

Oufitter: Kwalata Safaris
Professional Hunter: Jaco Strauss
Hunter: Sonya DeLucia
Location: Block L9, Niassa Special Reserve, Mozambique

If you are looking for the typical story where the main focus is about what kind of rifle and bullet were used, size and age of the Cape buffalo that was shot, and range that the buffalo was shot at, etc., then keep turning these pages. This story isn't for you. This is a story about how I learned that I loved to hunt, especially buffalo.

My first safari experience was actually in 2013 at the Eastern Cape with Blaauwkrantz Safaris. I went with my then boyfriend, now husband, Dave Branham and friends Scott and Mary Jo and their son Scotty. Dave, Scott, Mary Jo, and Scotty, who was celebrating his 15th birthday, were the hunters. I was along as an observer. However, on the first morning out, seeing Kudu cows on the hillside through binoculars with their huge catchers' mitt ears, something stirred inside me. As the days went by and the list of animals to harvest dwindled for each of the hunters my excitement grew. I absolutely couldn't wait to get into the bakkie each day. At one point I chastised our professional hunter (PH), Eardley Rudman, for being late by 2 minutes. Toward the end of this safari, Mary Jo and a young lady in her twenties (who was a kindergarten teacher) hunting with her father, both asked if I was interested in hunting something. I hadn't really thought about it, but when Mary Jo said I could use her rifle and Eardley said we could go test my shooting skills at the range, well, I was all in. I had served in the U.S. Army and had handled different types of weapons but that had been years ago. I guess I did okay because the next thing I knew I was out on the plains, a hunter looking for an impala. Long story short, I shot my impala. Eardley and the tracker made it a very special experience by painting the blood on my face and we blessed and gave thanks to the impala for giving its life that day. This hunting experience led to an almost 12 year long stint of hunting everything from dik dik, crocodile, wildebeests, honey badger, springboks, Ostrich, etc., to my latest harvest, a Cape buffalo. Now, every time we see Eardley at either the Safari Club International (SCI) or Dallas Safari Club (DSC) Conferences, we jokingly tell him that he created a monster and my husband is quick to tell him that our taxidermy bill has doubled thanks to him.

It's one thing to hunt non-dangerous game. I never really considered hunting dangerous game until our safari (again with Scott and Mary Jo) in 2015 with Authentic African Adventures in Limpopo South Africa. This safari was also very special since my husband and I got married at neighboring Shelanti Game Reserve. Scott and Mary Jo were our best man and matron of honor and didn't know that they were going to be attending and participating in a wedding until the day we got married. However, that's another story for a different time. On this safari, both Scott and Dave were hunting Cape buffalo and I was hunting a variety of other game, all non-dangerous. Dave and I were hunting together with PH, Kyne Edwards. At one point we were tracking buffalo and were in some very heavy bush and couldn't see the buffalo less than five yards away. However, we could smell them. Before that I never really understood the concept of animals picking up human scent because of wind swirling. Well, the wind swirled and at that point we discovered that we were in the middle of a herd of about 80 buffalo who began hauling butt in all directions. Let's just say the pucker factor was at an all time high at that point and the buffalo got away! We tracked numerous buffalo for nine days over about 125 miles through the thickest

brush you can imagine and on the narrowest game trails over the hills where we saw Klipspringers. In the end, I was not with Dave when he finally got the buffalo but I heard the shots which was a real pisser. I was actually with the outfitter himself looking for animals on my list because our days were running out. I realized then that I wanted to hunt my own buffalo someday.

We planned to go on safari to Mozambique for my buffalo in 2020 but COVID hit so that trip got cancelled. We planned to go the following year in 2021, however, there was some civil strife in Mozambique and again we cancelled to be on the safe side. We planned to go in 2022, however, long awaited back surgery was finally scheduled in December 2022. After talking with my orthopedic surgeon and getting cleared to hunt, we were finally able to plan another safari for late August/early September in Mozambique in 2024. The preparations began.

