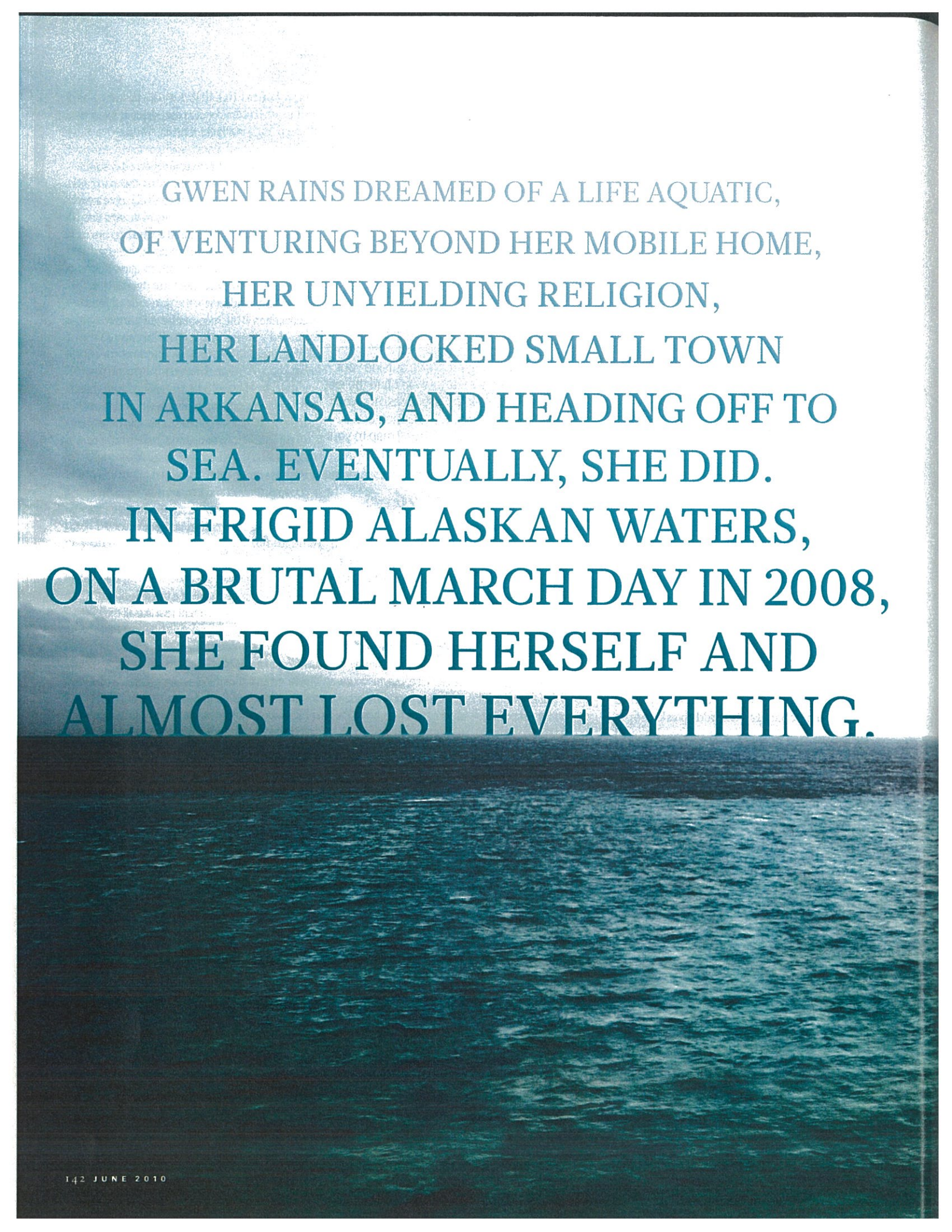


Wild Blue

By Kalee Thompson



GWEN RAINS DREAMED OF A LIFE AQUATIC,
OF VENTURING BEYOND HER MOBILE HOME,
HER UNYIELDING RELIGION,
HER LANDLOCKED SMALL TOWN
IN ARKANSAS, AND HEADING OFF TO
SEA. EVENTUALLY, SHE DID.
IN FRIGID ALASKAN WATERS,
ON A BRUTAL MARCH DAY IN 2008,
SHE FOUND HERSELF AND
ALMOST LOST EVERYTHING.

