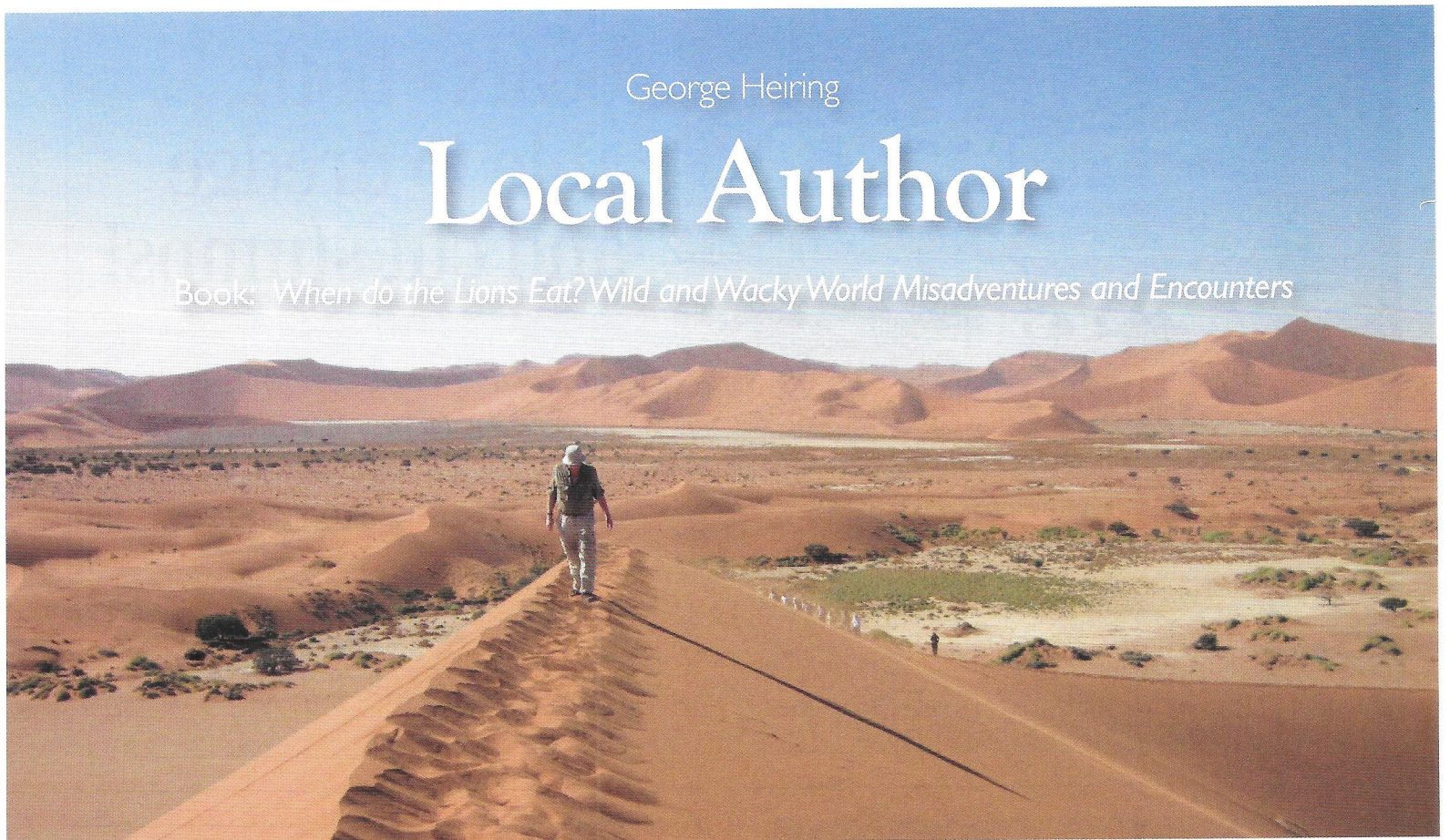


George Heiring

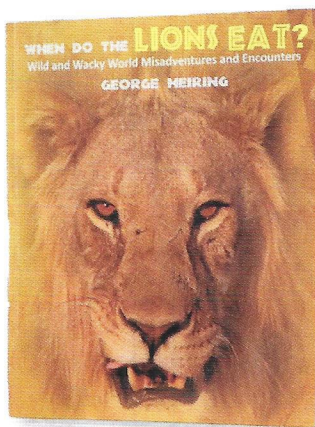
Local Author

Book: *When do the Lions Eat? Wild and Wacky World Misadventures and Encounters*



The description on the back cover of *When do the Lions Eat?* boasts the book contains fifty-eight short stories of author George Heiring's six decades of travels to exotic places. But from the moment I read the first few pages, I realized "short stories" was much too limited as a description. The pages are filled with the intricate, fascinating, bizarre, mysterious, outlandish, and stunning, aspects of life outside this continent as experienced by George, who is a genius storyteller, and his wife, Donna.