This hunt for a Cape buffalo was entirely about me and was planned around my needs, wants, and capabilities both physically and mentally. My husband made this trip possible for me and was by my side throughout the whole process which consisted of over a year of preparation. Neither of us had been to Mozambique. We chose it because we heard of its beauty, vastness, intrigue, and feel of "old Africa". We wanted a tent camp experience and to be in an area that was remote where Cape buffalo were native, ran free with no fences and were among other predators besides humans. We knew there would be challenges like the terrain, malaria, tsetse flies, and weather, but we were excited about this adventure. Since I was hunting dangerous game for the first time, it was important to both of us to choose an outfitter that was trustworthy, experienced, put safety first, and that would treat me, as a female hunter, with respect. Too many times we have gone to SCI or DSC to book hunts and outfitters would basically ignore me if I wasn't with my husband, or the minute he came into the booth would immediately direct their attention to him. Outfitters take note - when this happened in the past, we left the booths with no further consideration to hunt with those outfitters. We did our research on which outfitters hunted in Mozambique, and had an established presence. Those were the booths we visited at DSC in January 2022. I won't go through the process we used to select an outfitter, but we knew after the first visit to the Kwalata Safaris booth that year that we had a connection with them. This was extremely important to us. We wanted to shake hands and talk face-to-face with the PH that we would hunt with in the bush. It was important to us how they ran their operation, whether their PHs were full or part time, experience and background of the PHs and how long they had been with the outfitter, outlook on conservation and same values as us on hunting post-breeding game, contributions to their local communities, and how we felt after talking to them. Of course, it wasn't over once we booked with the outfitter. The communications with our chosen outfitter began long before we ever boarded a plane for Africa (most times we'd book at least a year to 18 months out) and would continue up until we got to camp, crucial for a successful adventure. Kwalata did not disappoint. We had many phone calls, visits at various shows, e-mail and WhatsApp text exchanges which included videos of game harvested that we were interested in hunting, and even videos of wild dogs that I had never seen before that I hoped to see on our upcoming safari.

I have to tell you of a Face Time (FT) exchange I had with Jaco in January 2023. I had back surgery in December 2022 and wasn't able to travel to DSC since I was only one month post-operation but my husband went. While he was there, he called me from Kwalata's booth with

Jaco. Jaco was going to be our PH and wanted to know exactly what characteristics/requirements I was looking for in a Cape buffalo. Of course, we had talked previously of my desire to get a very old, post-breeding bull, with dulled down tips or even a scrum cap. I wanted a full-bodied bull with an attitude and some spunk with some scarring on the face, back, or haunches who had lived a good life. However, as I told him, I did have one very special requirement. He leaned in very close to my husband so he could hear my request via FT. I told him that my mother in Florida was failing in health and needed a cane to walk with sometimes. So, I needed a bull with a penis that was at least 36 inches long so I could have a cane made for her. I then proceeded to ask how in the world he was going to measure the bull's penis before I took a shot to make sure this requirement was met. It was all I could do not to burst out laughing during this exchange. Without the blink of an eye, Jaco told me that he would have his assistant PH, AJ, run out there, get the bull excited, and do the measurement quickly before I made the shot. I knew we had the right PH from that moment on. At our very first meeting back in early 2022 at DSC, Jaco told his wife Lindie that he needed "stress pills" after talking to me. My husband actually brought him chocolate filled with liquor as his "stress pills" before he got on FT with me in early 2023. In all seriousness, the professionalism tempered with humor, respect, and a genuine desire to help me achieve my goal of getting my first Cape buffalo was what helped us decide that Jaco and Kwalata Safaris would be the perfect fit for us.