IT WAS JUST BEFORE 2:30 A.M. ON MARCH 23, 2008, WHEN THE WALL PHONE RANG IN GWEN RAINS'S TINY CABIN.

SHE WAS ONBOARD THE *ALASKA RANGER*, a 184-foot fishing trawler in the Bering Sea, bundled up in thermal underwear and tucked into a sleeping bag on a narrow bunk bed.

From the top bunk, Gwen's cabinmate, Jay Vallee, picked up. "Hello? Hello?" There was no one there. He put down the receiver, and the phone immediately rang again. "Hello?" Still no answer.

At 38, Gwen was tall and sturdy, with huge blue eyes and dirty-blond hair that fell in soft waves below her shoulders. Along with Vallee, 25, she was a fisheries observer—a biologist hired to work on commercial boats and gather the fish-catch numbers used to keep ocean populations sustainable. Vallee had been on the ship for three weeks, Gwen just four days. A middle-of-the-night phone call wasn't particularly unusual—Gwen imagined it was probably the first mate summoning them to the wheelhouse for a routine question.

Or maybe it's a safety drill, she thought as she pulled herself out of bed, slid into the knee-high rubber boots she always wore on the ship, and headed up one level to the wheelhouse.

As Gwen approached the top deck, the general alarm, a high-pitched ringing, sounded throughout the ship. Outside, the temperature was 15°F, and the wind whipped across the ice-covered deck at nearly 40 miles per hour. The ship's second-in-command, David Silveira, stood at the top of the staircase. During two previous seasons, Gwen had worked with the 50-year-old former tuna fisherman on another boat, the *Alaska Pioneer*, where they spent hours together in

the wheelhouse, chatting and watching porpoises and whales. Silveira had decades of experience; captaining the *Pioneer* was his normal gig, and he was known for his calm demeanor. But now his face was awash with fear. Gwen knew that something was terribly wrong.

Silveira turned to Gwen. "This is bad," he said. "This is really, really bad."

"You're not running a drill?" Gwen asked.

"No. The ship is flooding."

EVEN AS A KID GROWING UP IN LAND-locked Marshall, Arkansas, Gwen was crazy about fish. Her favorite TV shows were documentaries about whales, and she loved nothing more than a Saturday out on a lake, angling for catfish with her grandfather in his flat-bottomed skiff. One of Gwen's favorite childhood memories is from that boat: "Grandpa took me fishing, and it started thundering. But that's when we really started catching fish. So he said, 'If you

promise not to tell your mom and grandma I kept you out on the boat in the storm, we'll stay and fish.' And I never did."

When Gwen was 13, she saved up to buy a 55-gallon aquarium, then filled it with tetras, guppies, and angelfish. Science was her best subject, and she dreamed of being a research biologist, but as a Jehovah's Witness, she'd grown up hearing the church preach against the corrupting influences of college. She dropped out of high school after her sophomore year, settled for a GED, got married at 18, and had her first child a couple of years later.

By the time she was 29, Gwen was living in Texas, married to an electrician, and chasing after four kids under the age of 8. The marriage floundered. Gwen put down \$3,000 cash for a mobile home back in Marshall and moved in with the kids and several aquariums. She had left the Jehovah's Witnesses a few years earlier, and by the time the divorce papers arrived in the mail, she was already enrolled in college.



"I can still take myself back to my favorite moments out at sea," says Gwen, here working as a fisheries observer in 2007.

Some months she could barely come up with the gas money to drive the 140 miles round-trip to the University of Central Arkansas, a trip she made four or five days a week. She worked odd jobs to pay for basics like groceries. "My house got pretty dirty because I'd ignore it to get school-work done," Gwen says. "So then I'd stay up all night to catch up on my housework. The kids got told 'no' more than 'yes,' because I was a starving college student." But in 2005, when Gwen walked across the stage to pick up her diploma, she could hear her children screaming: "Go, Mom! Go!" Later her daughter, Jordan, asked her what *cum laude* meant. Gwen was crying as she answered: "It means your mama did really good."

