



THE COSTCO CONNECTION

July/August 2015 • Volume 19 • Number 4

A lifestyle magazine
for Costco members

Grylls gone wild

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Bear essentials

By Mark Cardwell

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Survivalist
Bear Grylls
writes his
first novel

EDWARD MICHAEL GRYLLS is no stranger to discomfort. But the British adventurer and television celebrity looked decidedly sheepish when his big sister, Lara (who also nicknamed him “Bear” when he was an infant), recently shared with Piers Morgan—host of chat show *Life Stories*—as well as millions of Britons who watch the show, that her brother has always dreamed of playing James Bond on the big screen. “It would be great,” answered Grylls, grinning shyly. “But it’s more of a dream than a reality.”

Still, it’s an intriguing notion: a real-life action hero portraying a fictional one. Call it life imitating art, but now Grylls, who has earned international fame and fortune as an extreme wilderness survivor who will eat or drink almost anything (elephant dung juice, anyone?), has taken his career in a new direction. Having written more than a dozen non-fiction tomes, how-to books and adventure novels for kids over the past decade, Grylls has just published *Ghost Flight*, his first adventure novel for adults.

“It’s the first in a series covering the adventures and exploits of Will Jaeger, who is—like the real-life me—[a] former SAS [Special Air Service] and Royal Marines Commando,” Grylls tells *The Connection* in an email interview, while abroad filming episodes for several upcoming television programmes in the United Kingdom, the United

States and China. “Unlike me (hopefully), he’s a very tortured soul who’s lost his wife and young son to a mystery abduction.”

Finding out who took them and why is, according to Grylls, a central plot line that will run throughout the series, which is planned as a trilogy. “Jaeger is plagued by guilt, because he could do nothing to save them,” Grylls says.

Set mostly in the fictional Mountains of the Gods in the Amazon jungle (the real mountains of that name are in the Himalayas, where Grylls first garnered fame, keep reading), *Ghost Flight* revolves around a Jaeger-led expedition of former elite warriors, including an ice-cool Russian operator named Irina Narov. The plot involves a mystery World War II warplane that harbours a secret that, if discovered, could wreak havoc on the world as we know it. The book’s publisher describes

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Bear Grylls' love of adventure has helped craft a career of television and publishing successes.

© BEAR GRYLLS/VENTURES

it as a "hair-raising adventure, an extreme survival quest and a shocking mystery reaching back into the horrors of Nazi Germany."

Grylls says he felt an adult thriller was the best way to develop a character like Jaeger, "who is loosely based upon myself." The plot and mystery, he adds, "suck the reader[s] in [and] they are whisked off on a global adventure into some of the remotest and most challenging environments planet Earth has to offer—and all the time being pursued by a very dark force indeed."

Facts and fantasy

When asked why he was drawn to the Second World War theme and time frame for *Ghost Flight*, Grylls says he has always been fascinated by both the war and the roles some of his family members played in it—none more than his grandfather Ted, who commanded a top-secret unit dubbed T-Force that was tasked with hunting down top Nazi scientists for the Allies at war's end.

"[He] never spoke about his wartime experiences and exploits—that generation tended not to, especially when, as his were, the operations were top secret—and that left me even more fascinated if anything," Grylls says. He learned about his grandfather's wartime activities through the efforts of an archi-

vist who came across his war records while doing research for *Ghost Flight* at the National Archives in Kew. "Lo and behold, I discovered what he really had done in WWII, which was mind-blowing," says Grylls. "An extraordinary revelation and a plot line that informs and drives the book."

Bringing plotlines and action to life is the thing Grylls most enjoys about writing fiction. One challenge he ran into, however, is writing realistic dialogue. "You always need to [ask yourself], 'Is that what the hero and team would have said to each other in the drama of the moment right then?'" Grylls says. "Most challenging is creating characters people can believe in. That's why I base them loosely on people I know [and] my own experiences."

If that's the case, he certainly has ample material to work with. Born in Northern Ireland, raised on the Isle of Wight and educated at Eton College, Grylls, the son of the late Conservative party politician Sir Michael Grylls, has experienced enough real-life adventures to make James Bond jealous.

Man of action

Grylls' adventurist tendencies began at an early age. Already an avid sailor, climber and skydiver by the time he got to Eton, the young Grylls, who was dubbed "Bear" by his sister, Lara, when he was just a week old, notably scaled the domed roof of the iconic Tudor-era boarding school's library. He also co-founded Eton's first mountaineering club, a noteworthy feat in a school whose alumni include his idol, famed British explorer and Everest climber Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

After finishing school, Grylls joined the



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Territorial Army and then passed selection to serve as a reservist with the SAS. His military career was cut short, however, when a free-fall parachuting accident during leave in Zambia in 1996 left him with three partially crushed vertebrae. Doctors initially feared that Grylls, then 21, might never walk again.

