



In an Instant: A Family's Journey of Love and Healing

By Lee Woodruff, Bob Woodruff



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In one of the most anticipated books of the year, Lee Woodruff, along with her husband, Bob Woodruff, share their never-before-told story of romance, resilience, and survival following the tragedy that transformed their lives and gripped a nation.

In January 2006, the Woodruffs seemed to have it all—a happy marriage and four beautiful children. Lee was a public relations executive and Bob had just been named co-anchor of ABC's *World News Tonight*. Then, while Bob was embedded with the military in Iraq, an improvised explosive device went off near the tank he was riding in. He and his cameraman, Doug Vogt, were hit, and Bob suffered a traumatic brain injury that nearly killed him.

In an Instant is the frank and compelling account of how Bob and Lee's lives came together, were blown apart, and then were miraculously put together again—and how they persevered, with grit but also with humor, through intense trauma and fear. Here are Lee's heartfelt memories of their courtship, their travels as Bob left a law practice behind and pursued his news career and Lee her freelance business, the glorious births of her children and the challenges of motherhood.

Bob in turn recalls the moment he caught the journalism “bug” while covering Tiananmen Square for CBS News, his love of overseas assignments and his guilt about long separations from his family, and his pride at attaining the brass ring of television news—being chosen to fill the seat of the late Peter Jennings.

And, for the first time, the Woodruffs reveal the agonizing details of Bob's terrible injuries and his remarkable recovery. We learn that Bob's return home was not an end to the journey but the first step into a future they have learned not to fear but to be grateful for.

In an Instant is much more than the dual memoir of love and courage. It is an important, wise, and inspiring guide to coping with tragedy—and an extraordinary drama of marriage, family, war, and nation.

A percentage of the proceeds from this book will be donated to the Bob Woodruff Family Fund for Traumatic Brain Injury.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. There's a reason Lee Woodruff's name comes first in this collaboration. While this celebrity memoir revolves around the war injuries suffered by ABC News anchor Bob Woodruff, it's really his wife's story. Drawn from the journals she kept during his recovery and also delving deeply into the history of the couple's courtship and family life, this gritty memoir is well served by Lee's capable and compelling speaking voice. Woodruff's vocal control is strong, even mesmerizing, and she peppers the grave reminiscences with funny stories and witty observations. Her voice sometimes breaks with emotion, whether describing her fears after learning of her husband's condition or earlier heartaches when coping with a miscarriage or learning of the profound hearing loss of one of their twin daughters. Bob intervenes occasionally to describe his family, various career ups and downs, and what he remembers about the incident that rendered him a casualty of war. Listeners may wish to have a tissue or two on hand while they listen to this beautiful story of marriage for better and for worse. Simultaneous release with the Random House hardcover.

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About the Author

Lee Woodruff and Bob Woodruff live in Westchester County, New York, with their four children. Bob Woodruff was named co-anchor of ABC's *World News Tonight* in December 2005. On January 29, 2006, while reporting on U.S. and Iraqi security forces, Mr. Woodruff was seriously injured by a roadside bomb that struck his vehicle near Taji, Iraq. Lee Woodruff is a public relations executive and freelance writer.

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Chapter 1

Lee

Orlando, Florida, January 28, 2006

There is a ride at Disney World called the Tower of Terror, and on the weekend of January 28, 2006, my four children, even the twin five- year-olds, begged me to go on that ride over and over again.

Housed in a re-created aging Hollywood hotel, the ride begins where you climb into a creaky elevator that snakes its way through the creepy premises. An electrical storm kicks up, and right on cue something goes wrong with the power. The elevator in the eerie hotel suddenly drops. The descent is so rapid, so sudden, that it almost sucks your diaphragm up into your throat, and right before the drop there is a moment where you are literally suspended in air, too stunned to scream. It feels as if speed, motion, light, and time literally freeze.

We must have taken that ride a half dozen times. And then the feeling returned the following morning as I rolled over in my king-sized hotel bed. The day before, the kids and I had been to the Animal Kingdom in Disney World. We'd marveled at the African safari ride, ridden rapids in Asia, and gotten soaked as we howled our way down the man-made white water. After an early dinner we'd rented a pedal bike with another family and laughed until we cried as we raced other bikers around the lake, while fireworks from Epcot exploded overhead.

Tucking four kids into bed that night, I silently congratulated myself on a good weekend. I'd come to Disney to shoot a pilot TV show for Family Fun. We'd spent two days on set and then the rest of the time had been the kids' reward: combing the parks for Disney character autographs for the twins and thrill-seeking rides for the older two. We'd planned to fly back home on Sunday and get ready for school.

Toting around four children by myself was not new. That weekend my husband, Bob Woodruff, the newly anointed co-anchor of ABC's World News Tonight, was thousands of miles away in Iraq. We spoke to him briefly that day, in between the safari and the rapids ride. He and his crew had had a tiring day covering the Palestinian elections before flying on to Baghdad in advance of President Bush's State of the Union address. The plan was to bolster ABC's Iraq coverage at an important moment in the war. The pace was blistering, common to any foreign correspondent who must keep moving and file stories from faraway places in time zones eight to twelve hours ahead of our own.

Bob and his crew were operating on an aggressive schedule with only a few hours' sleep each night. As usual, the itinerary was punishing. Get in, get the stories about the Iraqi military, anchor from Baghdad during Bush's address, do some pieces for Good Morning America, and, on the way back, try to finalize an interview with the King of Jordan in Amman, the Jordanian capital.