A year after she earned her biology degree, Gwen saw a posting for the Alaska fisheries job on monster.com. "The drawback was, I had to be away from home for months at a time," she says. But the job seemed the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, to be out on the ocean, conducting actual biology fieldwork. And it was decent money: \$130 a day to start, with a \$20-a-day raise each time she completed 90 days of work. Gwen's ex-husband agreed to take the kids, although not without berating her, in front of them, for being selfish.

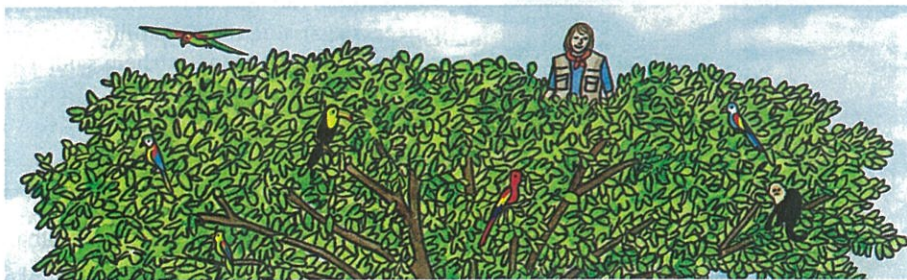
Gwen was torn but decided to go—her dream was finally within reach. She'd travel to Alaska for three months at a time, working alongside a crew of fishermen, many of them recent immigrants, roughnecks, and

ex-cons, during the summer and winter fishing seasons. After each stint, she'd present her data to the National Marine Fisheries Service in Seattle, then take a few months off before heading north again.

"MAYDAY. MAYDAY. MAYDAY. THIS IS the *Alaska Ranger*." Gwen stood in the wheelhouse listening in as Silveira made the first call to the coast guard. "We are a factory trawler," he reported. "We're 184 feet in length, black hull, white trim." It was 2:46 A.M.; the ship was about 140 miles west of the nearest fishing port, Dutch Harbor, in the Aleutian Islands, and 920 miles west of Kodiak, Alaska, where the coast guard picked up the call.

Over her fleece jacket, fleece pants, long johns, and wool socks, Gwen had already pulled on her bright red neoprene survival suit, designed to keep her dry even if she ended up submerged. She looked around at the crew members. A handful wore only shorts and T-shirts, and some were barefoot as they pulled on their survival suits.

The *Ranger* was a 35-year-old trawler. Each day the crew dropped a massive net into the ocean, dragged it along the bottom until it was full of fish, pulled it back up, and then beheaded, gutted, and froze the fish (most often yellowfin sole, Pacific Ocean perch, and Atka mackerel) onboard. Every time she boarded a new boat, Gwen was required to fill out a standardized safety checklist, provided by the National ▶



{Big Experience #2}
**SEEING
 THE WORLD
 FROM THE
 TOP OF
 A 16-STORY
 TREE**

"It's like climbing to outer space. There are millions of undiscovered creatures in every nook and cranny. Some are two feet long, some smaller than a raindrop. At 165 feet up, I'm the first to see rain on the horizon. There are 1,000 shades of green, and I usually can't see the forest floor. Sometimes I stay overnight, and it's too much fun to sleep. The tree's

strong architecture is very protecting. The swaying lulls me like I'm a baby. At night the insects chew and chirp—it's a symphony by Mother Nature, Times Square in the forest."

—
Tropical rainforest canopy biologist and conservationist Margaret D. Lowman, PhD, who began taking her two children up with her into the treetops when they were 4 and 6 years old

Ladies First

Thirty-four who dared to push the envelope.



600 B.C. TO 200 B.C. Tribes of statuesque women (and men) roam the Eurasian steppes. The fearsome Amazons of myth? Not exactly. But archeological evidence suggests that among these nomads, the women were the warriors.



