

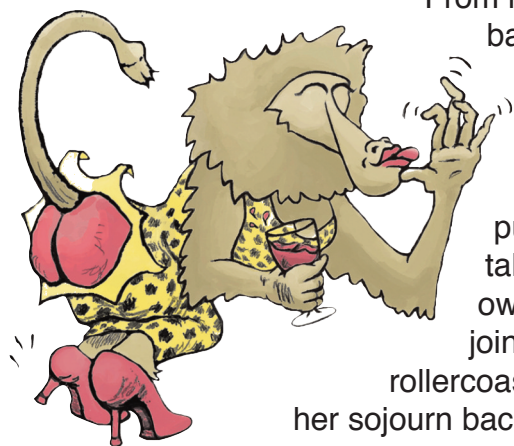
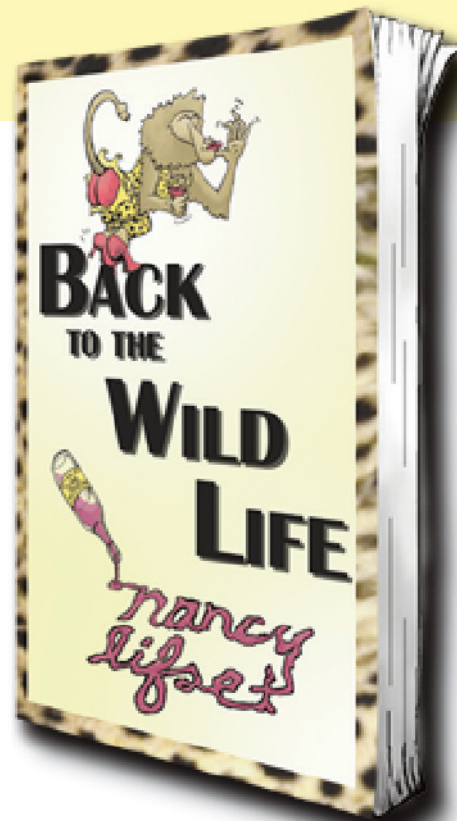
# About The Book

A sauvignon blanc-in-hand memoir by Nancy Lifset, ***Back to the Wild Life*** chronicles this former Hill staffer's escape from the swamps of professional purgatory in DC to the uncomplicated havens of South Africa.

There she finds refuge amongst the wildlife and wineries despite her battles with "the dreadful creatures commonly known as baboons." In this tale of survival of the fittest, Lifset rekindles her passion for life...the wild life.

After twenty-five years toiling in the legislative trenches as a Capitol Hill staffer and enduring a professional crisis of titanic proportions, Nancy Lifset leaves the staid confines of Washington, DC to recapture her passion for life in the wilds of Africa, chronicling her journey with side-splitting humor.

This madcap adventure of "wildlife, wine, a whim and a prayer" follows her escapades after the fallout of the Randy "Duke" Cunningham scandal to the wacky world of a Namibian wildlife sanctuary and the lush hills of the Cape winelands country, where she takes on a whole new set of challenges.



From her encounters with an unruly, spiteful colony of baboons to her twisted exploits in the refined world of wine tourism, she finds herself in the middle of one outlandish situation after another. In her reports from the field, Nancy pulls no punches – but takes a few of her own – as readers join her on the rollercoaster ride that is her sojourn back to (in)sanity.



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## Back to the Wild Life

By Nancy Lifset

ISBN 13: 978-0-9788417-7-5

Genre: Memoir / Humor

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# About The Author

A retired Hill staffer, wine enthusiast, animal lover and junkie for South Africa, Nancy Lifset penned *Back to the Wild Life*, a humorous memoir of her adventures in southern Africa that helped resuscitate her passion for life after a game-changing detour in her career. With dry wit and wine uncorked, Nancy showcases an acerbic style and an uncanny ability to find inspiration in the random one-off's that make life a mosaic of coincidences.

Nancy earned her B.A. in journalism at the University of Maryland (1980), and began her 26-year career on Capitol Hill during her senior year of college, cutting her teeth “digging dirt” and doing opposition research for several U.S. Senate campaigns. Later as a staffer in the House and Senate, she handled everything from “guns” to “butter” issues, and got her first taste for the “wild life” in the work hard, play hard world of Washington, D.C.

