

Celebrating 50 Years of Wilderness

# Washington TRAILS

A Publication of Washington Trails Association | [wta.org](http://wta.org)

## Northwest Exposure!



**An Unexpected Guidebook**

**Weekend at Mount Rainier**

**Hacking Your Hot Chocolate**

**Snowshoe Trails Near You**

Jan+Feb 2014

\$4.50US

02>



0 74470 25686 1

“Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you deal with it.”

## Inspiration in the Face of Tragedy

*Beyond the Bear* could have been a story about a life ruined. After all, it is the firsthand account of one of the most horrific grizzly bear attacks in recent history. Instead, Dan Bigley, with the help of coauthor Debra McKinney, crafted an inspiring tale of a life reinvented in the wake of an experience that could only be called pure, unadulterated hell.

As befits a nature enthusiast and experienced outdoorsman, Bigley's narrative is captivating from the beginning. In the weeks, and even hours, leading up to the attack, Bigley was a man who had it all. Six months before the attack he landed his dream job with Alaska Children's Services, taking children with severe emotional problems on recreational outings. A week before the attack he closed on his dream home, a rustic cabin nestled high in the Chugach Mountains. Bigley didn't think his life could get any better. But then, the night before the attack, he had his first date with his dream girl, someone he'd loved from afar for months.

After they talked and held each other all night, he departed in the early hours of the morning for a fishing trip with a friend. He had fished with this friend, in the same well-traveled fishing hole outside of Anchorage, more times than he could count. Only twelve hours after leaving the arms of his new sweetheart, the fishing trip turned from routine to nightmare. As Bigley and his friend walked back to their vehicle, fish in tow, they turned a corner and saw a grizzly ahead of them.

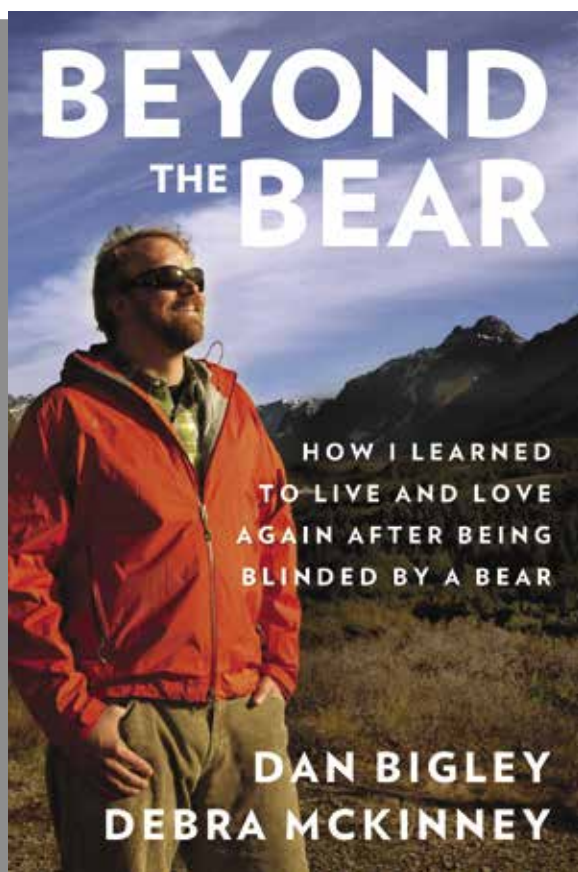
The sow was stationed just below the parking area, with her back turned to the two men. Instantly, she spun around. She was unlike any bear Bigley had ever encountered. Instead of being spooked by the presence of a human and ambling away, she started huffing, woofing and pawing at the ground. Bigley and his friend backed slowly away from the grizzly, but she stalked them onto the trail and then charged. Bigley took the brunt of the attack. His body was ripped to shreds, his eyes torn out of their sockets.

Miraculously, Bigley survived the attack. But, at only 25 years of age, life as he knew it was over. He faced an uphill battle, first in the hospital where he stayed for weeks, undergoing surgery after surgery. In time, some of Bigley's wounds healed. Others didn't. He permanently lost his sight and his sense of smell. He continues to have issues with the scars on his face. It took two years of medicine and therapy, as well as attending a school for the blind, before Bigley could relaunch his life.

His new life looked nothing like his old one. He could no longer carry out the duties of his dream job. He had to sell his cabin in the woods because he could no longer drive to its remote location on his own. Out of love, during his long recovery, he let his dream girl go. That could have been the end of things. But instead, it was just the beginning.

In prose that is at turns unflinchingly graphic and touchingly moving, Bigley's story demonstrates that life doesn't have to stop when the worst happens. It's a tale of courage, true love and enjoying the outdoors in spite of everything that makes them dangerous. More than anything, *Beyond the Bear* is a page-turner that is guaranteed to inspire. Bigley will make you a believer in the saying that motivated him to pursue life with a passion even after being attacked by a bear: "Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you deal with it."

**Recommendation:**  
5/5



**CASSANDRA OVERBY** is a Seattle-based freelance writer who loves to travel and explore the outdoors. Her writing often highlights the adventures and misadventures she gets herself into along the way. Cassandra has a knack for meeting interesting characters everywhere she goes. Her life philosophy is that strangers are just friends waiting to happen. Check out her writing and get inspired to have an adventure of your own by visiting [cassandraoverby.com](http://cassandraoverby.com).