"It was a time of great trauma and stress for my family," Grylls told Morgan. Strapped in braces, he spent months in bed, first at the military rehab school at Headley Court, then at his parents' home. A poster of Mount Everest that had been hanging on his bedroom wall since childhood sped his recovery. "I focused on climbing Everest," he recalls. "That poster became the whole focus of my recovery."

In May 1998, Grylls made headlines across the UK when he became the youngest Briton to climb Everest. He followed up that remarkable feat by leading several other dangerous expeditions and charity-related publicity stunts over the next decade. They included circumnavigating the British Isles on jet skis, crossing the North Atlantic in an inflatable boat, paramotoring over the Himalayas, rowing naked in a homemade bathtub down the Thames to raise money for a friend who lost his legs in a climbing accident and setting a Guinness record for the highest open-air formal dinner party (at 7,600 metres in a hot-air balloon while wearing full mess dress and an oxygen mask).

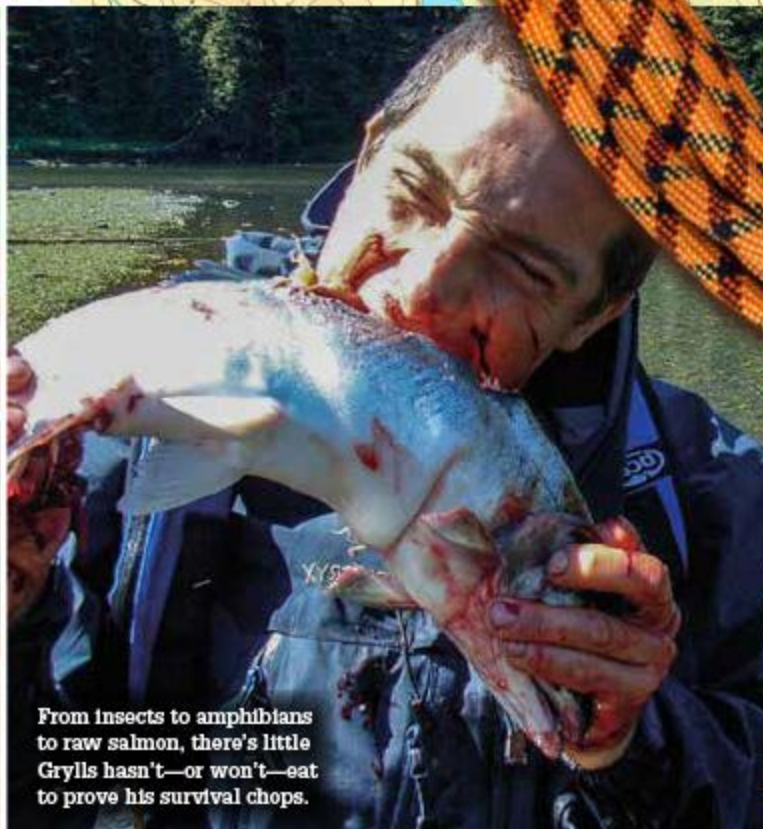
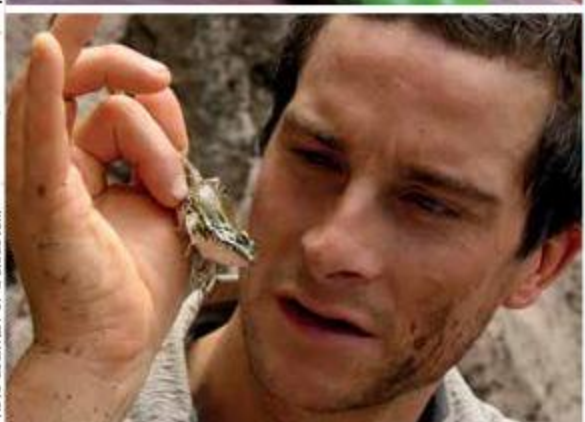
Grylls' growing fame and action-man credentials eventually earned him an offer to do a TV commercial for Sure deodorant. "Facing an audience, you are on your own, there's no safety rope," Grylls says, in a voice-over as he walks towards a stage, the scene interspersed

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Bear's Wild Weekends has patred Grylls with a variety of celebrities looking for adventure. Here he is with actor Ben Stiller.



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From insects to amphibians to raw salmon, there's little Grylls hasn't—or won't—eat to prove his survival chops.

