

Leo the Lion

“King of Beasts in All of Africa”

Stories from the African Savannah

**For my daughters: Heather, Erin, and Annie
and my grandchildren:
Ayo, Liam, Hayden, Orion, Crosby, Margo, Marin, Cary, and Rose**

From Berto

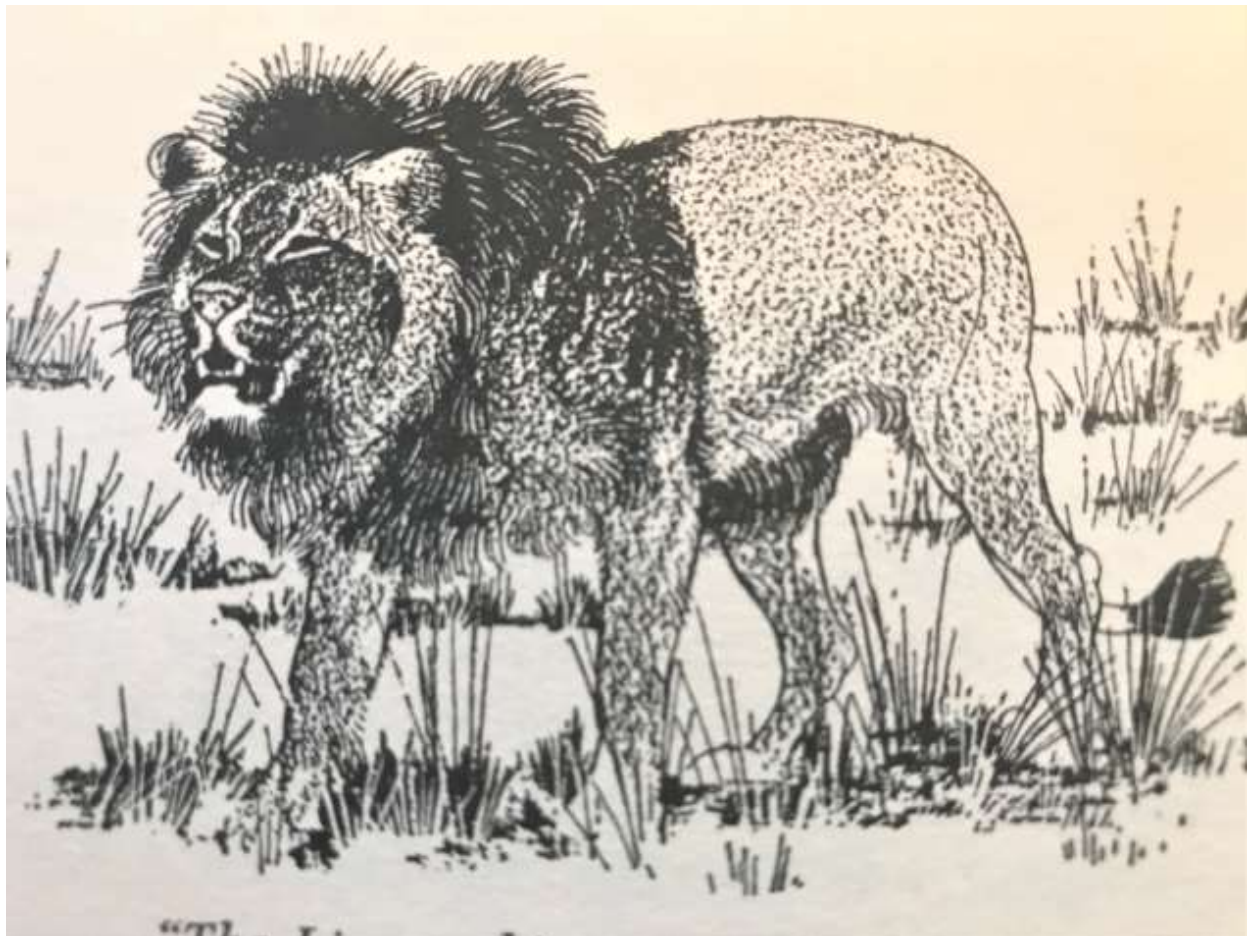


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Note:

- Chapters 3, 4 and 6 are based on stories told by the Bushmen of Africa and beautifully re-told by Laurens Van Der Post in his book, “The Heart of the Hunter.”
- In those three chapters the italicized sentences and paragraphs are direct quotes from Laurens Van Der Post’s telling of those stories. Van Der Post was a superb story-teller and a magnificent writer of prose.
- All of the pen-and-ink drawings of animals were drawn by Maurice Wilson and appear in “The Heart of the Hunter.” They have been copied from that book and pasted into the Illustrations section. (The other illustration was drawn by my daughter, when she was little.)

Leo The Lion Stories

Introduction

When my youngest daughter, Annie, was a little girl I often told her a “Leo the Lion story” at bedtime. It was a precious time for both of us. The stories were about the lives of animals who lived together on the African savannah. Most of the stories were about problems on the savannah that Babs the Baboon had noticed. Babs was a grandmotherly figure who deeply cared about the young animals on the Savannah. She was loved by the youngsters and their parents. Babs would bring her concerns to the attention of Leo the Lion and his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey. The three of them would then address the problem Babs had noticed. Each story provided a life lesson, a wholesome perspective about life and how one might best behave. Often, the stories indirectly dealt with issues that Annie might have been facing at the time.

All of the stories begin with the same introduction, the same refrain—that “Leo the Lion was taking his usual and customary nap, under his favorite acacia tree...” when suddenly Babs the Baboon would appear with a new concern.

The Leo the Lion stories I told to Annie were ones that I made up on the fly. This resulted in some stories being a bit of a bust. Annie seemed to kindly accept the fact that some stories would be better than others. The stories recorded here are a few of my best efforts. In addition, I have recently written three new stories (3, 4 and 6) that are based on stories shared by Laurens Vanden Post in his book, *The Heart of the Hunter*. In beautiful prose, Laurens relates the legends and social understandings of the wise Bushpeople who lived for thousands of years on the Kalahari desert of Africa (present day Namibia). Those three stories include some direct quotes from Laurens book.

Although most of these stories are intended for young children, some are quite applicable to older children, including adolescents. My hope is that the stories helpfully address issues that children, adolescents, and even parents might be facing. Another hope is that the stories will open children’s minds and imaginations to new ideas and new perspectives.

