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A COLLECTION OF POEMS FOR THE RHINO

by Ray Dearlove
Founder Of The Australian Rhino Project

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*These poems are dedicated to the late Dr. Ian Player, Pod McLoughlin,
Dee Williamson, John Elliott, Shaun Smith and Toni Desilets- all true rhino warriors.*

INTRODUCTION

I was born in Pietersburg in South Africa in the days where if you were driving in the country, you would see kudu, impala, giraffe and, if you were really fortunate, a leopard. The Kruger National Park was a three-hour drive from our home and since the closest beach was about twelve hours away, we took all of our holidays in this wonderful paradise for wild animals. My parents did not have a car, so we would all squeeze into Frank and Phyllis Locke's vehicle and set off for the Park. My earliest memories are of camping at Punda Maria or Pafuri with my sister and my parents; camp fires and communal toilets. I can still recall the awe (and shock) of meeting an elephant on one of the gravel roads near Shingwedzi. Fortunately Frank maintained control of his car despite plenty of advice from the back seat.

More than sixty years later, my love for wild animals (and the Kruger National Park) is undiminished and somehow, I managed to visit one or another game reserve every year until my family emigrated to Australia.

Around 2009, news started to emerge about the threat of poaching in Southern Africa. Until this time, Southern Africa had been spared the onslaught on the rest of the continent's rhinos and elephants.

There had always been demand for rhino horn in Southeast Asia but in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, the international crime syndicates realised the enormous profits that could be made by selling rhino horn into what seemed to be an insatiable demand in certain Asian countries. The syndicates were as efficient as they were ruthless and within a few years, what was called a low intensity war was taking place between those trying to poach the rhino and those trying to protect these iconic animals. It was an uneven contest as groups of poachers crossed the border from Mozambique and picked off the rhinos. Staggeringly, on the black markets of Southeast Asia, rhino horn was worth more than gold, heroin and cocaine. The kill numbers escalated quickly to peak at 1215 rhinos killed for their horn in 2015. On average, three rhinos a day are killed for their horn. That is one rhino every eight hours. It is estimated that on any given day or night, there are up to forty poaching groups in the Kruger National Park. As prevention methods in Kruger improve and the number of rhinos reduce, the poaching gangs move elsewhere in the country and, at present, the game reserves in Kwa Zulu Natal are bearing the full brunt of the rhino poaching.

In 2013, I was contacted by Humphrey Mcallister, a good friend from South Africa who suggested that I get involved and I decided to try to do something about it. I founded The Australian Rhino Project in Sydney Australia. The goal was simply to establish a breeding herd of rhinos in Australia as an insurance against the possible extinction of the species in the wild.

I am convinced that the tipping point has been reached where the rhino kill rate exceeds the rhino birth rate. This spells doom for the world's remaining rhinos in the wild. I wrote a number of poems looking at the rhino issue from several angles.

If this book can increase awareness of this desperate situation then one of my goals will have been achieved.



FOREWORD – BY MAJOR GENERAL JOHAN JOOSTE

Ray's passion for the African bush in all its facets and splendour combined with his dedication to the cause of the rhino, has made him a sort of "rhino whisperer" as he relates the realities of the rhino poaching scourge in a very authentic and genuinely emotional way. He has also unwittingly assumed the role of "rhino ambassador" who has committed personal time and resources to the overall rhino campaign. This will never be taken for granted.

Using his rare talent of writing up his experience of and exposure to the brutal so called "rhino war", he has a unique appeal to us Africans and specifically those of us in the front line of combating those who plunder our natural resources and slaughter our rhino in a barbaric way.

These unique creatures of pre-historic origin which could be saved from near extinction in South Africa in the previous century are relying on us and we rely on the genuine and demonstrated support of friends like Ray. I salute him with gratitude on behalf of all those who would forever get a lump in the throat when we read the valued poems.