She retired from Capitol Hill in 2006, mentally battered after the dust settled from her former boss's fall from DC grace, and returned to work as a lobbyist in the private sector. In 2009 she charted a new course and left behind the workday world and years of professional drama, for the wildlife sanctuaries and wineries of Southern Africa in the summer of 2009, where she began living and writing *Back to the Wild Life*.

Passionate about wine, Nancy's “no connoisseur – just the ultimate consumer.” Her guiding principle has always been “keep it simple and straight up” – all except for the glass. A lifelong dog lover, she's been actively involved with Rhodesian Ridgeback rescue. No less a cause for Nancy is that of wildlife conservation. All of these passions converged in her trip to Africa, and ultimately, were part of her journey back to the wild life.

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## Q & A with Nancy

### **What was the genesis of *Back to the Wild Life*?**

I think the phrase that sums it up best is this: “wildlife, wine, a whim and a prayer” – it was the ultimate escape from my working world hell. After years of professional turmoil, starting with my role as a witness in Congressman Duke Cunningham’s congressional corruption case, I was looking to recapture my enthusiasm for life and work, and to chart a new course. I’d been to South Africa several times since my first visit in 1998, but I always left wanting more. It was not only a logical place for me to “get away from it all,” but it was a place I had long dreamed of living for awhile. It was my love of South Africa, wine, wildlife and the desire to start down a new path that led to my African adventure in the summer of 2009. I have to confess that I’m a bit of an accidental author, though; I didn’t set out on my journey with the intent to write a book. All I wanted to do is create a picture of the places I was visiting and report on the things that were happening to my friends back home. It is those twisted tales of my African encounters, each a short story in itself that morphed into this book. *Back to the Wild Life* was really my way of keeping the spirit and inspiration of that trip alive. I hope it gives people a few laughs. My greatest hope, though, is that the book inspires those who haven’t been there yet to visit South Africa. It really is an amazing place, and it works wonders on the soul.

### **You spent 26 years on the Hill as a staffer, how did your experience in that wild life shape the book?**

Capitol Hill really is a work hard world, and there are certainly plenty of opportunities to play hard, even if they come while on the job. But the “wild life” reference is not about social excess and craziness – although I’m not knocking the virtues of those things being an occasional part of the package. For me, the phrase represents all the energy, excitement and enthusiasm that came with the job on Capitol Hill, the passion I had for the things I was trying to accomplish, and the way all of that colored the life that I lived at the time. The whole point of my African journey was to try and recapture that spirit for life, and to take it forward – it’s one of the central themes of the book, and of course, it’s the title.

I am convinced that my African adventure, and this book, would never have materialized had it not been for my last experience on the Hill. As painful as the whole Cunningham debacle was for me, there are some good things that came out of it. One of them was that the whole sorry state of affairs forced me to re-evaluate everything about my life, and to figure out what my priorities were. What I learned in the process was that work, probably the defining factor of my adult life until that point, isn’t everything. I had eight months left to serve for retirement eligibility when the Cunningham scandal exploded. Going to that office everyday - with the attendant press circus, Duke’s being in the office, subpoenas flying in every direction, and scandalous new developments emerging daily – was the most stressful thing I’ve ever had to endure in my life. But Duke had become the national poster child for congressional corruption, and I was fearful that might impact my employment opportunities. I felt I had no choice but to tough it out for those eight months. It was during that time that I promised myself I would never again stay in a place I didn’t want to be, or in a place where I wasn’t thriving, in work or life. That is why I was

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## Q & A with Nancy

able to work up the nerve to leave the working world in 2009 – quite a leap for someone who had held one kind of job or another since age 14 – to pursue a dream. I'm sure I'd never have done anything as risky and unconventional as spending a summer in Africa, much less write a book about it, had Cunningham's falling star not crashed in my backyard.

### **Is it true that *Back to the Wild Life* was originally a series of emails sent on your Blackberry?**

Yes. Some of the stories in the book are the verbatim e-mails, or what I called "field reports," that I wrote to friends back home – with a few clarifications, minus typos and personal asides. Others were based on the e-mail snippets I sent to many different individuals, wrapped up with some blackberry "notes to self."