Throughout the year ahead of my hunt, my husband helped me prepare mentally and physically. We walked and/or hiked an average of five times a week (usually five miles a day) and went to the range religiously no matter how hot or cold. I also started swimming a couple of times a week so I could build up the muscles in my upper back and shoulders. Before this hunt, the biggest caliber rifle I used (and my rifle of choice actually) was my .338 RCM. I needed to be able to handle the recoil and weight of the .375 H&H I would use to shoot my Cape Buffalo, as this was the minimally acceptable caliber for this hunt. After shooting a lot of different bullets and loads to determine what the best combination would be, I decided upon 300 gr Swift A-frame. I shot at various distances, up to 300 yards, while knowing that I would likely shoot my buffalo at no more than 50 yards. I shot with a scope and with a red dot deciding on the red dot. My husband bought life size targets with the kill shots designated for me to practice shooting. While the local public shooting range service officers tried to accommodate our request to bring the target to the range, it was simply too big to safely display and it was a huge distraction to others. So, I ended up dry firing at it in the backyard. No kidding - there I was...walking around my backyard in a residential neighborhood with a rifle on a sling over my shoulder intermittently putting the rifle up on sticks and shooting dummy rounds (cycling the bolt so I had the feel of being able to bring the bolt all the way back). If you stood close enough you could hear the clang of the round hitting my patio floor. I practiced off of the sticks, used the patio pole for support, used the small oak tree for support, used the hot tub and patio dining table, and finally did the booty scoot on the patio floor with the rifle across my legs then getting to a kneeling position. Good thing I have a 6' high block wall fence and my neighbors aren't right on top of me or they might have called the police on me.

One of the best pre-hunt experiences I had was the chance to meet Dr. Kevin Robertson. My husband and I were introduced to Kevin through a long time friend of ours, Edward. Edward had been on several buffalo hunts and had shared his stories and given me some great advice about what to expect. He said Kevin provided him a wealth of information and he thought that

as a first-time buffalo hunter that I would benefit greatly from hearing firsthand about Kevin's experiences personally and professionally. What a treat! Kevin gave me and my husband a personal comprehensive presentation in his home including much of the information in his books. However, the advice from him that really resonated with me, and I treasured most, was to be mentally prepared (to imagine the buffalo I'd like to hunt and to play out the hunt in my mind down to the most minute detail over and over again), hunt well, and enjoy the experience.

Fast forward a little over two months and we began our journey to Mozambique. We got up at zero dark thirty (2:30 a.m.) and headed from our home to the Tucson International Airport (which is a little more than an hour away) in Arizona for our flight that left around 6:00 a.m. We landed in Atlanta and had about a 7 1/2-hour layover to link up with our friend Gary and his son, Nick. We took off for our 15-hour plus flight to Johannesburg, South Africa, highly anticipating the delicious airline food ("hot pocket"-like as hard as hockey puck, hand pies our favorites!). We landed in Johannesburg, and were greeted by our fabulous travel agent representative, Bruce, from Gracy Travel, who escorted us to the adjoining hotel. After a good night sleep and hearty breakfast, we were again escorted back to the airport for our three-hour flight to Pemba, Mozambique. When we landed, our charter plane was already there, so we met the pilot and loaded up. I got the honor of being the "co-pilot" since I had never been in a bush plane. How exciting! The flight was about 2 1/2 hours. I loved looking out the window at the rolling hills and carved out areas for rivers, some of which had no water at all. What struck me most was the lack of infrastructure and pollution. As we got to our destination, we made several flyovers to ensure a large herd of waterbuck was clear of the grass runway where we landed.

Our PHs and their support staff were there to greet us. We went directly to the shooting range to ensure the rifles weren't affected during travel, then headed to the lodge where we were shown our accommodations, a large canvas tent on a concrete slab. We were briefly told not to go out of our tents after dark without flashlights, and to meet at 4:30 a.m. for breakfast the next morning. Inside, there was a nice sized bed, double vanity, closet space to put our things, tub, and a shower, the door to the inside was a slider, wooden with netting, and the windows, also with netting, could be unzipped to let a breeze inside. We were the farthest tent from the main area and there was a small watering hole, maybe three by five feet just outside of the tent between us and the bush.

