

Written by Ginny Grimsley  
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*“This...whatever it was...has now been joined by another...whatever-it-is...and they are now proceeding in company. Would you mind coming with me, Piglet, in case they turn out to be Hostile Animals?” ~ Winnie the Pooh*

A few months ago I experienced my first bear jam at Yellowstone National Park. In the midst of an afternoon thunderstorm and raindrops the size of Godzilla’s tears, my husband slowed to a rolling stop, inching forward and muttered under his breath: “bear jam”. Pardon me, what did you say? A what? Oh. OHHHHHH! Slow down! Slow down!

Having grown up in Southern California, the term bear jam sounds like a lollapalooza of rock musicians staged for a long weekend in bear country USA. Not this time.

As you can imagine, it was VERY difficult to contain my excitement when the cars in front of us finally sped away on our side of Yellowstone highway, apparently done viewing a bear. Wow, a BEAR! I was immediately transported to the place where I understood the profound symbolism of bear and it’s meaning to those who have this great beast as a totem. First and foremost, bear is one of the most revered and worshiped animals in ancient times; however, the most interesting aspects of bear are the juxtapositions when observing this magnificent creature in its natural habitat.

On the one hand, we see tranquility, benevolence, nurturing and protection. We all know bear is a consummate mother—one of the most devoted mothers in nature. When all conditions are

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favorable, we will observe an amicable, relaxed, easy-going creature that seems heartily content to languish in sunny spots where it can stretch and snooze in leisure.

On the other hand, bear is a symbol of power and bravery. The Vikings used bearskins to intimidate their enemies and enhance their ferocity in battle. They invoked bear's warrior spirit and courage during the fight knowing that this powerful energy would support their efforts in standing against adversity and taking action.

In ancient times, bear was the master of its domain and carried the meanings of sovereignty and courage. Woe to those who provoked the wrath of bear by encroaching upon its territory.

So here I was, in very close proximity to this powerful being. Reality show and internet-induced terror of bears washed away instantly at the sight of this mass of wet hair ambling silently along the roadside while grabbing masses of vegetation in his mouth, chomping away, and giving no mind to the mayhem of tourists stopping both directions of traffic.

Despite being only a few feet away, this creature short-circuited my line of terror that starts at the frontal lobe and connects electrically to somewhere near the base of the spine. The only priority was to capture a photo of the first bear I had ever seen outside of a zoo...or a distant memory of Winnie the Pooh. I hurriedly snapped off tens of pictures unable to concentrate on f-stop, apertures or lighting. Fortunately, this bear was a cooperative model that continued to amble on without paying any attention to the fervor churning and multiplying from the epicenter of this bear jam.

Click, click, click...all the while trying to keep the rain out of my passenger-side window and off my camera. My husband finally reminded me that we were on a highway and had to move on to provide opportunity for the myriad of other gawkers. Agreed.

As our car regained speed, I sat silently thumbing through my digital archive of the speedy moment with our bear. I noticed on camera what I had not noticed with my naked eyes in the heat of the moment: our bear was quite scuffed up...scars and fur missing from various places on his face, two tags in his clipped or torn ears, and a wide leather collar with a bent piece of metal where something had apparently been torn free in some imagined hostile confrontation. Thinking back to his walk and demeanor, he just looked sore and detached from his star-struck

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paparazzi.

As the day progressed, I couldn't help but ponder my bear experience. I thought and thought...and thought some more about our battered bear. Our bear?

It is literally impossible to escape the majesty of Yellowstone. In a single day we experienced a showcase of wildlife: wolves, coyote, a bald eagle, several deer, moose, and herds of bison. What an opportunity. We had been invited into these animals' habitat...almost as one of them, I imagined. I tried to explain this abstract homage to my husband who looked like he was in his own pensive, solitary moment. I asked him what he thought of the strife that seems to be a part of bear's life in this park—in bear's own habitat.

His response will forever be etched in my mind...in my heart: “This park is a wonderful place where we have given sanctuary to these animals to thrive. Unfortunately, we took the land from them in the first place, and tried to give it back. We attempted to impose eminent domain against nature. Now, that bear has to carry tags in his ears, he has to have an undignified collar, and he walks among humans as if just offering a glimpse of his fleeting greatness.” He further explained that once you've taken what is rightfully theirs, you can never fully give it back.

I looked out my passenger window and gazed into the screen of pouring rain that seemed to heighten my emotions. Maybe these weren't Godzilla's tears after all; maybe they were bear's...

### About Noelle Meade-Izzi

Noelle Meade-Izzi is a published author and a self-proclaimed “Natu-journalist”. Her passion in nature and wildlife photography stems from her research and study of the wisdom of the animal world, animal symbolism and animal totems. Her book, *The Hummingbird That Answered My Heart's Calling*, is a testament to the power of nature and its ability to teach and re-connect humans to their true human nature. You can learn more about Noelle at [bee-nevolent.com](http://bee-nevolent.com) and connect with her on

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