George grew up in Iowa, "a land not associated with adventure, where friends joked that a sign at the state border should say, 'Welcome to Iowa, we hope you brought something to do,'" he said with a laugh. So, boy George grew up read-



ing travel brochures and magazines provided by family and friends from their travels. "So my bucket list of places I wanted to go started when I was about ten years old," he noted.

When he grew up and visited those places, the adventure was not as the travel brochures had pro-

claimed. "What inspired me most were not the sights that I saw, but the people I met," George explained. "I couldn't write my book like a guide because a travel guide is never current – the places are always changing. But I could write about the situations in a particular country and the people I met who told me the story of what it was like to live there."

While writing the book's prologue, it occurred to George that many of the places he and Donna had visited and written about are no longer there or are drastically altered. Citing examples, he said they were in Kathmandu before the 2015 earthquake, and on Phuket Island before the deadliest tsunami recorded in history ravaged Thailand in 2004. "The lifestyle of the naked warriors in Western New

Guinea has been altered since they were discovered by westerners,” he added; “but when I was there, they were as aboriginal as you can get in this world.”

After I read the book, I wished George had written the geography schoolbooks of my childhood because, through his tales, I didn’t just feel like I was seeing the locale of each chapter, but I experienced its culture and history while being entertained at the same time.

Well-seasoned travelers seem to share similar opinions. Since the book’s debut, George said travelers who read the book sent him letters, messages and comments,

and they told him his experiences were vastly different than theirs, so now they want to return so they can experience what he did. “That group is chomping at the bit because they haven’t been able to travel due to Covid, so they’re ready to go,” George said. “And for the armchair traveler, it gives them another place to say they are going to visit.”

“His work is no more ‘just a travel book’ than *Travels with Charley* is just a road trip,” *Lake Oconee News* columnist Bill Dudley opined in a book review on George’s webpage. Noting the arrangement of the book’s chapters, Bill said, “George completely ignores the rules and

constraints of chronology and geography. Instead, he lets the pace and mood of each story dictate where it falls in his arrangement. ...

In *When do the Lions Eat?* George never lets our attention wander with his feel for what theme, pace, or mood should come next. Light and humorous to reflective and touching, you’re gonna tear up over bread crumbs on a killing field in Cambodia, then you will smile at the beautifully written ‘The Great Barrier.’ And then, wham! You’re in the Baliem Valley of Indonesia where Donna goes missing with a hunting party of ‘unclad’ native tribesmen.”





George and Donna lived on Lake Oconee from 1990 until this year; they recently moved to a retirement community in nearby Athens. George said the move necessitated a reduction of their extensive souvenir collection from all their travels.

The one he was adamant on keeping is a canoe prow from Papua, New Guinea. “It was carved from a mango tree by natives who never intended it to be in anybody else’s possession but theirs,” he explained, and recalled how he negotiated with the tribal chief to take the canoe prow. “They had no use for money, but they love cigarettes, so I offered a couple of cartons of cigarettes for it. And the shaman said ‘yes, you can take it, but we have to have a ceremony to make sure the spirits

that are on it will not go back with you,” George recalled in his well-loved storytelling cadence. “So, we both had our faces painted and we had a ceremony where we smoked things that are probably not legal in this country, and that is one souvenir I will keep in the light when we move.”

George’s short stories, essays, and poems have been featured in a variety of national media, including seven books and eighteen literary and poetry anthologies. His other two recent books, *The Seasonal Heart* and *Turning Leaves*, are regional best sellers. His literary honors include the Byron Herbert Reece International Award, the Anderson Social Poetry Prize, and Georgia’s Founders and Mnemosyne Awards. ❖

When Do the Lions Eat?

may be purchased at:
 Georgia Writers Museum,
 109 S. Jefferson Ave.,
 Eatonton, 706-991-5119, and
 online at GeorgeHeiring.com,
BarnesandNoble.com,
 and Amazon.com, where
 a Kindle edition also is
 available.