As tired as I was from the lengthy trip, I didn't sleep well as the excitement of finally being on my hunt was too much. After a long night with little sleep, we headed to the main area where breakfast was served (about 300 yards from our tent). On the way, I noticed a paw print that my flashlight lit up. My husband said he thought it was a leopard print. When we got to the main area I told our PH that my husband saw a paw print and thought it was a leopard. With no surprise at all, he stated that it must be the "camp leopard". Taken a bit aback, I asked what was to keep the "camp leopard" from getting into my canvas tent. He nonchalantly said that "cats don't have opposable claws and he can't unzip the zippers". I instantly reflected on the many cartoons I had seen as a child, with cats who had no problem getting into places by using their razor sharp claws that would come out when needed. So, I shared this rationalization with the PH. He then said that the animals coming to the small watering hole next to our tent were easier prey to get to so not to worry about it. I was so relieved....NOT!

We began our routine. Most of our days started at 4:30 a.m. with breakfast, then off to hunt. We would either come back to camp for lunch, or have lunch in the bush depending on how the day was going. In either situation a nap was usually in store for me as I am not a morning person at all. I had asked the PH if he could tell the buffalo to just be ready at 10:00 a.m. but he said that wouldn't work. After our mid-day break, we would usually get back on tracks we had found in the morning or seek out new tracks. We were mainly looking for tracks for one, two, or three buffalo at the most as my goal was to get the oldest, ugliest, post-breeding buffalo I could find and Jaco said this type of buffalo would either be by himself or with one or two buddies. We would then track until we couldn't see anymore and head back to camp to get cleaned up, have dinner, then do it all again the next day.

A few things that I didn't expect were the heat (it was in the low to mid 90s), the tsetse flies, and the changes in the terrain. Though we are from Arizona and were used to the heat, the humidity in Mozambique made it feel hotter. That made walking six to ten miles a day or riding in it harder than I had trained for. While we were warned about the tsetse flies, we had never "experienced" them before. Pesky little suckers. In the mornings, on the way out of camp, the tracker and water carrier would look for elephant dung, and it would either be hung in a pot from the back of the bakkie and lit on fire to smolder as we were riding in the bakkie or the water carrier would actually put it on a stick like a marshmallow ready to be roasted and light it on fire and walk behind us to keep the little suckers at bay. In addition, some of the terrain we drove through either had been burned or was burning as part of controlling the undergrowth. The terrain was incredibly challenging to walk on. In some instances, there was thick jess, huge elephant potholes covered by jess that had been pushed down (so if you took a step on what you thought was solid ground you might actually fall a foot into an elephant track), rocky inclines, charred bushes and stumps, etc. Other things that made this trip unique and memorable, were the incredible sunsets, the remoteness of our location (which gave me a whole new appreciation for the contestants on the TV shows *Naked and Afraid*, *Survivor*, or *Alone*), the friendliness of the people in the village we passed through, the beauty of the night sky without light pollution, and the sounds of the birds and wildlife in the bush.

Every day in the bush was different. On day one we saw a random guy riding on a bicycle. Then just down the road we saw lion tracks. When I asked where the guy came from and why he was riding a bicycle in the bush where there were lions, the PH said he was probably coming to or from one of the local villages and that he was riding during the day because lions were less likely to be awake during the day. That very first day, as it hit me that I was the hunter of the dangerous Cape Buffalo, and not the "observer" as with my husband on his buffalo hunt, I gained much more perspective and hypersensitivity. The sights, smells, and sounds of everything were magnified. The smell of the burning elephant dung, and the char from the burning trees, bushes, and grass. The sight of the burning terrain was like a scene out of the *Wizard of Oz* with the flying monkeys. But then there were random patches of green from plants and grass that almost looked fake. The grandeur of baobab and candelabra trees was breathtaking. Weevil nests in trees by the hundreds were a sight to behold. As I was tracking my buffalo through this place it was like a light switch went off within me. I was now the hunter and every sense was enhanced and magnified...stepping on dry leaves, clearing my throat, my stomach growling, needing to pee. Jaco said not only did I need to watch out for Black Mambas when I went behind the bushes to pee but for grey forest snakes too....I'm still not sure if the latter was true! A small herd of

elephants we saw that day had me thrilled yet slightly terrified since there was a baby and mama within the herd and I'd always heard how protective mama elephants could be. We gave the elephants wide berth and went on our way. We did come upon a dagga boy that afternoon that seemed to have something wrong with a front leg (maybe a snare?). He was losing body mass so we passed. We then picked back up on tracks from our morning outing but ran out of daylight and headed back to camp. On the way back from this 12-hour day, we were blessed with the most beautiful sunset I have ever seen; hues of red and orange and purple that were indescribable. A bonus on this day was that my husband, Dave, got the Red Duiker that was on his wish list.