RMR

Cast of Characters

Leo the Lion

Mercedes the Monkey

Babs the Baboon

Lilly the Lion

Laila the Lion

Madeleine the Mongoose

Ellie the Elephant

Minnie the Long-Nosed Mouse

Stephanie the Steenbuck

Dennis the Duiker

Kagen the Praying Mantis

Homer and Hank the Hippos

Willie and Wally the Wildebeests

Eleanor the Eland

Curtis the Kudu

Billie the Bongo

Rickie the Dik-Dik

Kippy the Klipspringer

Jimmy the Gemsbok

Winnie the Waterbuck

Isabella the Impala

Bobby the Bushbuck

Bron-Bron the Blue Crane

Scooter the Hare

Kobe the Cobra

The Mamba

Jack the Jackal

Henry the Honey Badger

Harvey the Honey Diviner

Sammy the Secretary Bird

Illustrations

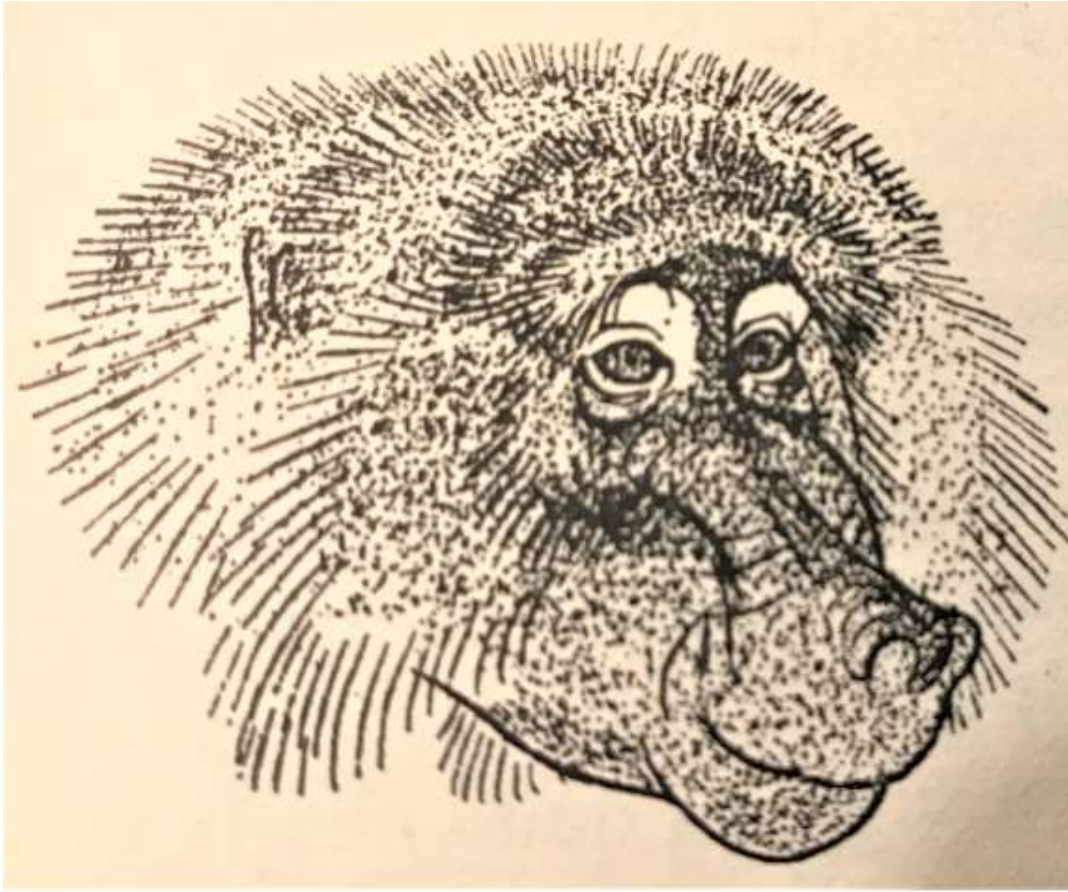


Leo the Lion

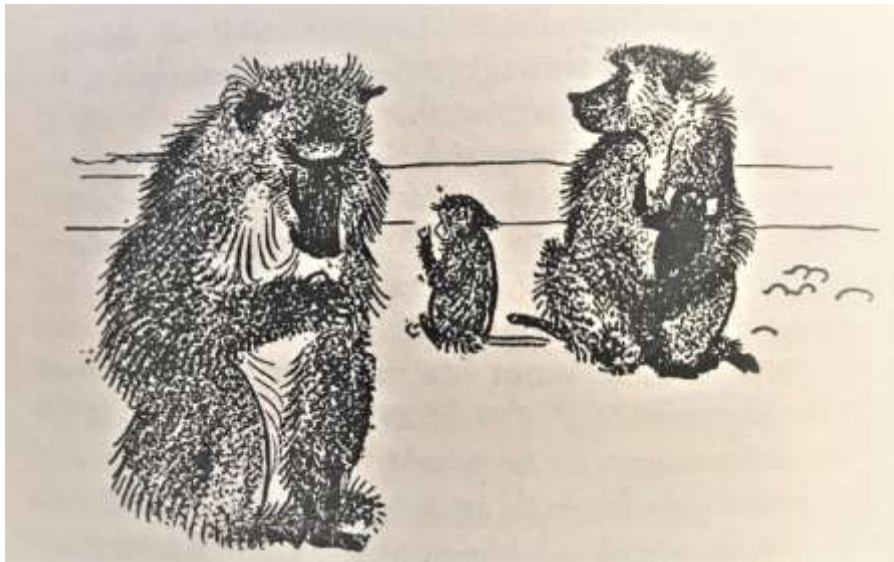


Leo the Lion sitting in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below, with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging to-and-fro, fro-and-to in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree, and with Babs the Baboon (on the right) coming up the hill.

(Illustration by Annie, when she was little)



Babs the Baboon
Grandmother for the Young on the Savanna
Always caring about problems on the Savannah



Mercedes (in the middle, when he was little)



Stephanie the Steenbuck
So innocent, kind, and gentle,
Always believing in Goodness everywhere,
With her neat and beautifully kept resting place,
Protected by the Magic of the "Steenbuck Person" in all of us



Dennis the Duiker
Fearful, untrusting, easily threatened, quick to run from always assumed danger
(Pronounced "Dew-Wee'-Ker" with accent on the "Wee." "Duiker" is a Dutch word for
"Diver." When frightened, the Duiker dives into the brush to hide.)



Madeleine the Mongoose
Who has a hard time understanding the true meaning of competition

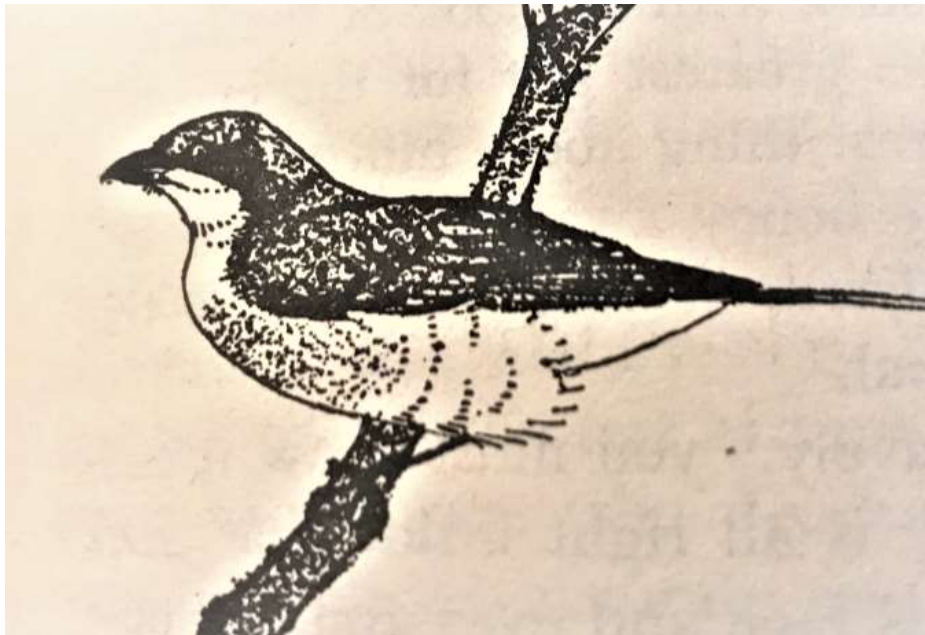


Willie and Wally the Wildebeests
Mean looking "beasts," but with hearts of Social Beauty



