

# In Memoriam: Ian Player

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*Margaret Phillips Johnson*

I an Player, who was a giant in the field of conservation and ecopsychology, passed away in November of 2014, at his home in South Africa. He was 87 years old. He is given credit as a young game warden for saving the white rhinos from extinction in the Umfolozi Game Reserve. In an aerial survey in 1953 he determined that there were only 437 still alive; he also was aware that they were steadily being killed by farmers, hunters, and poachers. It was no easy task to capture these rhinos and safely ship them off to other reserves, parks, and zoos in Africa and around the world. But he succeeded, and in 1965 international authorities estimated that the white rhino had been “saved.” Today there are as many as 20,000 still with us. He pioneered the Dusi marathon, a canoe race in Natal Province, and was the founder of the Wilderness Leadership School, the Magqubu Ntombela Foundation, the International Wilderness Movement, and the World Wilderness Congresses.

In midlife Ian discovered Jung when he met Laurens van der Post and read a book Laurens recommended, *C. G. Jung and the Story of Our Times*. Ian said, “I then realized that there were two great holinesses: there is the outer holiness of the land itself, and there is this holiness within which has been mapped by Carl Jung.” *Psychological Perspectives* published an article by Ian (Volume 57, Issue 2, 2014, “An Elder Sitting by the Fire: My Path to Jung”), in which he describes his path interweaving these two great “holinesses,” a task he pursued with passion until the end of his life. And maybe, from where he is at present, he continues to do so.

Ian loved to take people—both adults and children, black and white, urban and rural, conservationists, or not, and most of all, Jungian analysts who were brave enough to leave their studies—hiking into the wilderness on a several-day camping trip in the Umfolozi Game reserve. I was on three such trails with him. I understand that Jungian analysts John Sanford, his wife Lynnne, and Katie Sanford, from San Diego, had this rare experience

as well. On my last trail with Ian, Peter Amman and Robert Hinshaw, both analysts from Switzerland, carried photographic and sound equipment and recorded our experiences on that wilderness trail. Peter Amman has named this film *Hlonipa*, the Zulu name for “respect.” Both the inner and the outer “holinesses” were seriously respected.

There was always silence on the trail; no idle chatting, eyes open, ears listening, always open and receptive to what was there. When there was spoor on the trail (scat and signs of wildlife), it was seriously studied. Were the signs positive that we continue our walk in this direction? Or was there danger ahead to look out for? The night watch that each person stood was taken seriously as well, as an opportunity to sense, feel, and smell the night life in the wilderness and to meditate on that experience. And in the morning, or later in the day around the campfire, we told each other our dreams from the night before.

Each dream was held and examined with the same respect that we examined the signs of wildlife on the trail: What did the dream point to, where did it lead us, was this a sign for all of us?

The night that Ian passed away in South Africa, I had a dream about him while sleeping in my home in Colorado. Ian was dressed in his khaki walking outfit with his backpack and his walking stick. Without stopping or looking at me, he just walked past me, down a path that led into the Umfoloi Game Reserve. He was smiling and seemed to be eager to be going where he was going. The next morning I received an email from a friend in Switzerland telling me the news that Ian had passed away the day before. I then understood the dream.

Because of this dream, and to honor Ian, the journal is going to republish an article I wrote in 1990, about my experiences with Ian on my second wilderness trail. Ian felt that the African wilderness experience can be “the beginning of a new experience of individuation” for those who join him. May you continue to lead us along this trail, Ian.