CIRCA 39 Dynamic sister duo Trung Trac and Trung Nhi amass a Vietnamese army in a revolt against Chinese rule. For four years, they lead the rebellion.



CIRCA 395 Fabiola, a Roman aristocrat whose divorce and subsequent remarriage were condemned by Christian society, founds a hospital for the poor and other outcasts of her city. It's likely one of the first hospitals in the Western world.



CIRCA 1001 Murasaki Shikibu begins writing *The Tale of Genji*, an epic portrait of court life (twice as long as *War and Peace*), considered by many to be the greatest masterpiece of Japanese literature and possibly the world's first novel.



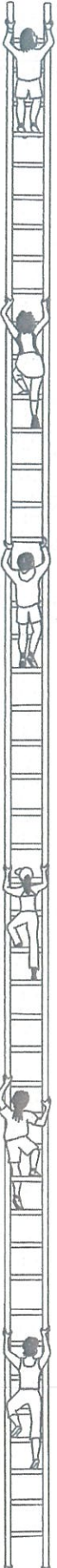
1429 Peasant girl Joan of Arc commands the French army in a series of victorious battles to liberate her homeland from the English; she is burned at the stake for her trouble.



CIRCA 1579 Grace O'Malley, a swashbuckling Irish pirate known for raiding ships, fights off an English government expedition sent to stop her.



CIRCA 1613 In her graphically violent painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, Italian artist Artemisia Gentileschi slays the ideal of submissive womanhood: Her heroine is fierce, powerful, and ruthless.





Clockwise from top: The *Alaska Ranger* in 2006; on board the *Munro*, two coast guard members assist a survivor from the *Ranger*; the coast guard airlifted 21 *Ranger* crew members from the freezing water.

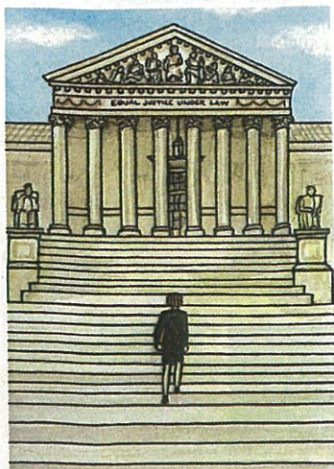


Marine Fisheries Service, to ensure that the ship had the required survival equipment and was safe enough for the observers to sail on. She had walked the *Ranger* with her checklist in hand and noted that its fire extinguishers were in poor condition, and that some of the watertight doors designed to stop flooding from one compartment to the next did not seal properly. "It was by far the worst boat I'd ever set foot on," Gwen remembers. Still, none of the problems she noticed were what her form called "no go" items—missing safety equipment that would prevent a government employee like her from heading out to sea.

Now Gwen listened in as Silveira reported the *Alaska Ranger's* trouble to the coast guard station in Kodiak. (The ship's 65-year-old captain, Eric Peter Jacobsen, consulted with the ship's engineers nearby, but as the officer on duty, Silveira handled the initial rescue calls.) The flooding, Silveira told the coast guard, had started in the rudder room—one of the engineers guessed that a rudder had fallen out from the bottom of the boat, creating a gaping hole in the ship's hull—and was spreading fast. The crew saw the water rising and gave up any attempt to control it with pumps; they shut the watertight doors and fled to the top deck. All 47 people onboard were gathered there, zipped into their survival suits and huddling together to stay warm.

By now they all knew the horrid truth: The nearest ship was hours away. Less than 50 minutes after the first alarm, waves were already cresting over the stern, which was riding low in the water. Gwen heard the engineers discussing the possibility of being towed in. Too late, one of them said. The boat was sinking fast.