Major General (Ret) Johan Jooste

Head of anti-poaching, South African National Parks

November 2017



FOR THE RHINO

I wrote this poem – in the middle of the night – whilst flying from Perth to Johannesburg. “Cry the beloved country” was, of course, the title of Alan Paton’s prescient novel of 1948. It was the first poem that I wrote about rhinos and indicates the depth of my passion for these extraordinary and iconic animals. It is estimated that rhinos have been on the planet for approximately 10 million years and yet, if current trends continue rhinos could become extinct in the wild within ten years.

See them stand

Side by side

Mum’s super large horns.

His just starting to grow

Both so proud

See them run

The oldest mammals on the planet

Majestic, powerful and free

See them stop

Sniffing, staring

Uncertain and nervous

Hear the shot

See her fall

Trembling, shuddering

Hear the saw. Feel the pain.

Ruthless, cruel, greedy humans

Hear his cries

His mother’s face a bloody mess

All alone

Mother and child. No reunion

Cry the Beloved Country



Photograph by Lisa Paggotto.

AS COWARDS DO

I wrote “As Cowards Do” after meeting Dave Powrie and hearing of his narrow escape from death. Dave is a good friend and is security warden for an internationally known, large and popular private game park in South Africa. He has responsibility for protecting all the animals, not only rhinos, and people. About a year ago, he and his wife were asleep one night when suddenly the bedroom light went on in their home and there at the foot of the bed were five men, three of whom were armed with machetes and one with a gun. Dave and Loma were completely helpless and their dog - which slept in their room every night for protection – they subsequently found out - had been drugged. The poachers demanded that Dave hand over ‘the rhino horn’.

There was no rhino horn in his house but they would not believe him and after a few minutes, things got really ugly when one of the poachers grabbed Loma. Dave, in his own words, ‘lost it’ and exploded out of the bed and despite the overwhelming odds he fought these five poachers out of his house. He then collapsed with sixteen knife wounds to his body as well as a punctured lung. His wife was also stabbed but fortunately their two-year-old baby in the next room slept through the whole nightmare.

I’m pleased to say that Dave survived and he is back on the job. This demonstrates the lengths to which some people will go to get their hands on rhino horn.

AS COWARDS DO

*They came in the middle of the night
As cowards do
Armed to the teeth and driven by greed
The target a man, his wife and a child aged two*

*A hot, hot night, not a breath of air
Windows open, fast asleep
Faithful dog in his spot, on guard
Any scent of trouble, ready to leap*

*Suddenly, shockingly, on goes the light
What the hell they say, who can it be
Five poachers at the foot of the bed
Machetes and a gun is all they see*

*Where is the rhino horn, where is the horn
That is all they say, give us the sack
We have no horn, we have no horn
Why won't my dog attack?*

*Five to one, this is no contest
They will not go away, what to do
One jumps on his wife, intent very clear
To hell with that, it's me or it's you*

*The dog is drugged, no help there
His wife is stabbed, the fight is on
One on five, a man possessed
Inch by inch, this man won't quit, this man won't run*

*Out of the door he fights them, one by one
Then he drops*

*Sixteen stab wounds and a punctured lung
The pain, the shock and then it stops*

*Six months later, back on the job
He and the poachers both
No arrests and the rhino slaughter continues
He does his work, he abides by his oath*

“...Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope and those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance...”

- Robert F. Kennedy



Photograph by Tammy Zak

IS IT NEED OR IS IT GREED?

I wrote “Is it need or is it greed?” after being told about little Sabi – the orphaned rhino. A rhino poacher had been shot and killed while attempting to once again poach rhinos in the Kruger National Park. Incredibly, at the time, he was on bail from a previous poaching charge.

Russel Mokoena was one of five men accused of poaching a baby rhino at the Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary close to Nelspruit which was owned by Petronel Niewoudt. I know Petronel well and in my eyes she is a hero for the work that she does with rhino orphans. Mokoena was working at Care for Wild at the time of the incident.

In terms of background, Sabi’s mother was poached in Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Her baby, Sabi, was brutally mutilated and his front legs had been chopped off by these callous men. He almost died and was gradually being rehabilitated by the Care for Wild team.