Our conversations with him from Disney World had been short and tough. The cell service in Iraq was spotty and the time difference was frustrating. We had one conversation midday Saturday, as he and his crew were going to bed in a military compound somewhere in Baghdad. He exhaustedly mumbled something about getting much-needed sleep the next day. Exactly what he said didn't register with me at the time. My daughter Cathryn was determined to buy a puka shell necklace. With my shoulder cradling the cell phone, I negotiated some cash from my wallet while keeping an eye on the twins, who were dangerously close to a fence in front of a bamboo grove.

Later, Bob would swear that he told me he was going to embed with the military for some exercises, while I would swear he said only that his team was going to relax for the day. At the end of our conversation I passed the cell phone around so the kids could say hi. This was common practice in our house—good nights, kisses, homework help, all via satellite. When your father covers news around the world, the phone becomes a primary communication tool, for better or worse.

"Do you feel safe there?" I asked absentmindedly, collecting the change from Cathryn. "Are you okay?" It was a stupid rhetorical question, made more absurd by the fact that we were currently standing in Disney World, "the happiest place on earth," while he was somewhere in the most violent place on the planet.

"I do. We're surrounded by the military. It's fine," he reassured me. He and his cameraman, Doug Vogt, couldn't know that the elevator was about to drop. In the ochre-colored sands on a godforsaken highway outside Baghdad, they were about to enter their own Tower of Terror.

That night I called the front desk to request a 7 a.m. wake-up call. With the bigger kids sleeping next to the twins, perhaps I could slip downstairs the next morning and take a quick swim in the pool before breakfast. Even though it was January in Florida, the water was invigorating and it would be a great way to start our last day in Orlando.

In a few days Bob would be home and we'd be a family again. His new appointment as co-anchor had set a grueling pace for the past month, even the weekends. His days had been crammed with photo shoots, press conferences, and ad campaigns. The new program with Bob and Elizabeth Vargas was committed to go to the story, to have one anchor on the road and one in the studio as often as possible. Bob relished the

challenge. It was a new era at ABC News. There was an excitement at the broadcast that was a welcome tonic after the months of sorrow following Peter Jennings's illness and then death from lung cancer. Bob and Elizabeth would give the news department something to rally around, after feeling like a ship without its beloved captain.

"Just get through January," I had told Bob, as he left for the Middle East on that fateful trip. It had become a kind of mantra for us after the announcement, as he shot out of the gate as a newly minted co-anchor.

"I really don't want to leave you guys," he said, as he leaned into the door frame of my home office, rolling suitcase in hand. He looked exhausted, distracted, and not eager to get back on a plane to return to Iraq for the sixth or seventh time in three years. The town car was already idling in the driveway.

"Just get through January," I repeated, "and life will take on a more normal pattern. We'll have weekends again, and we can be a family."

He reeled off everything he'd packed, hoping I'd figure out what he might have missed. This was familiar territory, this nonchalant leaving. It should have had more weight, but to give it any more importance would have jinxed it in my mind. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Gaza Strip: give him a kiss as always, treat it like a normal morning, and he will come home safe and sound. I had a work deadline that day, and the sooner I got him on the road the faster I could finish my task.

Frankly, I didn't think a lot about Bob over the Disney weekend either. The days had been full and the kids eager to pack in as much as possible. Bob drew sustenance from being on the road; the stories, the energy, the adrenaline rejuvenated him. He loved being a journalist, and that meant leaving us for stretches of time. We may not have always liked it, but we had made peace with it as a family. Periods of being intensely together were interlaced with periods of being apart.

As I rolled over and turned off the bedside light that Saturday night in Disney World, I thought we would all rise to this new challenge of Bob's career as well. "Co-anchor." It was good and bad. Good because he had reached the pinnacle of his profession, a plum job in television news, a successor to one of broadcast journalism's icons. Bad because we would see him even less. Our definition of family time would need some revising.

The Sunday morning phone call pierced the quiet and I jolted awake to a bedspread of floral and chintz in a totally unfamiliar room. It took me a second to register where I was. Ah, right, I thought. Disney World. The wake-up call.

I rolled over and picked up the receiver. "Thank you," I said, and lazily began to set it back on the cradle. I had decided to lie there for a few more minutes before I snuck out the door.

"Lee?" A faint voice came from the receiver, now almost back in place. Geesh, I thought. Personalized wake-up calls, how very Disney. I brought the phone back to my ear to thank the man.

"Lee, it's David Westin," the voice said.

He had my immediate attention. My brain fired signals to my body as I bolted up on the pillows. The president of ABC News does not make social calls to employees' wives at 7 a.m. on a Sunday morning, even a co-anchor's wife. I licked my lips and swallowed. My mouth was dry.

“We’ve been trying to reach you,” he said, in a slow measured voice. He stopped for a beat as if to gauge how he would say his next line. “Bob has been wounded in Iraq.”

I sat straight up, trying to process the information I was hearing. Every synapse in my brain was firing. “Wounded?” I said to David Westin, as calmly as I could. “What do you mean wounded?”

“He was on an embed outside of Baghdad riding with the Iraqi army. We don’t have a lot of information right now, Lee, but we are getting it as fast as we can. We are getting him the best care possible.”

“David.” I interrupted him. “Is my husband alive?”

“Yes, Lee. Bob is alive, but we believe he may have taken shrapnel to the brain.”

I tried to digest what that meant and couldn’t comprehend it. He was alive; I’d start with that. The rest was gravy.

“What was an anchor doing on a military exercise?” I asked, voice rising. “The last thing I knew he was doing a story about an ice cream shop in Baghdad....

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