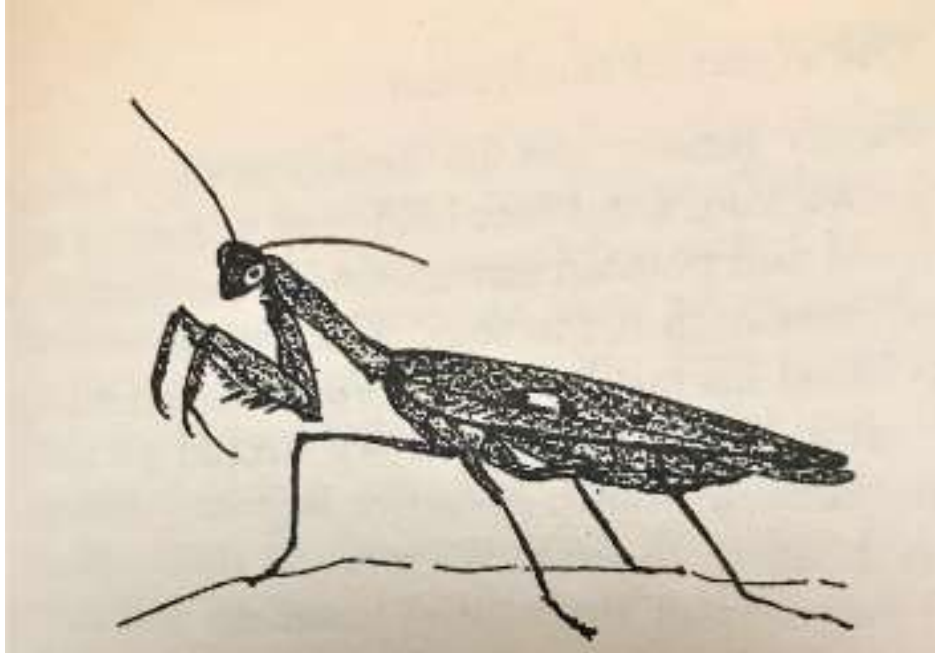
Henry the Honey Badger

Who never quits, never gives up, never tires, keeps digging deep, but also accepts help. He understands collaboration and true friendship



Harvey the Honey Diviner

Henry's best friend and helper



Kaggen the Praying Mantis

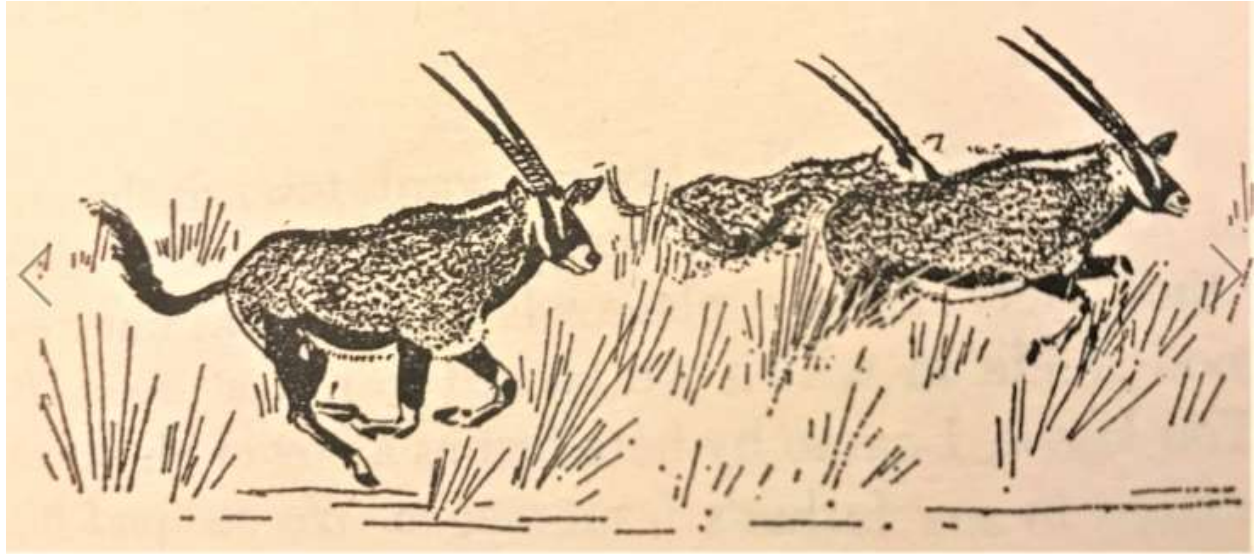
The “first spirit,” “the creator,” “the bringer of fire to earth,” the “Old Tinderbox,” the one who first gave things their names, the symbol of “the spirit of wholeness in life,” ---according to the humble Bushpeople.

Kaggen reminds us to be humble and grateful for the Great Meaning, the Great Sense, and the Great Goodness of Life



Sammy the Secretary Bird

Who chronicles Social Truths on the Savannah



The Gemsbucks

One of at least 72 varieties of Antelope on the Savannah

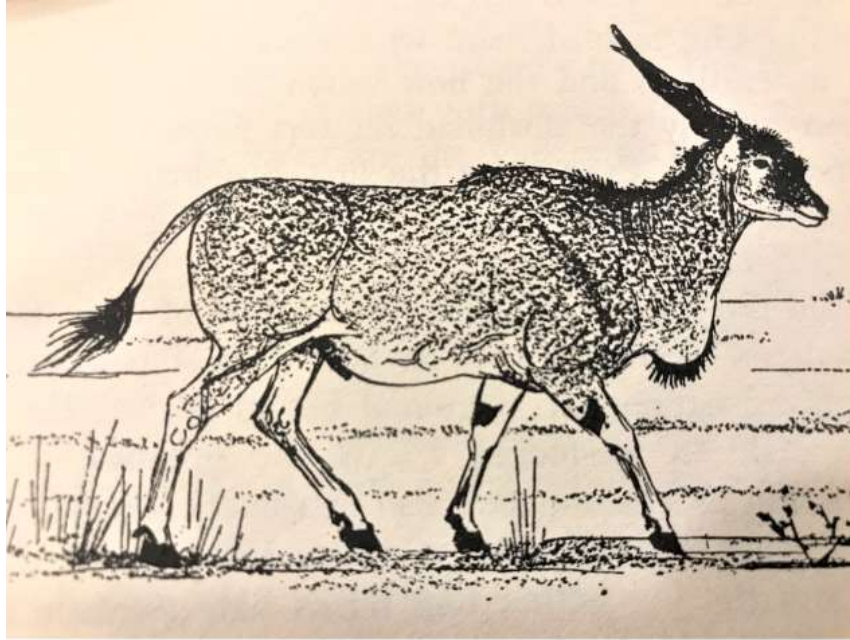
Other antelopes include the Steenbuck, Klipspringer, Bongo, Dik-Dik, Eland, Duiker, Wildebeest, Waterbuck, Impala, Bushbuck, and Gerenuk