The engines [CONTINUED ON PAGE 186]



{ Big Experience #3 }
**ARGUING
 YOUR FIRST
 CASE BEFORE
 THE SUPREME
 COURT**

"The case centered on whether an immigrant who had fled persecution in his home country could remain in the United States

while his immigration status was decided. After I took my place at the podium, I could hear the court fill with spectators behind me. My heart started to beat faster, but I tried not to turn around. When the justices walked in, they sat just five feet away. I felt starstruck, but they smiled at everyone. I read one sentence from my notes, but after that I found myself just talking to them as if they were interested colleagues. They interrupted with rapid-fire questions, but it actually felt like the ten of us were figuring out the answer to

a puzzle. I kept telling myself that if I could convince the justices I was right, I could potentially save a man's life. I thought of my late grandfather, a lawyer in the Soviet Union who came to the United States to provide opportunities for his children. It would have been such a thrill for him to be there. But his spirit was with me."

—
Lindsay C. Harrison, an associate at Jenner & Block in Washington, D.C., who successfully argued the pro bono case *Nken v. Holder* before the court when she was just 30



Tomes of the Brave

Does captaining a ship through the perfect storm count as an adventure? We'd say so. But what about taking up dating in late middle age? Here, some books in which authors expose their bravest acts of derring-do, far, far away—and at home, too. **By Sara Nelson**

1 You might think Linda Greenlaw, captain of the *Andrea Gail's* sister ship in *The Perfect Storm*, wrote her most harrowing story in *The Hungry Ocean*. But in fact her **Lobster Chronicles** (Hyperion), about taking a break from captaining a swordfish boat to become a lobsterman on a tiny island, is an even fiercer tale of nerve and pluck.

2 So, okay, John Charles Gilkey was a criminal—he stole rare books—but in Allison Hoover Bartlett's **The Man Who Loved Books Too Much** (Riverhead), he becomes a madcap rogue who will stop at nothing to feed his obsession.

3 Journalist Peter Hessler didn't leave China when his Peace Corps stint was up.

Instead he settled in and wrote **Oracle Bones** (Harper Perennial), about traveling between the present and China's ancient past.

4 **A Round-Heeled Woman** (Villard) is a courageous, frank, and hilarious chronicle by Jane Juska, a semiretired English teacher who entered the dating world through a personal ad—at age 66.

5 **The Lost City of Z** (Vintage) chronicles what happens when an unlikely adventurer—urbane, allergic *New Yorker* staff writer David Grann—goes in search of a legendary explorer and the Amazon civilization from which he never returned.

6 In **Three Wishes** (Little, Brown), Carey Goldberg,

Beth Jones, and Pamela Ferdinand tell the story of their adventures in family planning. (Hint: They involved sharing information—and more.)

7 Thirty-year-old Kira Salak kayaked alone for 600 miles on the Niger River of Mali to Timbuktu—and loved it, according to her 2004 chronicle **The Cruellest Journey** (National Geographic).

8 **Extreme Fear** (MacSci), by Jeff Wise, is both a journalistic account of some brave encounters (a woman coming face-to-face with a cougar in a canyon, for example) and a smart scientific analysis of what happens in the brain when we experience fear—and how we can turn that fear into an advantage.



1777 Teenager Sybil Ludington rides all night long through a storm to alert the 400 men in her father's militia that the redcoats are coming. She's called the female Paul Revere—but Paul rode with two of his buddies. And he was captured by the British.



1805 Sacagawea joins Lewis and Clark as their expedition's interpreter, traveling thousands of miles across the Rockies with her newborn babe strapped to her back. Who says life ends when you have kids?



1814 As the British torch Washington, D.C., First Lady Dolley Madison remains in the White House long enough to rescue historic valuables—running out moments before the soldiers charge in.



1862 Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, just 19 and dressed as a man, enlists in the Union Army. In a letter home, she assures: "I don't fear the rebel bullets nor I don't fear the cannon."



1867 Ida Lewis rescues three drowning men from wind-whipped swells in Newport Harbor. Then she rows back to save their sheep. Ida later becomes the country's first female lighthouse keeper.



1872 Victoria Claflin Woodhull becomes the first woman to run for president. A colorful candidate, she advocates for free love.



1906 Madam C.J. Walker hawks shampoos and serums door-to-door. The orphaned daughter of former slaves, she becomes one of America's wealthiest businesswomen.



1912 Astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt discovers the period-luminosity relationship (later used to calculate the distances between Earth and the stars).