Day two started with us on the tracks of two dagga boys through the thick jess when all of the sudden I felt something sting the crap out of me on my waist. I lifted up my shirt and sure enough there was a fire ant. Like Texas, everything in Africa is bigger and this sucker was huge. Well, where there is one fire ant there is likely more. At that point I politely asked the PH, tracker, and water carrier to face the other way and dropped my drawers in the middle of the bush so my husband could examine me to see if there were more and pick them off. Thankfully I came out with only one bite. I pulled my pants back up and off we went to continue our tracking. Unfortunately, the wind didn't cooperate with us and we didn't want to push the bulls further so we backed off. The remainder of the day was filled with seeing tracks for small bachelor herds, which we did not pursue, and following the tracks of what appeared to be a huge dagga boy that seemed to have joined a herd so we lost him and daylight and headed back to camp. One memorable experience for me on this day was driving through one of the local villages. Everyone wore bright colored clothing and the children ran alongside of the bakkie and cheered and said hello. They lived in simple huts put together with grass and mud. Many of the women looked busy sewing, washing clothes, gardening, etc. I saw one woman who had a bandana on her head and the design was an American flag. There were dogs and chickens running around. What struck me was that there were no physical barriers to keep out wildlife (buffalo, elephants, lions, leopards, crocodiles). The fact that these people were so vulnerable with really no means of protection was really sobering. The only means of transportation was walking or riding a bicycle/motorbike (of which the latter seemed scarce). We spent 12 plus hours in the bush on this day and came to within about 4 1/2 miles from the Tanzanian border.

Day three was another long day. In the morning, we got on the tracks of two dagga boys but the wind switched and we decided not to push them and to resume in the afternoon. We stopped for a picnic lunch in the bush and I had a very nice nap in the hammock. We got back on the same tracks from the morning and ran out of daylight. The song "Here We Go Round in Circles" kept coming to mind. Apparently these two buffalo didn't get the message that they were supposed to lay down during the day. The tracker said it looked like they were drunk. They didn't lay down long and kept circling from grass patch to patch like they weren't from around those parts. Today I starting riding in the cab of the bakkie with the PH instead of on top with Dave. I really didn't want to as I love having the wind in my face and the view from the top is so much better but I had been suffering with nerve pain in my leg for quite some time and it won this time. Let me just say this, you learn a lot about the country you're in e.g. vegetation, animals, economy, culture, and your PH when you're in the cab with him all day. Jaco was very family oriented and passionate about what he does. He was clearly all about his clients. He shared information about growing up, his family, his time at the university and was interested in my life. How

refreshing! On the way back to camp that evening, we came across some buffalo in the headlights. I suggested we ram them and make road kill out of them. We had a good laugh over that one. To conclude this day, we had a lovely meal back at camp, cleaned up, then settled down in the tent. About half-way through the night, I heard a weird sound and woke my husband up. My mind immediately went to thoughts of the "camp leopard" trying to get into the tent. Another possibility was the crocodiles in the water that bordered the camp that were down a steep embankment. I had had several dreams about them plotting on how to get up the embankment and into my tent to drag me into the water. To shut me up (or calm my fears?), my poor husband got the flashlight and quietly went out the tent's front door to investigate where the noise was coming from. He came back in after a few minutes laughing. Evidently, a waterbuck decided to use one of our tent poles as a scratching post for his butt. I went back to sleep soundly.