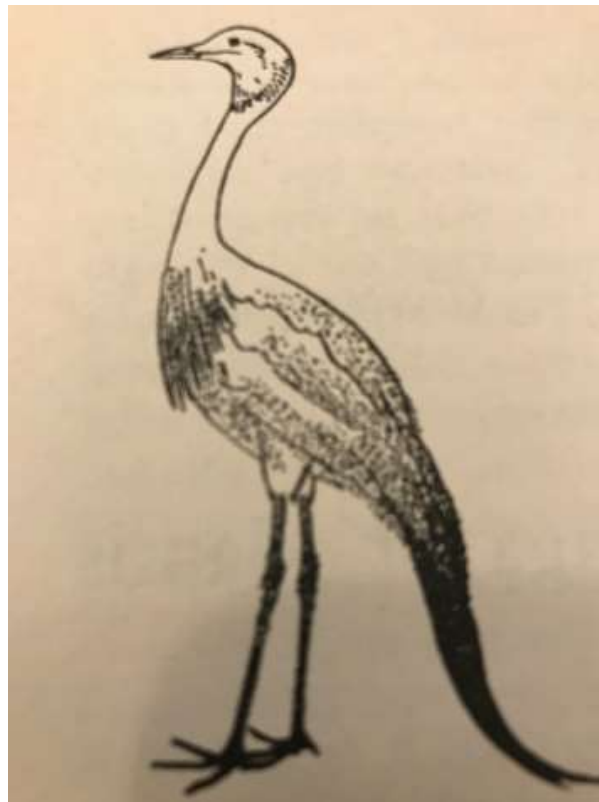
Homer and Hank the hippos

Head Life Guards at the watering hole

Homer: Coach of the "Savannah Rapids" swim team



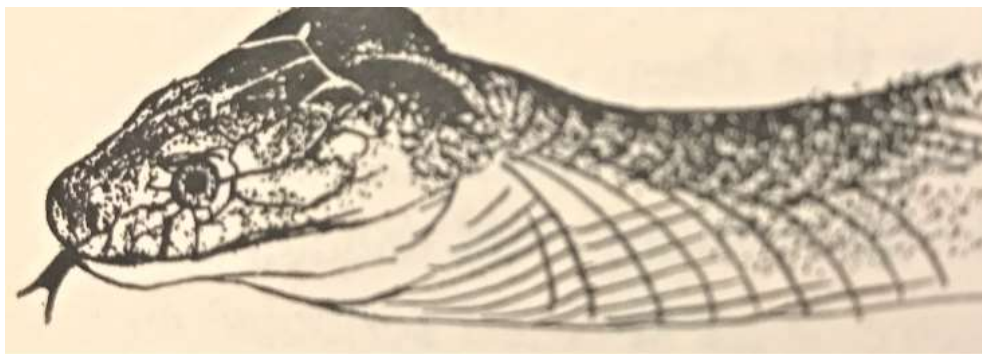
Eleanor the Elegant, Intelligent, and Eloquent Eland
Lilly the Lion's best friend

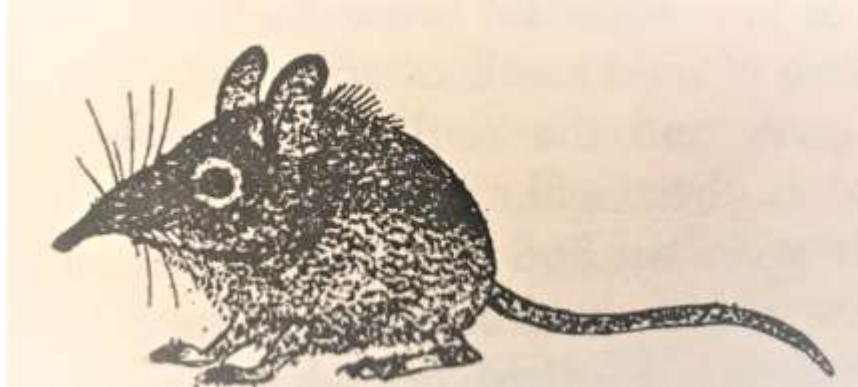


Bron-Bron the Blue Crane
Coach of the "Savannah Swish" basketball team

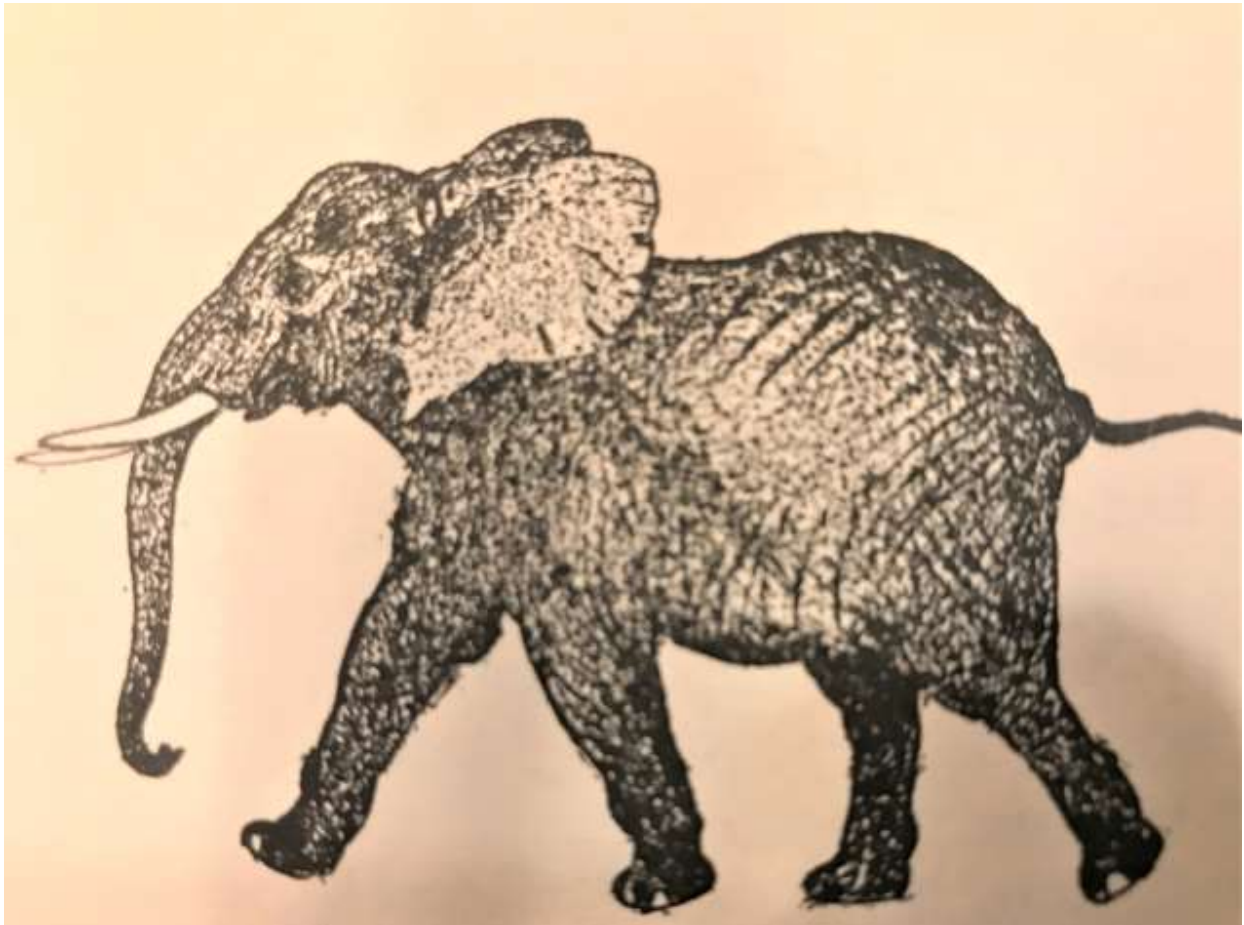


Kobe the Cobra
And his friend "The Mamba" (below)





Minnie the Mighty Long-Nosed Mouse
Point guard for the "Savannah Swish"



Ellie the Elephant
Executive director of the Watering Hole

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 1
Madeleine the Mongoose

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right from her forehead, but....Babs the Baboon, with yet another problem on the Savannah for Leo to address.