Apparently Mokoena boasted that little Sabi had not even tried to get away from him on the night that he was shot. The poor little creature had actually approached him, having known him as someone who worked with the rhino orphans every day and also being used to humans. Sabi’s little horns, which Mokoena dug from his head were sold for R34 000 (\$3,400.00) to a Chinese national.

The poem also explores the different reasons why men poach animals. Certainly there is the criminal factor and the desire for money and then doing it again for more money. But there is also an element of food security. There is no blanket of social security in Mozambique – from where most of the poachers enter the Kruger National Park. Mozambique is the seventh poorest country on the planet and many, many people live on or below the bread line.

IS IT NEED OR IS IT GREED?

*Today a poacher died
Not of sickness nor disease
He was shot while yet another rhino horn he tried to seize*

*On bail he was. For what crime you ask?
He shot an orphan rhino. Sabi was his name
A little fellow whose front legs had been hacked
His Mum yet another helpless victim of the poaching
His courage and cheeky attitude had brought him a wee bit of fame*

*The poacher worked the farm where Sabi lived
Sabi knew him and ran to him - as littlies do
The poacher, callous and cruel, shot him dead
And dug his tiny horns from his head*

For thirty pieces of silver

*Tonight another poacher will take his chances
They'll hit the rhinos at the nearby ranches
His family of seven all need food. He has no job.*

*A first for him, he'll join this killing mob
But first to the witchdoctor to be smeared with muti
Nobody can see them, nobody can hear them
Now protected from all of the dangers
From lions and leopards and the guns of rangers*

*They walk and they run. It seems like hours
But they are fine, they have muti powers*

*Now they see it, the rhino's midden
It is a big one - see her horn
Very soon it will be sawn*

*Hear the shot, see her fall
His hands are shaking, he saws and saws
His hands are bloody, her face is raw*

*Back at home his young wife waits
Her caring man has met his fate
He did his best, but now he's gone
We need to eat, next time I'll send my son*



THE GAME RANGER

I have always had enormous respect for Game Rangers. My cousin, Trevor Dearlove, started the first walking trails in the Kruger National Park in 1978, it was a novelty that appealed to every wildlife enthusiast and which satisfied an intense longing in visitors to the Kruger Park; to be able to walk in the bush instead of seeing it all from inside a hot and cramped motor vehicle. (No air-conditioning in cars then!)

There was then only one trail, the Wolhuter Trail in the southern part of the Park. The ranger who started that trail was Trevor. Over the years, as a Dearlove, I have had significant reflected glory from Trevor. Thanks Trevor!

As a youngster, I read all the books that I could lay my hands on about James Stevenson -Hamilton, Harry Wolhuter, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and in later years Bruce Bryden and others. I fulfilled some of my boyhood dreams when, many years later, I took a cricket team from my firm, IBM, and played against the Kruger National Park team – the Game Rangers – at the beautiful field within the staff village in Skukuza. Dr Gus Mills with whom I had been at school at St John's College in Johannesburg, a very good wicket-keeper – was captain of the Game Rangers. Like many wicket-keepers, Gus had a lot to say behind the stumps.

I was invited by General Jooste, Head of anti-poaching for SAN Parks to attend the International Rangers Day on July 31, 2014. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend and my cousin Robbie Robertson represented me. This poem and "For the Rhino" featured in the official program of the day and both were read out at the celebration of all South African Game Rangers at the Paul Kruger Gate.

I wrote this poem for the Game Rangers – all good, brave men.