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BEAR ESSENTIALS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

with images from his ascent of Everest, notably one of him falling from a snowy cliff, only to be saved by a tethered rope.

Amazing (and sometimes gross) feats

In 2005, Grylls landed the starring role in *Escape to the Legion*, a reality TV show in which he and 11 other young British men suffered the hardships of the French Foreign Legion's basic training in the Sahara. Grylls notably had himself buried up to the neck in an African desert to re-enact a recorded punishment for wrongdoers in the infamous French fighting force. "Experiencing it makes me think there cannot be many worse ways of dying," Grylls said while buried under a scorching sun.

His big break came when he was picked to host his own survival series, *Born Survivor*, on the Discovery Channel. The premise of the show was to teach viewers how to stay alive in extreme conditions. From the get-go, Grylls both wowed and revolted viewers with his zesty appetite for dicey uncooked fare he picked up off the ground in deserts and jungles.

In one memorable scene from South America, Grylls bit into a huge larva that exploded towards the camera. In another shot, in Africa, he told viewers that "if you're stuck out here with no water source, you can drink the fluid from a fresh elephant dung," then did exactly that.

Other grisly Grylls moments include him drinking his own recycled urine (as a last-ditch survival fluid), climbing inside a rotting camel carcass (as an emergency shelter in

sandstorms) and eating raw zebra and snake carrion (which made him ill).

"I do come alive in those moments," Grylls told Morgan. "But it's not that it tastes nice or is nice. It's fun to share skills and techniques that are quite edgy, but could save someone's life."

Since then Grylls, who turned 41 in June, has travelled the globe to shoot dozens of episodes for eight survivalist TV series. He has also appeared on numerous British and American talk shows, and done several TV commercials, including an anti-drug ad for the British military.

In 2009, Grylls, a devout Christian who joined the Boy Scouts when he was 8, became the youngest Chief Scout in the history of the 35-million-member international organization. "It's a real honour," Grylls says of the position, which he still holds. "It's all about encouraging young people to go for it in their lives and to embrace adventure."

The following year Grylls came second (behind the Queen) in a British poll of public figures who are most admired by the middle classes. "He is popular with middle-class men, a sizable number of whom spend quite a lot of time fantasising about survival and war-type scenarios," study author Richard Benson told *The Telegraph* in October 2010. "And a substantial number of middle-class women rather fancy Bear."

In addition to his TV work, Grylls has also developed his own global brand of survival clothing and equipment. Products on the Bear Grylls online store (beargryllsstore.com)

include knives, hatchet, fire starter, survival tool pack and canteen (all made by American military supplier Gerber) and three models of paramotors (propeller-driven paragliders), ranging from a basic model that retails for £8,600 to the Bear Grylls Paramotor Adventurer Package, which sells for £17,200.

The site also offers the 15 books that Grylls has written since 2002, when he first penned *Facing Up*, which chronicled his expedition to the top of Mount Everest. He followed that with several nonfiction titles that both recounted his adventures and featured survival skills in the outdoors.

Active prose

In 2012, Grylls released two notable works: his autobiography, *Mud, Sweat and Tears*, and *A Survival Guide for Life*. "I would guess the most successful had been my autobiography, which went to number one," he says. "But my favourite is *Survival Guide for Life*, which is all about how to achieve your goals, grow in character and thrive in adversity."

The half-dozen children's adventure novels Grylls wrote for his *Mission Survival* series gave him a way to fuel the imaginations of young readers.

"The thirst of young people to learn and to read more and more about the wild, survival, adventure—what I love—makes me hungry to deliver more of that kind of material," he says. Among the titles in the series are *Gold of the Gods*, *Way of the Wolf*, *Sands of the Scorpion* and *Tracks of the Tiger*.

Grylls hopes that the *Ghost Flight* trilogy

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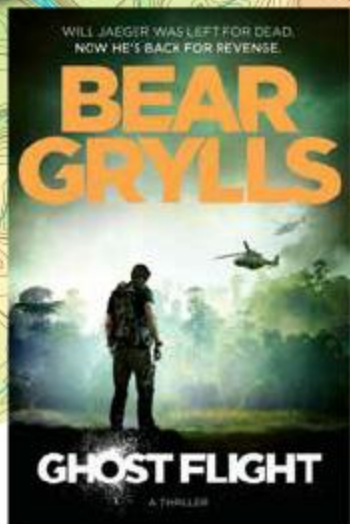


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You'll find copies of Bear Grylls' new novel, *Ghost Flight*, at your local Costco warehouse.

