

Colin Church: Public Relations Executive, Conservationist, Author & Family Man (January 28 1940 – March 16 2021)

BY JULIE CHURCH

Colin Church passed away on 16th March 2021, after he developed septicemia on his last safari to Kora National Park, Tana River County, just after his 81st birthday. Kora was home to the great conservationists George Adamson, and now Tony Fitzjohn, a friend of Colin's and his wife Nicole. A gloriously wild, remote landscape, harsh, it was a very apt location for Colin's last big adventure.

Colin was the second son to Rev Howard and Elisabeth Church, who came to Kenya in 1932 with the Church Missionary Society. He schooled at Kenton College and the Prince of Wales School (now Nairobi School) and spent much of his holiday time with his elder brother Tony. Together, they spent hours exploring the slopes of Mt Kenya and the Athi and Kapiti plains. It was here that Colin acquired his passion for wilderness, fishing, riding, and his love for Kenya and respect for its people.

After school in the UK, he travelled in South America and Europe and it was during these years that he developed a passion for journalism and public relations. He became a journalist in the UK



PHOTO BY RHINO ARK



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TOP RIGHT

Colin Church with Mr Barasa of KWS checking on the fence accompanied by Rhino Ark Fence Team in 2012.

MIDDLE

Colin Church and his business partner, Patrick Orr in 2000.

BELOW LEFT

Colin Church at the Aberdare fence run, Bondeni, presents an award to Tegla Lourope in 2011.

working for Reuters and reporting on the proceedings of the House of Commons. Upon his return to Kenya, he worked for the Nation Media Group and edited the *Kenya Farmer*. In the early 1970s, he merged with Ian Raitt to form one of Kenya's first Public Relations firms, Church Raitt and Associates. Upon the departure of Ian Raitt for the UK, he teamed up with Patrick Orr in 1975 to incorporate Church Orr & Associates. He founded the Public Relations Society of Kenya, and in 1996 was elected president of the International Public Relations Association, the only Kenyan to hold this global position to date. It was in this profession that Colin learnt the art of delegation, the importance of listening, and the value of patience and persistence.

After 25 years in Public Relations, Colin dedicated his life to conservation using the skills he had developed in business. This

started when he was appointed by the President to Chair the Board of the Kenya Wildlife Service. There he brought new, innovative programmes by developing inter-agency partnerships, developing communication and marketing strategies, bringing wildlife conservation into the national limelight.

He then chaired the Management Committee of Rhino Ark from 2000 to 2012. During this time Colin championed the drive to raise funds and awareness to protect Kenya's water towers. This started with the Aberdare National Park and after the completion of the fence around the essential water tower, he set up the adoption of its maintenance plan. He went on to galvanize support for the fencing of Mt Kenya, Eburru



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PHOTO BY NICOLE CHURCH



PHOTO BY TONY CHURCH



PHOTO NORAH GITHINI

TOP LEFT
Colin Church speaking at the 2011 Rhino Charge event.

TOP RIGHT
Colin Church receiving his OBE from Prince William, Buckingham Palace, London, England in 2018.

BELOW LEFT
Colin Church at the launch of his book - Mel-el-lek, Giraffe Manor in 2019.

BELOW MIDDLE
Colin Church fishing at Chemasusu in 2021.

BELOW RIGHT
Colin Church with his wife, children, their husbands and grandchildren in 2018.

Forest and the Mau complex. For this achievement, Colin was awarded an OBE for his services to conservation, the environment and to the community in Kenya by the Queen of United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries in 2017.

After retiring from Rhino Ark, Colin accepted in 2018 the Chairmanship of the Mara Elephant Project working closely with its co-founding members including Richard Roberts and Suzanne Fehsenfeld.

Then in 2019, Colin chaired Seas4Life Trust, whose motto is 'healthy seas – healthy lives'. He provided sound advice and embraced the first Cycle4Seas fundraiser for marine conservation.

He was also a co-founder of Eburru Rafiki, a key adviser to the Big Life Foundation, and the Bongo Surveillance Project. He was a member of the Board of the Muthaiga Country Club for 17 years, chairing that institution for three years, where he was instrumental in leading the way for a younger generation of members.

His book *Mel-el-Leks' Mountain*, portrays life through the eyes of Mel-el-Lek – a member of the Wandorobo people, was reviewed in *Swara* (January–March 2020). Colin passionately wrote about the

Aberdares and events of hardship, achievements, times of war, injustices and civil strife.

Whilst conservation became Colin's professional career, he was a true family man. Head of the 'Kanisa' Clan, he guided his children and grandchildren, and always embraced safaris, fishing trips and family events. Each member of the family participated in one way or another in the Rhino Charge and enjoyed the results of his conservation work in the Aberdares, Eburru, Chemasusu and Msambweni. Colin found true love in his wife Nicole, who cared for him greatly, and joined him on every safari.

Colin had the gift to listen, learn and gently find ways that supported conservation and sustainable development in Kenya. He has now handed the younger generation a torch, to create a pathway that involves living in harmony with wildlife and to look after the country he loved so dearly – Kenya.

My deepest thanks to Judge (Retd) Jonathan Bowen Havelock MBS, the CEO of MEP, Marc Goss, and Patrick Orr for the information included in this tribute, and to the Kanisa Clan for their contributions, love and support. ●



JULIE CHURCH is the eldest daughter of Colin Church. A marine conservationist and social entrepreneur. CEO of Seas4Life Ltd and Trustee of Seas4Life Trust. Founded and managed Ocean Sole, the Flipflop Recycling company.