THE GAME RANGER

*I was born to be a game ranger
When I was young, Kruger was my second home
I loved animals and looked forward to seeing danger
The men in the green uniforms were my heroes
I read all about Wolhuter, Stevenson-Hamilton and all those out's
I had a dog named Jock*

*I joined the team. I earned my stripes
I cared for animals, I cared for people, they cared for me
I loved my job*

*With a volley of shots, my world was changed
The innocent rhino in their sights
Why oh why, my children ask me?
How can I explain man's greed and cruelty?*

*Now I am a ranger with a gun
I am a target whilst the rhinos run
Is this what God intended, surely not
I mourn, I cry, while my rhinos rot*

*There must be something the world can do
We rangers were trained to nurture and protect
Now we are trained to survive
And try to keep all our rhinos alive*

*I curse the poachers, I curse those who buy the horn
I pray to God for a bright new dawn
I rejoice for every rhino born*



Photograph by Kim Jacobson

AM I A POACHER?

This whole poaching issue is so complex.

The ranking of rhino poachers can be illustrated with a five-level pyramid. Level one is the hunter. Number two can be called the handler who provides the hunter with resources such as the weapon and ammunition. Number one hunts the rhino and saws off its horns and hands the horn to number two in exchange for payment.

From there the horns make their way to number three who would typically live in the town or the city. Number four then receives the horns and ensures that they are delivered to number five, the end-buyer in countries such as Vietnam, Laos, China and, more recently, North Korea.

Anyone involved from level two upwards is typically called a syndicate member while at level one, there will be the fellows, usually two or three, who carry the food, mobile phones or may have some knowledge of the area to be targeted. One of these is probably also the fellow who needs to feed his family, who is literally picked up on a street corner on the day and made an offer to join the hunt.

While these men are ruthless and cruel, there is often this one individual who joins the pack who really needs money to feed his family. With this in mind, I wrote "Am I a poacher?"

Please note that a "Sangoma" is a witchdoctor and "Muti" is the magical potion brewed by the Sangoma. Amongst all the supposed benefits, here is absolute belief that if you are smeared by the appropriate 'Muti', you become invisible.

AM I A POACHER?

*My father is long gone, my mother is sick
One brother has Aids, another has left town
I have four little kids, but what can they eat
They cry from the hunger, Dad, please get us some meat*

*Now there's a stranger in town, flashy car and all
Throwing money around saying 'please call me Saul'
Buys food for the people and free drinks at the hall*

*Saul seems to like me and asks- how fast can you run?
I'm looking for helpers who are looking for money
More than ten grand, I'm not being funny*

*I speak to my wife, she says I should do it
I say to Saul, where are we going?
To shoot just one rhino and bring back his horn
If you are fast, we'll be back before dawn*

*But first to the Sangoma, to smear us with Muti
Nobody can see us, nobody can hear us
We now have protection from all of the dangers
From lions, from leopards and the guns of the rangers*

*Tonight is the night, be ready at sunset
We are lucky, there is a full moon
You carry the saw and also the food
Be not afraid, we will return very soon*

*We walk and we run. It seems like for hours
But we are ok, for we have the powers*

*Saul says stop, all of a sudden
Here I see it, the rhino's midden
It is a big one - eish, see his horn
Very soon it will be sawn*

*Hear the shot, see him fall
Be quick, cut it off, get it all*

*My hands are shaking, I saw and I saw
My hands are bloody, his face is raw
We are now back in town, safe and sound*

*Where's my money, I ask of Saul
He laughs at me and points his gun
No money for a fool, let's see you run*



Photograph by Shannon Wilde

DO THEY REALLY CARE?

The poem “Do they really care” is aimed fairly and squarely at the ‘authorities’. I am convinced that the poaching menace will never go away unless governments stand up as one and say “Enough is enough, no more”.

This poem is also a cry for help. Good men such as Princes William and Harry, Sir David Attenborough and others have added their voices to the cause, but where are the leaders of South Africa, of Mozambique, of Laos, Vietnam, China, Thailand and North Korea who will take the lead on firstly stopping the demand and then the poaching. Agencies such as the CIA, the FBI and Interpol are all involved. Why can’t it be stopped?

John Scanlon of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) is a strong advocate for change, and a man for whom I have great admiration, but unless all of these governments step up, our wildlife will be gone in the next ten to twenty years. Then who will they blame?