“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “Homer the Hippo has started a swim team, and that is a good thing. They are calling themselves the “Savannah Rapids.” But, some of the swimmers---Madeleine the Mongoose, in particular---have become much too competitive and are making life miserable for the other swimmers. Miss Mongoose is all about winning, beating, defeating the other swimmers. For her it is all about being better than the other swimmers. She wants to succeed, personally, but hopes all others will fail. For the others, this is taking much of the fun out of being on the team. Your daughter, Lilly the Lion, seems to be affected the most by this. Lilly is a very good swimmer. Miss Mongoose seems to worry that Lilly will become, or already is, a faster swimmer than she. So, Miss Mongoose has been saying mean things to Lilly, like ‘I’m going to beat you. You are not as good as you think.’ This is causing Lilly to lose her confidence and her desire to swim. It’s not just Lilly. Ellie the Elephant, Eleanor the Eland, and Minnie the Long-Nosed Mouse have been feeling bad, too, and are wanting to quit, all because of Miss Mongoose.”

Leo told Babs that he would meet with Lilly, Lilly's friends, and Homer the Hippo to discuss this problem. The next day they met at the south end of the watering hole. Leo listened to Lily's concerns, which were exactly as Babs had described.

Leo said, "I think the problem is that Madeleine the Mongoose does not understand the true meaning and spirit of competition. She does not understand that competition is not about beating, defeating, or being better than others. Maybe it would help if we try to explain to her that the word 'competition' comes from the two Latin words 'com,' which means 'with' or 'together' and 'petere,' which means 'to seek.' So, properly understood, 'competition' means 'to seek together.' It means 'seeking new heights together'---for example, seeking new heights of swimming ability, together. The goal is for all to get better and for all to enjoy the process of doing so."

"We can then go on to explain to Madeleine that the purpose of competition (racing against each other, for example) is to make the process of getting better more fun, spirited, and interesting. The spirit of competition is to answer the question: If we work really hard and together, how good can we get, individually and as a group? The spirit of competition is to dare to answer that question. Who wins the race is quite interesting, but is not nearly as important as all getting better and each finding out how successful they can be, if they dare to work really hard to find out. Whether a swimmer comes in first or last is not so important. Daring to answer to the question is what is important. So, competition is not really about winning, beating, defeating, or proving that you are better than others. It is about daring to answer the question—how good can we become, if we work really hard and together. It is about all getting better together and becoming the best that we can become. The competition is simply a way to answer the question and get better in a fun, spirited way."

Lilly and her friends immediately understood Leo's explanation of competition. Over the next several weeks they were able to enjoy the true spirit and purpose of swim competition and were able to ignore and not be bothered by Miss Mongoose's behavior. For them, being on the swim team was all about having fun getting better together. What mattered was answering the question. What mattered was "seeking new heights together." They kindly and gradually shared these understandings with Madeleine. Their hope was that by setting a good example and being patient, Madeleine the Mongoose would gradually come to a better understanding of the true meaning of competition. Indeed, she eventually did just that, and she became a happier swimmer, too.

Babs was pleased. She asked Sammy the Secretary Bird to chronicle this story, for posterity.

And that is the end of Chapter 1 of Leo the Lion, "King of Beasts in all of Africa"---Madeleine the Mongoose, a story about the true meaning and spirit of competition.

Good night.....

Leo the Lion Story

Chapter 2

The Wildebeests

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right from her forehead, but....Babs the Baboon, with yet another problem on the Savannah for Leo to address.

“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “There has been a fight between one of our antelopes and a huge Wildebeest from the other side of the Great Mountain. Wildebeests hardly ever come to our side of the Mountain; but two days ago a big teen-aged Wildebeest wandered over to our side and started to take a swim in our watering hole. One of our teen-aged antelopes, Kippy the Klipspringer, took offense and angrily told the Wildebeest that he was not welcome in our swimming hole and should go back to his side of the Mountain, ‘where he belonged.’ Kippy and the Wildebeest then got into a fight. Kippy’s nose got bloodied, and when the Wildebeest thundered back to the other side of the Great Mountain, he almost trampled several of our youngest antelopes on his way.”

“Then, yesterday, a dozen big, scary, teen-aged Wildebeests gathered near the Mountain, where their side of the savannah and our side meet. They stared disapprovingly at some of our antelopes who were grazing nearby. Now all of our young antelopes are scared, especially: Billie the Bongo, Rickie the Dik-Dik, Kippy the Klipspringer, Jimmy the Gemsbok, Eleanor the

Eland, Curtis the Kudu, Wally the Waterbuck, Isabella the Impala, and Bobby the Bushbuck. We are afraid that there is going to be another big fight.”

Leo thought for a moment; then asked Babs to gather all the antelopes---the children and their parents--at the south end of the watering hole at 4 o'clock that afternoon.

At 4 o'clock sharp Leo and Mercedes arrived at the watering hole. All the antelopes who lived in that part of the Savannah had gathered moments earlier. Leo sat among the antelopes and said, “What do you know about the Wildebeests?” Kippy said, “They are big, mean-looking, and scary.” “They are not from here; they are not like us,” said Bobby the Bushbuck. Then, Eleanor the Eland, in her usual elegant and eloquent way, said, “Actually, we do not know much about the Wildebeests, because we never go to their side of the Mountain and they hardly ever come to our side.”

“Did you know,” said Leo, “that Wildebeests are a type of antelope, just like you are types of antelopes?” A sudden loud gasp could be heard at the south end of the watering hole. The young antelopes were surprised to hear this. Their jaws dropped in unison. “Yes,” said Leo, “there are at least 72 different kinds of antelope in all of Africa, each magnificent in their own ways.” “I think it would be a good idea,” suggested Leo, “if a group of young antelopes from ‘our side’ of the Mountain were to travel to the ‘other side’ of the Mountain to meet the Wildebeests and get to know them better.”

The next day, a dozen young antelope, and their parents, travelled to the ‘other side’ of the Great Mountain. Eleanor the Eland organized and led the expedition. The parents brought food to share with the young Wildebeests and their parents. When the visiting group arrived, the Wildebeests were surprised to see them, but immediately welcomed them with warm smiles and open hearts. The Wildebeests shared fresh water from their watering hole, and both groups enjoyed a big feast. After the feast the young Wildebeests invited the visiting antelopes to swim in the Wildebeests’ watering hole. They tumbled about in the water in delight. The littlest antelopes loved it when the big, strong Wildebeests tossed them high in the air and gently caught them as they fell back into the water.

Late in the afternoon the visitors returned home. “How did it go?” asked Leo. The young antelopes smiled and said, “The Wildebeests are lots of fun and were really nice!! We plan to visit them frequently, and we have asked them to please visit us.” Kippy said, “The Wildebeest who bloodied my nose came up to me, gave me a gentle chest bump and a high-hoof, and we both apologized. We are now best friends.”

From then on, the Wildebeests were welcome anytime to visit their antelope friends on the other side of the Mountain. And, once per month the parents on both sides of the Mountain arranged for pot-luck get-togethers.

Babs was very pleased. Life was good on the Savannah. Sammy the Secretary Bird dutifully chronicled this event for posterity.

And that's the end of Chapter 2 of Leo the Lion, "King of Beasts in all of Africa" ---The Wildebeests, a story about getting along and more.

Good night....

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 3
The Magic of the Steenbuck

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right from her forehead, but....Babs the Baboon, with yet another problem on the Savannah for Leo to address.