The morning of day four brought us tracking a small group of about nine buffalo that we came upon, however, the bulls were too young. We came upon another small herd in the jess about 150 yards from that herd but they caught our scent and ran. We then found the track of a solo good-sized bull with the shape of one of hooves like an elf boot that we followed to a waterhole and lost. Right after that we were checking other watering holes and happened to come across a very large Boehme zebra stallion. This was another animal on my husband's list. He made a great shot with his double rifle and down the zebra went. Jaco starting calling my husband Quigley at that point since he could make long accurate shots like the sharpshooter in that movie. We took the zebra back to camp to the skinning shed, had lunch and a nap, then went back out in the bush in the afternoon. We found the tracks of two dagga boys in the jess who were circling again in the green patches of grass in the jess. We tracked them for a couple of hours and heard them ahead of us in the brush. Jaco and our tracker thought they were headed to an open area that they were both familiar with, however, since it was late in the day, we wouldn't catch them before dark so we headed back to the camp.

Day five brought more of the same. In the morning, we tracked a small herd of about five bulls; two looked like they were a nice size so we proceeded. We caught up to them but Jaco determined there were two 7-year olds, one 9-year old, and two 11-to-12 year olds. Afterward we found the track of what appeared to be an older dagga boy and decided we would come back to it after lunch. We then got on the tracks of a nice Chobe bushbuck (which was on my list), however, a baboon came crashing down the tree near us and busted us out. If I had been quicker, that baboon would have made it on my list. I guess it was his lucky day. We had lunch at the site of a beautiful pan. Not much animal activity there except a few warthogs milling about but there was a beautiful Fisher eagle perched in the tree who was looking for lunch. After lunch we went back to start tracking the solo bull. On the way a herd of about 40 sable stampeded right across the road in front of us in the truck. It was so breathtaking to see them running wild and free. We got back on the tracks of the solo bull and came to a small ditch that was filled with leaves, brush, and fallen trees that we had to pass through. We felt the bull was close so we were trying to be very quiet. All of the sudden a huge wart hog, maybe Pumba's grandpa, bolted out of some brush and was trying to make his way up and over a steep embankment. At first it scared the bejesus out of me then I started cracking up laughing because he got stuck and all you could see was his hind legs spinning like they were in a hamster wheel. He finally got enough traction and over the top he went. Unfortunately, we lost the tracks of what appeared to be

another "drunk" buffalo just going around and around in circles. We ran out of daylight and headed back to camp.

So on Day 6, we decided it was going to be Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Saturday and that all bulls mattered. Previously, we had been mainly looking for tracks of one, two, or three dagga boys at the most and following them. On occasion we had come upon small herds and checked them out to see if there happened to be an old bull amongst them. Today we decided that we may as well look at tracks with more bulls in the hopes that our odds of finding my dagga boy would increase. We found a set of tracks for five or six bulls and set off after them. While after them we came upon three nice looking bulls that were coming towards us. As they neared, Jaco said the third bull was about 13-years old and was a proper bull to take. At the onset of the safari, we had discussed my desire to get the oldest, ugliest, post-breeding bull I could find, however, the days left on my hunt were dwindling, and I still had to harvest a Niassa wildebeest. Furthermore, we hadn't been able to get the suni or Sharps grysbok for my husband, nor set out any bait for the hyena we were after. Jaco indicated it would be a mistake not to take this bull (though he emphasized that this was solely my decision and we would proceed however I wanted to) and all things considered I said "okay". He had put the sticks up previously and I was waiting for him to tell me it was okay to get on the sticks when the first bull saw us and started to run with the two others behind him. It all happened so fast that I was left with my mouth hanging open wondering what happened. As we started to just pick up the sticks and move on, I asked what happened. Jaco said that he was waiting for me to make up my mind. I said that I had made up my mind and when I said "okay" I meant I wanted to take the bull. He said it was alright but I was so embarrassed and just held my head down as I walked behind him so we could continue looking for the tracks we originally started with. After awhile we came upon the group we were after but all of the bulls looked too young. As we started to leave there was an old dagga boy about 100 yards off to the right of them laying down. Jaco couldn't see the horns as the bull was turned away from us. We waited for awhile to see if he would get up but he didn't. Jaco told me was going to put up the sticks and that I should position my rifle on it so I did. He said he was going to grunt at the bull to see if he would get up. If the bull got up and was a proper bull then I was to shoot. He grunted and the bull didn't get up. He grunted again and the bull got up and turned around. Jaco told me to shoot where the white patch was. I didn't see a white patch. He again said to shoot at the white patch on the shoulder. I still didn't see one. Well, by that time the bull swapped ends and ran. Another head hanger. It was a long silent walk back to the bakkie. At that point, my husband pulled the two of us together and walked us back through the miscommunications that happened making a special note of the second one with Jaco's description of where he wanted me to shoot. My year long preparation of shot placement included terms like a third of the way up and on the shoulder, in the crease behind the shoulder, on the tip of the shoulder, etc. When Jaco said to shoot at the white patch (which was actually a grayish white from hair loss on the bull) I froze. In hindsight I should have followed my gut instinct and based on the way the bull was turned taken the shot I had practiced many times over. Well, hindsight was 20/20 and there was no going back. However, we discussed terms and how we would handle the situation the next time and I felt good about our mutual understanding of each other.

