

ILLNESS: Perseverance pays off

FROM B1
After getting past a nasty parasitic infection contracted in the field in 2000, he returned to a different area of New Guinea two years later with the intention of studying another species.

Scholes fell ill after only four days of videotaping the birds in a makeshift structure he called his "jungle phone booth" — and being devoured, or so it seemed, by mosquitoes and leeches.

The ordeal started with a bad stomachache. Eventually Scholes couldn't stand up straight.

He treated himself with an anti-malarial antibiotic, and then began another for what he thought was a gastrointestinal infection.

"I didn't know what I had. I didn't know if it was going to get worse," Scholes said. "I was not even sure I needed to leave."

But he used his satellite phone to call his girlfriend and future wife, Kimberly Bostwick, who quickly recognized the seriousness of the matter. It occurred to her that Scholes might not come back alive.

"I felt my capillaries constrict," she said. "I felt physically my body react. Not just my stomach, but like my fingertips."

She immediately arranged an evacuation plan with directors of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

But as with any plan, there were detours that no one could foresee.

Four days after the initial pain and an unsuccessful attempt to pick Scholes up, a helicopter finally swept him off the mountain.

But the helicopter was short of fuel, and a refueling stop delayed their landing in the provincial capital of Alotau by a few hours.

A doctor confirmed that Scholes' appendix had ruptured but could not treat him because of inadequate medical supplies.

"They had to get me to Aus-

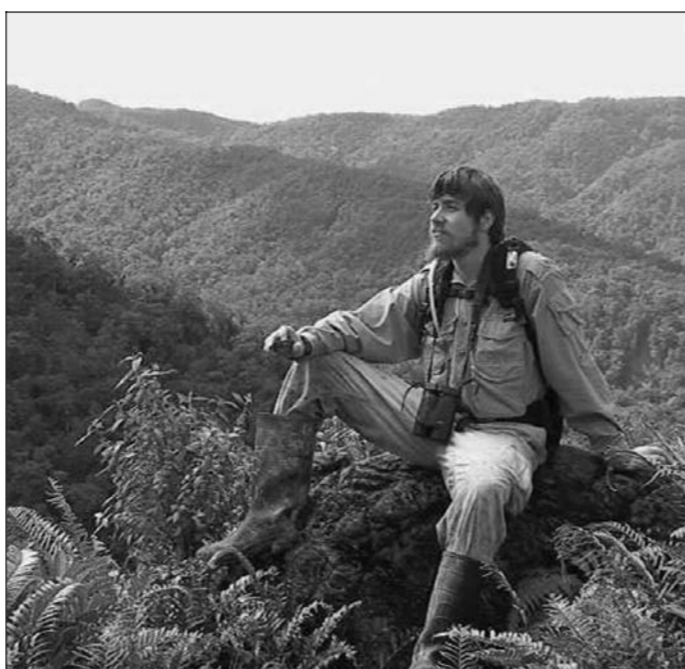


PHOTO COURTESY OF EDWIN SCHOLES

Nearly four years after illness threatened to sideline Edwin Scholes' doctoral work, he earned the degree.

tralia, which added another wrinkle," he said.

Scholes spent the night in a hotel. The next morning, on the way to the airport, he hitched a ride in a pickup truck after the minibus he was taking had a flat tire.

He hobbled in, wondering how he would board the Air Niugini plane without a ticket.

But when Scholes told airport workers he was dying of appendicitis, the manager printed off a ticket for him.

"As far as I know, no one has paid for that ticket," he said.

Later, thanks to an agent from the U.S. Consulate, he was allowed to complete a subsequent leg of the journey with only a copy of his passport.

Scholes expected an ambulance to be waiting when he landed in Cairns, Australia. Instead, he found a cab driver holding up a white paper sign that read, "Mr. Scholes."

She dropped him at the hospital around lunchtime, now five days after his appendix had burst.

Doctors in Cairns marveled at how well the antibiotics had

contained the infection. "You're stable enough — it's not even an emergency," they told Scholes.

They removed the appendix about 8:30 p.m. Scholes spent a week in the hospital and then remained in town a couple of more weeks for checkups.

Bostwick flew to meet him. "It was somewhere between a medical evacuation and a holiday," Scholes said.

Bostwick remembers it as a "really sweet time."

Richard Prum, who was Scholes' graduate adviser, said such stories are not uncommon in field biology.

"But that one is certainly one of the most dramatic," he said.

Prum, currently a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Yale University, remembers his former student as extremely driven.

"He knew what he wanted, and didn't let any practical advice get in his way."

Scholes has finished his 230-page dissertation and will start a fellowship in January at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Just call him Dr. Scholes.