“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “The hunters have come, and they are shooting at our most magnificent runners---our antelopes. All of our antelopes are scared, especially the young ones: Billie the Bongo, Rickie the Dik-Dik, Kippy the Klipspringer, Jimmy the Gemsbok, Eleanor the Eland, Curtis the Kudu, Winnie the Waterbuck, Isabella the Impala, and Bobby the Bushbuck---all of these little antelopes are so frightened that they are refusing to leave their homes. They are particularly afraid to go to the watering hole. We don’t know what to do!!”

Leo thought for a moment; then asked Babs to gather all of the antelopes---the children and their parents--at the south end of the watering hole at 4 o’clock that afternoon.

At 4 o’clock sharp Leo and Mercedes arrived at the watering hole. All of the antelopes who lived in that part of the Savannah had gathered moments earlier. Leo sat among the antelopes and said, “I would like to tell you a story. Have you heard of the magic of the Steenbuck?” “No,” they said in unison. “Well,” said Leo:

“One day a South African hunter, accompanied by a native Bushman guide, arrived in their Jeep Land Rover on the edge of the Kalihari desert, which is southwest of here, far behind the Great Mountain. Now, some of you young antelopes probably don’t know what a Bushman is. The Bushmen (or Bushpeople) are one of the “First Peoples” of Africa. They have lived in southern Africa for at least 22,000 years. Their culture is one of the oldest and wisest in Africa.”

“The people in the Bushman guide’s village were suffering from hunger, due to a prolonged drought. It had not rained for 103 days. The South African hunter had offered to hunt for antelope, which he would bring back to feed the hungry children in the village. The hunter and the Bushman guide were desperate to find any antelope---a springbok, a Steenbuck (also spelled Steenbok), a klipspringer, or ideally an Eland, or at least a Duiker (pronounced Dew-wee’-ker, with emphasis on the wee).”

“After many hours of sighting no antelopes, they finally came upon a little Steenbuck. Now, you have probably never heard of the Steenbuck, but they are a beautiful type of small antelope that live in that far-away savannah on the other side of the Great Mountain. Hunters have always considered the Steenbuck to be one of the most beautiful and most lovable antelopes in all of Africa. Steenbucks are known, too, for the extraordinarily neat and pretty nesting places they prepare for sleep and rest. The noise of the Land Rover woke this little Steenbuck from her nap. She rose out of her pretty bed.

“The Steenbuck stood at the end of a bare patch of crimson sand about 20 yards away from the hunter. She stood as still and fine drawn as an Etruscan statuette of herself. Her delicate ears were pointed in the direction of the hunter, her great purple eyes wide open, utterly without fear and shining only with the wonder of seeing so strange a sight at this remote back door of life.”

“The hunter shot quickly, before the sight of the Steenbuck’s gentle being weakened his resolve to shoot her. The hunter missed, much to his surprise. The shot merely made the little Steenbuck shake her delicate head vigorously to rid her ears of the tingle of the shock from the gun’s explosion. Otherwise, she showed no trace of alarm. The hunter took more careful aim and shot a second time. Again he missed. Still, the little Steenbuck was not afraid. She just turned her head slightly to sniff at the wind raised by the bullet when it passed close to her ears. The hunter then continued to shoot until he nearly ran out of bullets, and the Steenbuck still stood there, unhurt, observing the hunter’s Land Rover keenly, as if trying to discover what the extraordinary commotion was all about. Then, a final shot succeeded merely in slightly nicking the saffron petal of one of the Steenbuck’s ears. Only then did the Steenbuck whisk swiftly away, a look of reproach in her eyes. The sun flashing briefly on the tips of her black polished toes, she vanished with a nimble bound into the scrub.”

“The hunter then asked the Bushman how it could be that his gunshots would miss the Steenbuck, especially at such short range. The Bushman smiled and said, *‘the Steenbuck is protected with great magic and is very difficult to kill.’*”

“The hunter later learned that the ‘Magic of the Steenbuck’ was that of the innocent, the gentle, and the beautiful combined in one. It was a creature, or it could be a person, too beautiful to be aware of imperfection, too innocent to know fear, too gentle to suspect violence. IT ANTICIPATES ONLY GOODNESS.”

*“The Bushman explained that the Steenbuck is completely different from the Duiker, which is another type of antelope that also lives far away on the other side of the Great Mountain. *The heart of the Duiker is full of suspicion and fear. When it hears the first strange sound, it assumes the worst and bounds away as fast as it can without a backward glance. The Steenbuck, however, when disturbed, stands up, slips out quietly from its place which it has made more prettily than any other animal on the veld and wherein it always feels itself to be lying so nicely. It stands quietly beside its place and looks without fear out of its great eyes, its little ears trembling and nicely pointed, to see what the wonderful noise could be all about.*”*

“The Steenbuck stands there, all the time looking so nicely and acting so prettily that the person who has come hunting it begins to feel he must look nicely upon the Steenbuck and act prettily, too. The hunter then suddenly senses that there is a ‘Steenbuck person’ immediately behind him, or within him, who wants him to act as nicely and prettily as the Steenbuck. When the hunter aims to shoot the Steenbuck, the Steenbuck person behind him, or within him, tugs at his arm and makes him miss. Such is the magic of the Steenbuck; it has ‘Steenbuck persons’ to protect it; its elegance, dignity, innocence, gentleness, self-respect, and belief in goodness bring out the Steenbuck person in all of us, including the hunter.”

Leo continued, “I think the Bushpeople believe there is a ‘Steenbuck person’ within all of us. It is a part of us, deep inside, that reminds us and helps us to be kind, gentle, caring, and good to others and to see the goodness in others and in life. The Steenbuck, standing kindly and calmly next to her neat, pretty bed, reminds us not only of the Steenbuck person within ourselves, but the Steenbuck person in all of us. The Bushpeople believe all children, like the Steenbuck, are born innocent, gentle, trusting, curious, able to sense the goodness and wonderment of life. Children in the Bushman’s village are taught to honor and nourish the Steenbuck person inside them by drawing on its magic for strength and guidance, especially when they are afraid or tempted to be unkind.”

“Sometimes children in the village forget about the Steenbuck person within them and become suspicious and fearful, like the Duiker, who senses threat everywhere and runs from everything. Or worse, some begin to behave like violent, angry hyenas? But, the Steenbuck persons within other children work their magic to help those who have become fearful and angry to remember, honor, and free the Steenbuck person within themselves. That is how children in the Bushman’s village help each other. That is how the Bushman’s village becomes filled with the collective spirit of its Steenbuck persons.”

“The hunter then asked the Bushman, ‘If the Steenbuck is so protected, does it ever get killed by the hunter?’ ‘Yes, of course’ said the Bushman, *‘Steenbucks sometimes are killed, despite*

their magic, just as the Duiker is killed in spite of his speed and suspiciousness. Yet, most Steenbuck survive, more than do Duikers. How could so small and defenseless an animal have survived in a world full of powerful enemies without great magic?"

"The hunter and the Bushman returned to the Bushman's village empty-handed, with no Steenbuck, no Duiker, no antelope of any kind. But, it did not matter. In the meantime the rains had come, crops were beginning to grow, and the village was celebrating. Perhaps the rains, too, were brought by the Magic of the Steenbuck?"

With his story ended, Leo turned to the children gathered at the south end of the watering hole. They were all calmly smiling and looked so peaceful, beautiful, innocent, gentle, and kind. It was as if the Steenbuck person within each of them was beaming and working its magic. Leo and Mercedes walked back up the hill, with a bounce in their steps. The children played joyfully around the watering hole.

The hunters had left, empty-handed, not to return for a long time. If the hunters ever did return, the young antelopes knew what to do. They would not be afraid.