We had lunch out by another pan and then headed back to see if we could find the three bulls we lost earlier. With a bit of luck, and a lot of skill from our tracker, Joe, we found the three bulls

resting in the jess. There was actually no shot on the one I wanted as he was laying down and was quartering away from us. The wait was on. We must have waited almost an hour for them to move and nothing happened. Jaco decided nothing ventured, nothing gained so we moved forward a little and they spooked and moved. The chase was on through the jess. We got to within shooting range but I wasn't able to get up on the sticks quick enough and they bolted. We were headed back to the bakkie when all of the sudden Joe came running from the left side and said to look out to our right. The bulls had stopped and they were grazing. Jaco and I moved in quietly and I got set up on the sticks at about 74 yards away. My bull was the third in line as they were walking by. As soon as he got into my window I fired. The instruction to fire hadn't even made it out of Jaco's mouth. He asked me if I felt that the shot was a good hit. I said yes. We heard heavy breathing and gurgling sounds coming from the bull. The bull ran about forty yards and down he went. As we were moving towards the bull I heard the death bellow. I smiled big and asked if that's what I thought it was. My husband and Jaco said yes. Jaco moved me forward and we waited and the bull bellowed again. At that point, he had me move forward a little more and shoot the bull between the legs in the chest where it was laying down with an insurance shot. My bull was down, and finished. Time seemed to halt as I was momentarily overwhelmed. My heart was beating out of my chest from the adrenaline. I was exhilarated, but at the same time I sad for this animal that had given its life for me. We had a moment of silence as I expressed my gratefulness to this animal and honored it. I was humbled by its massive body size, scarred face, and polished horns that had worn down tips. While this wasn't the buffalo I had planned to get, it was what Mozambique gave me and I was extremely thankful. It was the hunt I was destined to have with the people and in the place that I was meant to have it. It changed my life just as Kevin had told me it would and I can now call myself a Cape buffalo hunter.

This hunt was focused on getting my buffalo. Though we were not able to check all of the animals off of our lists, we were ecstatic with our hunt, the outfitter, PH, tracker, water carrier, and camp staff. I would like to thank all of the aforementioned people for making this hunt one I will never forget. In addition, special thanks go to our friends Gary and Edward for their encouragement that I could be successful at my goal to get a buffalo; to our friends Chris and Eddie for making my year long plus sessions at Eddie's range a reality; and most of all to my husband, Dave, for his unwavering long-term support in all of my hunting adventures and for being my steadfast champion and biggest cheerleader for this effort. I couldn't have done it without him. This experience reinforced that "the hunt" was more than just killing an animal. It was the sounds, sights, smells, feel, and taste of the bush. It was the camaraderie and friendships formed during this adventure. It was the thrill of the chase and the physical and mental challenges that came with it. It was the exhilaration I felt when I pulled the trigger and the relief I felt when I knew the buffalo was down for the count. Lastly, it was the certainty I felt before returning home that this would not be my last Cape buffalo hunt!