

my man...survivorman?

I wondered if I could turn my citified boyfriend into the outdoorsy man of my dreams. One whitewater rafting trip later, I have my answer. By Jennifer Goldstein

my boyfriend of seven years, Todd, and I don't exactly have the same sense of adventure. Case in point: Two years ago, when I asked if he wanted to climb Mount Kilimanjaro with me, his response was (in all seriousness), "Only if there's a segway tour." The fact that I prefer the outdoors while Todd likes climate-controlled comfort hasn't hampered our relationship. In fact, whenever an urge for adventure strikes me, he gamely tags along. But I'd be lying if I said there isn't a part of me that wishes he actually *enjoyed* it. So when I heard that there were class III rapids a few hours from our home, I decided that making our way down a choppy river would surely turn Todd into the ultimate survivor man. Here's what happened.

6:30 p.m., saturday (a week before our trip)

Todd: "When are we going rafting again?"
Me: "Next Saturday."

11:15 a.m., tuesday (four days before our trip)

Todd: "Is that rafting thing Sunday?"
Me: "No, Saturday."

4:20 p.m., friday (the day before our trip)

Todd: "What are we doing tomorrow?"
Me: "Going rafting."

6:30 a.m., saturday (the big day)

Despite the Freudian implications of Todd "forgetting" about our rafting trip, he wakes

up early to pack. I, on the other hand, lie in bed until the last minute, then peek inside the daypack we share to find water bottles and a change of clothes for both of us. The guy definitely gets points for preparedness.

7:40 a.m.

Since we don't own a car, we had signed up to go rafting with 15 other vehicle-deprived New Yorkers. When we arrive at the meeting place, Todd takes one look at everyone and comments on how out of place he looks. It's true: With his all-black getup and tattoos, Todd would be better suited for a band's tour bus than this granola gang. But he bravely introduces himself to the crowd and immediately cracks a joke about how his shaved head is going to get sunburned.

10:20 a.m.

We arrive at Whitewater Challengers, a rafting company in Pennsylvania's Lehigh River Valley, and a guide named Rodger herds us toward a group of inflatable rafts laid out on the pebbly beach near the river. We choose a spot in the front of a raft that's already holding two other couples.

10:25 a.m.

After teaching us how to use the paddles, Rodger launches into a demonstration of what to do if someone falls out of the raft. I zone out and eye the river longingly while Todd chats up everyone on board. Our friends all call him the "cruise director" because he's so social, and he happily lives up to his nickname.

10:30 a.m.

Our six-person group climbs out of our raft, carries it to the river, hops back in and pushes off. Here goes nothing.

11:15 a.m.

Look at us—we're rafting! Well, sort of. The water is calm, and the current moves us along so we hardly have to paddle. I'm a bit disappointed, and even Todd looks bored. I use the downtime to scan the woods lining the riverbank, hoping to see some wildlife. A bird calls in the distance and, intrigued, I excitedly yell to Todd, "That's a whip-poor-will!" He looks at me, eyebrows raised, with a look that says, "Seriously?" I suppose getting him excited about birdcalls is way more than I should expect.

11:30 a.m.

We suddenly hit some rapids (hooray!), and Todd points out to everyone that his "powerful stroke"—I swear, those are his exact words—is causing steering problems. "Hey, maybe you're not paddling as hard as I am," he says to me. "Don't you notice when I paddle, the raft moves to the right?" Our captain asks Todd and me to paddle through the next set without the help of the others so he can assess the situation. As we do, the raft moves...straight ahead, which means (ahem) we're evenly matched. Todd, however, refuses to give up on the notion that he is a master paddler.

1:10 p.m.

We're back ashore for lunch. As Todd unpacks the bag provided by the rafting company, excitement lights up his face. "Peanut butter and jelly!" he yells. "PB&J is sooo good." That is why I love Todd; he makes even the most mundane things seem fun. Who needs mountains and rapids when you get that jazzed about PB&J?

2:15 p.m.

We're back in the raft, and the water's about as calm as a kiddie pool. I'm officially annoyed now, but Todd refuses to give in to my semi-cranky mood. Instead, he keeps our companions laughing with a story about how I once "made" him go snorkeling and he almost drowned. Hearing him describe how he attempted to swim in a riptide with a mask full of water suction-cupped to his face, I realize another thing I love about Todd: I had no idea that was going on at the time. He just let me swim along in oblivion, so he wouldn't ruin my experience.

3:15 p.m.

Yes, more rapids! We tackle each set of choppy water with ease—until we notice a raft ahead of us stuck on a large rock. Despite our leader's command to "paddle left," we veer right and ram it full on. A wall of water washes Todd off the boat, but I'm too busy helping my raft mates dislodge our craft to notice. It's not until we spin off that I see Todd bobbing peacefully downstream, a smile on his face.

3:16 p.m.

We reach Todd and our raft captain says, "Use that technique we learned to get him back in the boat." I vaguely remember the demonstration, so I grab his life vest straps and yank. I look at Todd and see that the vest has become a strangulation device with the Velcro lodged under his chin. Nearby rafters shout at me and point to their armpits. Apparently this was a key lesson they learned while I was zoning out: Grab a person's pits, not their straps. I reposition my hands and try again. Todd bobs up out of the water, but it still takes two other people to get him back in. "That was fun," he says. He's actually laughing.

it's me
and Todd!



4:40 p.m.

We make it nine miles down river without further incident. But I notice that Todd's paddling prowess (or my lack thereof?) does indeed cause the raft to veer right on multiple occasions. For a moment, I can't believe Todd was right the whole time.... But then the guy behind me admits that he's nursing a hangover and hasn't been paddling hard. But even this piece of proof does not sway Todd, who insists that his stroke was also at play.

5:30 p.m.

After paddling our way back to shore, returning the life vests and waving goodbye to Rodger, Todd and I head to the van. As we drive away, I look over at him and see that he has a satisfied, far-away look in his eyes. "See, you liked it!" I say. To which he replies, "Oh, yeah, it was totally fun, but..." But what? But he would never do it again? But he regrets coming? But he's sick of my adventures? Todd interrupts my private panic: "I was actually thinking about how much fun it will be to get home, watch TV and order some Chinese takeout."

what I learned

Sure, sometimes I wish Todd were more adventurous, and I often nag him about hanging around the house when the weather is totally gorgeous and there's some kind of thrill to be had outside. But here's the thing: My boyfriend doesn't have to be the guy who tackles *Man vs. Wild*-type expeditions all the time. Being truly adventurous is really about stepping outside of your comfort zone. And Todd definitely does that—with a sense of humor that always puts a smile on my face. And the truth is, a comfy sofa, DVD and takeout General Tso's is a lot more appealing than a wet raft, mosquitoes and a soggy PB&J. Just don't tell Todd I said that. [n]