And that is the end of Chapter 3 of Leo the Lion, "King of Beasts in All of Africa"--the Magic of the Steenbuck---a story about the magical goodness and beauty within each of us, which is amplified by the magical goodness and beauty within all of us; a story about the power of gentleness, innocence, grace, dignity, and self-respect.

Good night....

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 4
Kaggen the Praying Mantis

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

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“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “Several of the young animals, Madeleine the Mongoose and some of the antelopes in particular, found a praying mantis and were teasing it unmercifully---poking at it, knocking it over, laughing at its gangly appearance and its big bug eyes.” Before Babs could finish this sentence, Leo and Mercedes both jumped to their feet and gasped so loudly that several acacia leaves shook and fell to the ground. Rarely had Babs seen Leo react with such alarm.

Babs quickly added: “As soon as I found them doing this, I instantly shooed them away, protected the poor mantis, scolded them, and sent them to their parents. Their parents were not as upset as the two of you and I. In fact, their parents were more critical of me for scolding their children than they were upset with their own children. Their attitude was, ‘What’s the big deal, Babs?’”

Leo listened, thought for a moment, then suggested that Babs gather the young animals and their parents at the south end of the watering hole at 4 PM that same afternoon.

When Leo, Mercedes, and Babs met with the group, Leo started by asking: “What do you know about the praying mantis? Do you know what my dear friends, the Bushpeople, believe the Mantis represents? Do you know what the Bushpeople call the mantis? Do you know what the Bushpeople believe the mantis has done for all living things?” There was silence at the south end of the watering hole. Neither the parents nor their young ones had any idea what Leo was about to explain.

“According to the Bushpeople, the praying mantis is the ‘Great Hero of Creation,’” explained Leo. *“The mantis is their symbol of ‘The First Spirit of Creation’ and the symbol of the ‘Spirit of Wholeness in Life.’ They believe it was the mantis that first gave things their names. It was the mantis who planted the seed of the first human being, in the protective bosom of a flower. It was mantis who brought fire—a deed for which he is nick-named ‘Old maker of fire,’ or ‘Old tinder box.’ The mantis could be called ‘The Bushman’s God’ but they have never used that phrase. They do not view the mantis as a God. Instead, they view the mantis as a spiritual symbol. They gave mantis the name Kaggen.”*

One of the parents then asked, “Why did the Bushpeople not choose one of the larger, more magnificent creatures of Africa to be their spiritual symbol? Why did they not choose the Elephant, the mighty Water Buffalo, the Cheetah, or the Lion? Why choose such a small and lowly insect to be their symbol of the Great Hero, The First Spirit of Creation?”

Leo paused, and thought for a long time. “I don’t think I fully understand why they chose the mantis, or exactly what the mantis means to the Bushpeople. But, I think the choice has something to do with the importance the Bushpeople place on humility. The mantis is a humble creature. The mantis walks close to the ground. The Bushpeople are able to see greatness in the small and magnificence in the humble. When the Bushpeople come upon the mantis, they gently kneel down in gratefulness to pay their respects, and *they see a creature that, itself, is absorbed in an attitude of complete reverence, his strange head always a little on one side of the wind as if waiting for it to bring to its listening ear the still small voice of the first spirit, as if listening for something that we cannot hear. With all that, there is something curiously human about his face. Its heart shape, pointed chin, high cheek bones, and yellow skin---much like the face of the Bushpeople. Besides, his eyes are extraordinarily big and bright, as if capable of extra perception, as if capable of understanding things that we cannot.* For all these reasons, the Bushpeople revere the mantis and view the mantis as a symbol of ‘The First Spirit of

Creation,’ and an important symbol of gratitude, humility, and reverence for the gift and the goodness of life. To the Bushpeople it is the attitude of the mantis that is worthy of emulation.”

Another parent asked, “Leo, do you believe the mantis is the ‘Great Hero of Creation?’ Do you believe as the Bushpeople believe?” Leo again paused and thought for a long time. “I believe there is great meaning and great sense to life---meaning and sense that we can only partially come to know---and when we are in close touch with that meaning and sense, we are filled with a spirit of gratitude, kindness, and humility that generates even more meaning and sense to our lives. The reverent stance of the humble praying mantis reminds me of this. Perhaps that is why the Bushpeople chose Kaggen as one of their most important spiritual symbols. I think they were wise. Like the mantis, the Bushpeople understood the importance of reverence, gratitude, and humility.”

Just then, the praying mantis who had been teased by the young animals suddenly appeared in the midst of the large gathering at the south end of the watering hole. A collective gasp could be heard; then all became so quiet that one could hear an acacia leaf drop to the ground on the hill behind. All the animals slowly knelt before the mantis, being careful to not get too close or to scare the reverend creature. The mantis cocked his head in one direction, then another, all around the circle of gathered animals, as if to personally thank each for their presence. One by one, the kind, knowing eyes of the mantis met those of each animal. The mantis then appeared to lead the group in a humble prayer of gratitude for the Great Meaning, the Great Sense, and the Great Goodness of life.

And, that’s the end of Chapter 4 of Leo the Lion—“King of Beasts in All of Africa”---Kaggen the Praying Mantis---a story about reverence, gratitude, humility, and the great meaning and sense of life.

Good night...

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 5
The *Savannah Swish* Basketball Team

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right from her forehead, but....Babs the Baboon, with yet another problem on the Savannah for Leo to address.

“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “Bron-Bron the Blue Crane kindly agreed to start a basketball team for the teen-aged boys on the savannah. Curtis the Kudu, Billie the Bongo, Rickie the Dik-Dik, Jack the Jackal, Kobe the Cobra, Scooter the Hare, and several others have joined the team. But, discipline has been a huge problem. The boys just want to fool around, they are not working hard, they are out of shape, they don’t listen to Bron-Bron, they are purposefully farting during the team huddles and giggling about it, and some are pouting when they don’t get the ball or when they miss a shot. Bron-Bron has become so frustrated that he feels like refusing to be their coach. Today, Bron-Bron asked me to seek your advice.”

Leo suggested that Bron-Bron assemble the team at the south end of the watering hole at 4 PM that afternoon. Leo met with Bron-Bron at 3 PM to make plans for the meeting. Bron-Bron was one of Leo’s favorite sports figures on the savannah. He was the most admired basketball player ever to play on the savannah. Several years ago Bron-Bron had led his local savannah team to the All-Africa championship. The championship game was against the Kenyan All-Stars whose

center was a Goliath Heron, the tallest heron on the planet (wingspan 7 feet 6 inches, height 5 feet). Bron-Bron's team out-hustled the Kenyan team and had much better teamwork. It was Bron-Bron's basketball intelligence and attitude that made him such a great player. He deeply understood the philosophy and value of sports. He understood the true meaning of competition and the importance of selfless teamwork. He understood not only the necessity for hard work, but the joy that comes from it. In their planning meeting Leo simply encouraged Bron-Bron to share these understandings with the boys.

At 4 PM Bron-Bron stood in front of the boys. Leo stayed in the background. Bron-Bron said, "Boys, I want to explain 4 simple rules to you:

First, I want you to have fun, and I will give you a lot of freedom to have fun. But, when I think you are getting too rambunctious or too rowdy, I am going to say, STOP, and when I say STOP, I expect you to immediately stop what you are doing and listen attentively to me. So, the rule is: **You can have fun; but, when I say STOP, you have to STOP**, immediately. That's the deal. Those who do not stop will be dismissed from practice.