RESCUE: Man saves his neighbors who were on fire

FROM B1
Officials said they didn't know the source of the leak.

Pam Levetzow, MGE spokeswoman, said that after the fire was extinguished Sunday night, workers checked the lines leading up to the house but found no leaks.

"What they know is something was going on inside the house," she said.

Monica Bonds, who owns the house with her husband, said Latasha Douglas moved into the home in November 2004. She said she saw Douglas two weeks ago at the neighborhood grocery store, and Douglas had not complained about any gas odors.

"Our biggest concern is for her and the baby," Bonds said. "It's a miracle they got out."

Bonds' husband visited Douglas in the hospital Monday. She was wrapped in gauze from head to toe and was heavily sedated but able to talk.

Latasha Douglas told family members that she had caught a faint whiff of natural gas Sunday night but did not think it was that strong, Lee Douglas said. About 10:20 p.m. she took the toddler into the bedroom to watch television, he said.

As she turned on the television, the house exploded, completely blowing out the exterior wall of the bedroom and engulfing the home in flames. She somehow grabbed her child through the flames and made it about 35 feet to the front door where she couldn't go any further, Lee Douglas said.

"All she knew was she had to get the baby out," Lee Douglas said.

Neighbors from blocks away ran outside to see what had shook their homes. Young jumped up from his couch.

"It was like something picked up the whole neighborhood and dropped it," Young said.

As Latasha Douglas reached the front of her house, she be-

IF YOU SMELL GAS

Missouri Gas Energy says anyone who detects natural gas odors should:

- 1 Leave the building immediately.
- 1 Avoid activating your electric garage door opener to leave your house. The internal circuitry of the motor in the door opener could ignite leaking gas.
- 1 Avoid using any type of telephone, including cell phones, which could ignite the leaking gas.
- 1 Not turn any light switches on or off. Anything electrical could cause a spark and ignite leaking gas.
- 1 Not try to relight a pilot light or strike a match. Leave gas furnaces, water heaters and other gas appliances alone. Get out of the house immediately and call MGE at (800) 582-0000.

"They kept screaming, and I kept telling them it was going to be OK," he said. "But it was so weird. ... I have never seen anything like that."

"I can still hear their screams, and I can still smell it," he said.

The flames had been so hot they burned or melted everything in the house. The roof was mostly gone. Only some smashed bed springs and the shell of the VCR were left in the bedroom along with the charred wood.

Lee Douglas said his sister-in-law works hard as a nurse's aid in nursing homes. She is a quiet woman who loves her baby daughter dearly, he said.

On Monday afternoon, as several people stood in the front yard talking about the accident, numerous others were driving by, slowing down, and calling out their condolences.

Workers were coming by to turn off the utilities because the city planned to demolish it, said Levetzow of MGE.

Levetzow said anybody who even suspects that they smell natural gas should call their gas company to try to prevent such disaster.

"This is truly a sad, sad occasion," Levetzow said. "We are here 24/7 whether it is a holiday or the weekend," she said.

"Even if you are not certain, go ahead and call. But don't call from your house because there a number of things that can serve as an ignition."

The Star's Christine Vendel contributed to this report. To reach Karen Dillon, call (816) 243-4430 or send e-mail to kdillon@kcstar.com.

lieved she had made it out, Lee Douglas said.

Young saw her standing in the doorway holding the child and ran to them. He pulled the pair out and over to his front yard, wrapping the toddler in his shirt to extinguish the flames. He ran into the house to get blankets while neighbors also tried to comfort the victims as they waited for the fire engines and ambulances.

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PENN: Archives board needs diversity

FROM B1
that will determine the future leadership of the archives.

The bylaws of the archives allow up to 15 members. Nixon wants to make sure the additional slots are filled with sincere individuals.

"We want to make sure the additional spots represent a diverse cross-section of the community so we can get governance that people will buy into," he said.

Also, anyone who is interested in serving on a new Black Archives board will be able to apply for a spot with the advisory committee. When the new board is in place, Nixon plans to step out of the picture.

"Hopefully, relatively quickly, the chief law enforcement officer of the state of Missouri can exit stage left and get this back to the community," Nixon said. "Every time you go through an entrance door, you'd better know where the exit is."

Now here's the rub: The old

board that has been reinstated could object to Nixon's move to add members. That probably wouldn't be a prudent move. Although it's not his first choice, Nixon is willing and ready to litigate if he's forced to.

"If they fight us, then we'll have to fight them," Nixon said. "I'm trying to do this in a way that's all positive."

I support the process Nixon has in place. Although the new board needs more diversity, it also needs to be dominated by black folks. But once the archives board goes through a major makeover and gains more credibility, it seems that funding for operational expenses inevitably will follow.

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