

*Pinsons campsite near Mineral King in Sequoia National Park.*

# ME, MYSELF AND I ... *Oh My!*

## SOLO, FEMALE AND IN THE WILD: A WOMAN'S PLACE TO BE

*Story and Photos by Petit Pinson*

“We are filled with a longing for the wild. There are few culturally sanctioned antidotes for this yearning. We were taught to feel shame for such a desire. We grew our hair long and used it to hide our feelings. But the shadow of wild woman still lurks behind us during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four footed.”

— “*Women Who Run With the Wolves*” by Clarissa Pinkola Estes

### I AM A CRACK ADDICT.

Have you ever just existed? I mean have you ever truly just sat or stood still even for a moment and listened, saw, felt, smelled, and tasted yourself in the midst of this world? Try it, you might like it.

I recall a moment when I was hiking high in the Tibetan Himalaya, when I suddenly became entirely and powerfully aware of

my being; not just my physical being but the fact that what I was doing was simply being. It was the crack of dawn, and I stood alone on a large rock overlooking a deep blue glacier. I inhaled the stillness of the high mountains, and the cool air filled me as I watched the sun bring each snowy peak to life. I greeted dawn and welcomed her beauty, knowing that from that moment forward I would be a crack addict, a crack of dawn addict. I find it a simultaneously humbling and enlightening experience to allow myself to just be.

Indeed, if we tried this at work — “Hey, how’s that project coming along?” “Oh, I haven’t started yet, I’m just being.” — we would risk losing our retirement. When friends or family call with the trite “Watcha doin’?” and we reply, “Being,” surely they will begin considering therapy options. Yet, behold! There are places and ways to just BE!

Imagine a wide-open space. Imagine this space surrounded by rocky peaks and flowing water, soaring birds and butterflies, wildflowers and pine trees. Imagine yourself there, in this space, alone; yes, alone. It is the crack of dawn, and you are alone. You inhale and stretch your arms over your head



*One-armed portrait.*

“I remember when I first began adventuring solo many years ago. My father asked (more than once), “Aren’t you going to carry a gun with you?” As any self-respecting daughter would do, I flexed my biceps and replied, “These guns!”





Nice work feet.



High Sierra rockstar.

toward the clear sky, and as you exhale you settle into yourself ... right there in that space, in that moment.

As I write this, I sit in a place very much like the one I've described. I sit alone perched on a rocky outcropping in Mineral King near Sawtooth Peak in Sequoia National Park. Clouds are swirling overhead, and a cool breeze carries on it the sound of the raging river below. I am just being.

I remember when I first began adventuring solo many years ago. My father asked (more than once), "Aren't you going to carry a gun

with you?" As any self-respecting daughter would do, I flexed my biceps and replied, "These guns!" (The thought of carrying a firearm had never crossed my mind).


Friends asked me what was wrong, assuming I must have been upset or heart-broken if I was heading out alone. They would exclaim, "You're crazy! What if something happens?" My answer was, "Something is going to happen. I'm going to fill my backpack with everything I want, head out into the wilderness, get my fix of dawn, and just be!"

An anonymous hiker made an ass-tute


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observation upon our meeting on a high mountain trail and stated, "A woman your age shouldn't be out here alone. You should be home having babies!" To that comment, I quickly formulated many stinging comebacks ... "A man of your meager intellect should not be out here at all." "Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" "I have ten kids, and they're on their way up the trail behind me." ... But I chose to save my energy for more worthy endeavors and continued on, alone and free.

I search the web for "women alone in the wilderness" or "women backpacking solo," and I find articles filled with fear and admonishments with titles like "Is Solo Travel Worth the Risk?" I find special programs offered for "chicks," "babes," and "wahines." I find lots of chat rooms for discussing the hesitations of adventuring solo.

The bottom line is that fear is the number one factor preventing women from adventuring alone. The deeper truth is that going solo allows women the option to take chances, experience everything unfiltered, and have each moment completely to themselves. Solo travel challenges us to truly know ourselves and our limits. While I do enjoy wild adventures with other "chicks," "babes," and "wahines" – not to mention "dudes" and "studs" – nothing allows me to release myself from all of these labels and get in touch with the wildness of my own spirit like backpacking into the wilderness alone.

As I write this, a red-tailed hawk soars overhead, and two marmots chase each other over this rock playground. I hear the snow melting as spring gracefully gives way to summer in the high Sierra. I smell granite and pine. Fog moves in, filtering the sunlight into an orange glow. I am alone, wild and free. I need this. I am an addict.

Imagine allowing yourself one day, two days, a week, a moment to be free from phone calls, fax machines, text messages, and emails and just be. Imagine a "To Do" list that looks like this:

- Hike
- Stretch
- Explore
- Relax
- Eat
- Be

And you might add to that: laugh, howl, sing, play, paint, read, write ...

The beauty of going solo is that we have the option to choose and to change at any moment. We can watch clouds, rocks, and rivers, and find inspiration in the moments we spend alone. After all, it is better to be alone than to wish you were!

This is an invitation. This is a reminder to pause for a moment and become aware of your being. Many women I have met say, "I'd like to be able to do that." I ask, "What are you waiting for?" Start small, ask questions, gather gear, create your own adventure and be!

As I write this, the rocky peaks disappear behind the white fog that has crept up the river canyon and surrounds me. I am alone. I howl, and I hear my echo howling back. I am in touch with my own wildness. I am alone, and I know that in the morning dawn will be here to greet me. I need this. I am an addict.

Try it, you'll like it ... Men, too. But guys, leave the firearms at home.

As Sir Edmond Hillary said, "It is not the mountains we conquer, but ourselves." **ASJ**



*Petit Pinson is a freelance writer, adventurer and outdoor educator. Her "base-camp" is in Three Rivers, at the foot of Sequoia National Park. When she isn't writing and adventuring solo, she leads trips for Wild Women Workshops*

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