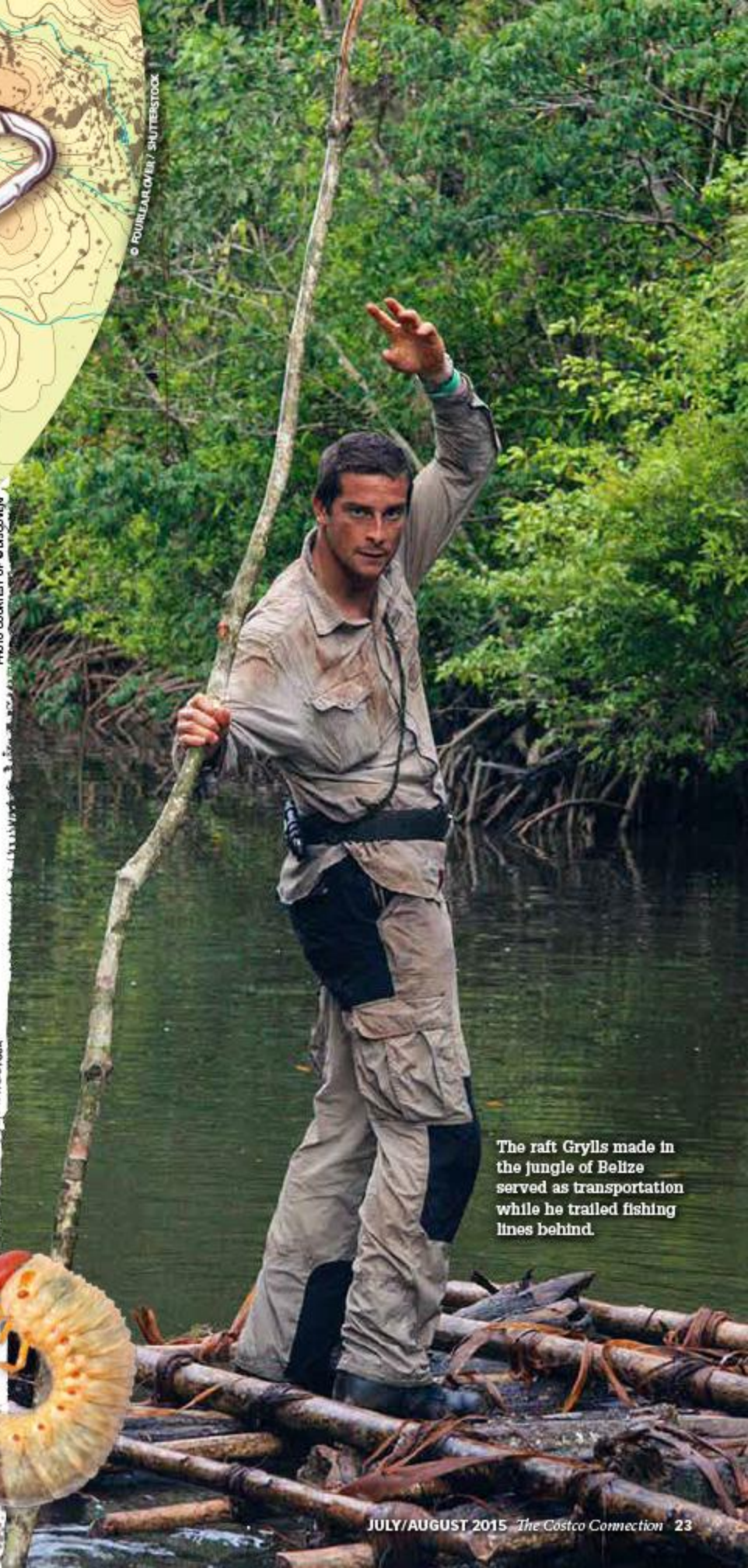
will extend that appeal to a wider audience. "It's designed to be read by a 13-year-old up to an octogenarian," he writes. "We all love great stories and to read moving accounts of [various] times in history."

He knows that from the feedback he gets from fan letters and during appearances at literary events such as the Hay Festival. "That is a great and unique chance to meet your readers face to face, which is always hugely exciting and rewarding," Grylls says. He also shares his stories with his three young boys: Jesse, Marmaduke and Huckleberry. He reports, "They have such a natural sense of story and what is good and what is boring!"

Despite his hectic action-adventure lifestyle, Grylls says he has learned to make writing part of his daily routine. "Best times are travel times, simply because I do so much of it these days in connection with the filming," he says. "Long-haul flights have become a favourite time to do some writing or editing. More and more I just do it on a smartphone, which is cool. I've ended up writing in some pretty unusual locations at times, including jungles and snow holes!" [4]

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The raft Grylls made in the jungle of Belize served as transportation while he trailed fishing lines behind.