I didn't start out with the intent to write a book on this journey, and before I left, I wasn't planning on keeping a journal or e-mailing updates to friends, either. But when I told people that I had quit my job to head to Africa, I got lots of reactions – the most common ones being blank stares (as in, "have you lost your mind?") and requests that I take lots of pictures. I had hundreds of pictures from my previous visits to South Africa, and I was much more interested in soaking in the South African experience than capturing it through a lens. But the requests for picture got me thinking. I wanted to convey the beauty and spirit of South Africa, capture a little of its magic for friends, and motivate them to visit the country themselves. It occurred to me that the most compelling visuals would be those people created in their own mind. Realizing that, and seeing an opportunity to create more travel companions for my future visits to the country, I decided I would send an occasional update to friends back home, and provide the inputs for people to "see" the country. Because I was staying at a wildlife sanctuary for a few weeks, and knew that there would be little in the way of privacy much less security there, I abandoned the idea of bringing a laptop with me, and decided to rely on my trusty blackberry for communication. I wasn't in Africa a day before the hijinx started. The hilarity of my circumstances seemed to get better - or worse, depending on your perspective - every day, and before long the stories took on a life of their own. I find it ironic and amusing in hindsight that I travelled halfway around the globe to decompress, but didn't make it a whole day before I was back up on the net, firing away like all those I left behind back in the crackberry capitol of the world: Washington, DC. There's an old saying that "you can take the girl out of the Honky Tonk, but you can't take the Honky Tonk out of the girl." Some things never change. I guess you never really can leave it ALL behind.

### **Why are you so passionate about South Africa? What is the lure for you?**

I first visited South Africa in 1998, only four years after apartheid had ended. I travelled the country with friends, driving from one end of the country to the other, visiting the largest cities and smallest villages, developed areas and primitive ones, weaving from the coast and inland, even spending some time in the bush. Geographically, the place was stunningly beautiful and

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the wildlife was breathtaking. Although the excesses of the apartheid era were still evident, the place had the feel of a new country in the making. The people were welcoming, and so full of spirit. The place had a real rawness and rugged character, and a primal feel that tugged at my soul. All those things got under my skin, and I was hooked. It really was transformational for me. I've been back several times, and I'm amazed at the progress the country has made since my first visit – from the economy, to the infrastructure, to the society itself - and that continues to this day. Despite the class and race challenges that remain – and they are real, but they are the same kinds of issues our country grapples with to this day - I'm more stunned by how far they've come in just fifteen years. In its post-apartheid phase, the country really is a model of democracy in Africa. I love the beauty of the place, its vibrancy and its people. The country has such great potential, and I want it to flourish. I think the World Cup gave lots of people a surprising view of the new South Africa, but it's still too great a secret to many.

### **You are donating a portion of proceeds to wild life charities, tell us more about them and why you want to support their missions.**

I've always been an animal lover, but I became passionate about wildlife conservation after my first visit to South Africa. It was on my first safari, where I rode right in the midst of so many wild creatures, that I developed a real appreciation for the wild kingdom and its role in our world. It's no secret that many of the African animal populations are losing their numbers, and many species are particularly endangered, due to lost range and encroaching development. When I became a volunteer at the N/a'an ku sê wildlife sanctuary in Namibia, I developed an even better understanding of the numerous wildlife conservation projects underway in Africa, and the intense amount of effort, money and manpower it takes to sustain them. So, when I returned, I made a commitment to put my money where my heart is. It seemed natural to start supporting projects that I was familiar with, so I first "adopted" the Wild Dogs at the sanctuary, providing funds to support their care and feeding for one year. I did that not only because I have long been fascinated with those animals, but because they are one of Africa's most endangered species. Recently, the sanctuary took in 14 abandoned Wild Dog pups, and I adopted two of them. I have also been supporting the Cheetah Conservation Fund, and a lion conservation project run by National Geographic. There are so many causes, and it takes an ongoing source of funds to keep them going. Even though I'm already supporting conservation efforts, I'd like to do even more. It just seemed logical to use some portion of the book proceeds to "expand my range," so to speak, in the realm of wildlife conservation.



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