynthia. She and I just intuitively understood each other. We had the same quirky sense of humor, so we could just be ourselves. And we both really liked wine. We stayed in touch after the trip, and probably talked once a year. We always said we were going to get together again and going to travel together.

Before they could plan that second trip, Don Williams and Cynthia Bush both became ill in late 2015. Their conditions worsened, and by early 2016, each was receiving palliative care.

Nancy: Don died eight days before Cynthia. The last time I had talked to her, she was having shoulder and knee issues—nerve pain—but she was such an upbeat personality, so joyous, that she never let on she was badly sick. I sent her a text message five days after Don had passed away, just to let her know. In the back of my mind, I was thinking she'd say, "Get on a plane, come visit us," as it would be great to get out of town, but I didn't hear from her and didn't think much about it. It was in the middle of my husband's memorial service that I got a text from her daughter-in-law, saying, "Sorry to hear about Don's passing—he was probably there to greet Cynthia." I had goose bumps. It turned out I had sent the text message to her at the exact minute she was being transferred to a hospice facility.

Nancy sent her late friend's husband a condolence card. It would prove a life-changing gesture.

David: I belatedly sent her one, and also followed up with an email, about a week and a half later. I said, "If you get a chance, give me a call," and so we talked for a couple of hours and she said, "If you're ever in southern California, look me up."



Nancy: I actually said, "I had a guest room, if you ever want to come visit." I had no agenda, really truly. I just thought it would be nice to have a distraction. It was kind of a relief to talk to somebody that understood exactly the emotions you'd just experienced, a comfort to have someone that had really, truly walked in your shoes. We relived some of our fun stories of Africa, and there was no awkwardness.

On a whim, David booked a two-day trip to visit in the summer of 2016.

David: I am decisive—like they used to say, "I'm not always right, but I'm never in doubt." Nancy insisted on picking me up from the airport, and I have to admit—I remembered she was an attractive lady, but yep, she was gorgeous. We got to her house and sat outside, talking, for probably four or five hours, kind of reliving and rehashing the last months, the things we'd been through. Then I said, "I want to take you out to dinner to your favorite restaurant." After that, we came back here and the rest is history. I had come for a two-day visit then went back home to Atlanta; for the next couple of weeks, we were on the phone daily. The quality of the connection we had just made was something, and we wanted to nurture it further. So I started living at the airport.

Nancy: It was almost an instantaneous connection. From our first afternoon we never looked back. Never in the back of my mind had I any thought of any romantic interest. I truly believed I would be single for the rest of my life, and I was okay with that. I don't think I realized how lonely I was until he came—and then he was gone. It probably threw a lot of people off: "How in the heck could you just lose your spouse and then start a new relationship?" But for me, and for David, we had been grieving for so long, during our spouses' illnesses, moving on was not as difficult.



By the fall of 2016, the pair had decided that David would move, full time, to California by early the next year, but the pair had agreed from the outset that they wouldn't remarry. They quickly changed their minds.

Nancy: We were at dinner, in April, and I said, "I know we're not going to get married, but I think in six months we should have another conversation about it." David said, "I don't have to think about it, I'd marry you tomorrow." We basically planned our wedding in about three weeks.

David: There was no point postponing it, as there are no guarantees in life—if you don't grab happiness while you can, you might miss it. We started to appreciate a few of the logistical challenges of having different last names when we traveled. We went off by ourselves to Hawaii: We went there single and came back married.

Their relationship has proven challenging to some of their close friends and family, especially those close to Nancy.

Nancy: It was tough. My late husband had been married previously, so I have five stepchildren and one daughter together—and she had a very difficult time initially because she was very close to her dad, and it was hard for her to see me moving on. She took me off her radar for a period, and couldn't talk to me. My best friend and her husband, who spent a lot of time with my late husband and me, they're still in a grieving process as well. My neighbors, my friends, my stepchildren, though, they said it was wonderful.



David: I have three biological children, all of whom were very supportive. I think they were glad to see Dad moving on. With my two stepchildren, it's a split decision, and one family hasn't

accepted it. But my 98-year-old mother, who is still alive? She was very supportive through this, but she was thrilled when we decided to get married.

Their new life together has, unsurprisingly, been full of travel—and joy.

David: We start on a trip to Southeast Asia for three weeks tomorrow—flying to Hong Kong, then a cruise to Vietnam, Singapore, and Bangkok and a tour in Cambodia. It's so much fun to have somebody to travel with, and live life's experiences with again. We haven't yet been on another safari, though.

Nancy: We have pictures of [Don and Cynthia] up in the house, and there's not a day that goes by that one doesn't talk about the other—there's no discomfort. We are so happy together and even our dogs love each other.

David: Now, as we look back, we think, Wow, it was kinda quick, but I don't think we've had a moment of regret. The great thing is that we can look at the future now and be optimistic. Life has taught us, with those past tragedies, that we should never take anything for granted. Seize the day. Go forward and enjoy it.