Second, I want you to realize that **the harder you work now, the more fun you will have later**. The harder you work now to get into top physical shape (by running, running, and running even harder, up and down the basketball court during practice), the easier it will be to run in the games we play later---and the easier it is to run, the more fun it is to play. If you do not work hard now, you will not get into good physical shape, it will be hard to run up and down the court during games, you will always be short of breath and feel tired, and it will be no fun to play that way in the games. So, the harder you work now, the more fun you will have later. That's the Truth, and that's the deal.

Third, **no head-hanging!** When you miss a shot, don't hang your head, don't pout. Instead, tell yourself, "That's okay, I'll do better next time." No head-hanging. That just drags you and everyone else down.

Fourth, you must **understand the true meaning of competition**. Competition is about seeking new heights together. It is about daring to answer the question: how good can we become, if we work really hard and together. It is not about beating, defeating, being better than others, making others feel inferior. It is about helping each other to become better, together, and making the process fun. The true meaning of competition is not easy to understand. We will talk more about this throughout the season. You will never have good teamwork until everyone fully understands the true meaning of competition. And, by the way, the more teamwork you have, the more fun and success you will have.

So, those are the four rules. Those are the deals. Now, let's have fun, and let's work hard, and together, so that we can have even more fun later on and so we can answer "the question."

"Oh, wait, one last thing," added Bron-Bron. "there is a fifth rule, and it has to do with behavior during our team huddles. I'll let you figure that one out."

These rules made sense to the boys. They worked hard, they worked together, they learned, they grew, and they had a great, fun season.

Babs was pleased. Sammy the Secretary Bird recorded these Social Truths for posterity.

And that's the end of Chapter 5 of Leo the Lion, "King of Beasts in all of Africa" ---the *Savannah Swish* basketball team, a story about how "the harder you work now, the more fun you have later." A story about discipline and the true meaning and spirit of competition.

Good night...

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 6
The Ratel and the Honey Diviner

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right from her forehead, but....Babs the Baboon, with yet another problem on the Savannah for Leo to address.

“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was out of breath, but she was not agitated. After catching her breath, she said, “Leo, I have a favor to ask of you:”

Babs continued, “Two of our young antelope, Billie the Bongo and Rickie the Dik-Dik would like to hike to the Great Mountain to explore it. They have never been there before. Their parents would feel more comfortable if you and Mercedes would go with them, to keep them safe and make sure they do not get lost.”

Leo and Mercedes nodded at each other, and Leo said, “Sure, we would be happy to accompany them. In fact, I think Lilly the Lion and her best friend, Eleanor the Eland, would like to join us.” That turned out to be true. So, the next morning the 6 of them met at the south end of the watering hole and headed to Great Mountain---a good 3-hour hike.

Half-way to the mountain the hiking group noticed that a thorny bush on the left side of the trail, 60 yards ahead of them, *was being violently agitated, and then an animal burst out of it like a halfback breaking from a loose scrum in pursuit of the ball. It had a shining coal-black face, pointed nose, and eyes like mid-night sequins. Its shoulders were broad; its body long, with a skin so loose that it shook like jelly and yet was thick and black as armor plating. Its back was covered with rusty hair, its legs short and shaped like a bow. The air of determination about it*

was extreme, almost to the point of caricature. Seeing it streaking in the direction of the thunder (it was about to rain, you see), the 6 hikers were so amazed that they gasped loudly, in unison.

Their gasps caused the animal to stop some 50 yards away and turn around. It glared at the hikers utterly without fear, as if daring them to come near; but since the hikers stood still, it merely warned them with a sound somewhere between a whistle and a hiss to mind their own business. Then, it whisked about and trundled on, the dust spirting at its claws. The hikers were uncertain as to what this animal was. The animal that Mercedes thought it might be normally wore a neat coat of gray hair with white stripes over a formal black waistcoat and trousers, not the rust-colored sort of football jersey of the little busy-body hastening towards the rain.

"What is that?" exclaimed Lilly. "It is a ratel," said Leo, "otherwise known as a honey badger. I know of no creature in the world so without fear, so dedicated to his own way of life and so determined to never quit. That animal can take care of himself better than any other animal in the world."

"What does he eat?" asked Eleanor. "He eats grubs and beetles, like that there," Leo said, pointing at an insect with long Chippendale legs and a white edge around its flat back. The beetle, which defends itself by squirting acid into the eyes of its enemies, had appeared close by Leo's feet. When Leo moved a toe, the insect lifted a leg, tilted sideways, and ejected at Leo a squirt of liquid that looked fiery in the sun. Considering the size of the insect, the force and length of the jet were prodigious. Leo continued, "the ratel likes to eat beetles, centipedes, scorpions, ants, and snakes. Oh, he likes snakes, that one! There is no greater killer of snakes than he."

"The skin of the ratel was so thick," Leo explained, "that the fangs of no snake, not even the mamba, could penetrate it. When the ratel saw a snake, he would immediately go after it and not stop until he had killed it. He would even follow snakes into their holes and fight it out there with all the odds against him. The ratel did not know what it was to surrender or give up. All the animals knew that, and small as he was, they preferred to leave him alone. It is said that long ago a hungry lion once attacked a ratel, and the ratel fought back so effectively that, although the ratel was killed in the end, the lion was left too mangled and too exhausted to eat it. Since then, lions have left ratels alone".

"But, the ratel has one great friend", Leo went on to say. "Have you ever seen the little bird that comes fluttering out of the bush to perch on a branch where one can both see and hear it clearly crying, 'Quick! Quick! Quick! Honey! Quick!' Have you heard such a bird call?"

"That bird is the ratel's best friend: they are so close you could say that they sleep under the same skin. They work together to take honey from beehives. Now the ratel we have just seen is in such a hurry because he is on his way to join his friend. He knows that where the rain is

falling, there his friend will be to keep a pair of bright eyes on the bees making honey out of the flowers which had quickly blossomed, thanks to the rain. When the amber combs are full of honey in the house of the bees, the bird will come calling for the ratel. Whatever he is doing, the ratel will drop it and follow, holding his tail slightly arched just above his back and looking up only to keep an eye on his friend. Every 50 paces or so the bird will alight on a bush, look back to make sure his friend is following, and in case he is lost, will repeat his call (Quick! Quick! Quick! Honey! Quick!) The ratel will answer in his own tongue with a soft whistling sound to reassure him: 'Look! Look! Look! Oh! Person with wings, Look! Here I come!'"

"Of all the sounds in the world," said Leo, "that is the best to hear: friend calling friend. When the sounds cease, one knows that the ratel is taking out the honey. But, if one listens very closely, one can hear the excited little bird bubbling with small noises like water coming out of a fountain. For in all the world no living things love honey the way those two do. They will eat it up, side by side, like the friends they are, each one choosing what he likes best."

"Of course, the little bird helps men sometimes in the same way, but only when he cannot find the ratel. He prefers the ratel to men." "Why?" asked Lilly. Leo looked infinitely wise and a little sad, remarking, "Auck! Lilly, men these days too often want too much. This has not always been so. When the human race was very young (humans first appeared 200,000-300,000 years ago), the bird had preferred men to the ratel. But, the bird has learned in recent times that men more and more take the best and the most for themselves and leave the least and the worst for the bird. Not so the ratel. He gives his friend the same honey he gives himself, and as a result they are closer friends than ever."

Leo continued to explain that, "Men had come to realize that the honey-diviner preferred the ratel to them. So, they would walk about in the bird's favorite places, imitating the call of the ratel. The bird would come eagerly to them and guide them to the honey. But when the bird saw how he had been deceived, he would tell the ratel the next time they met. The men then needed to be careful, because if they ever tried that again, the ratel would follow them and attack them. And when a ratel bites, he does not let go until he has bitten through. You can beat him on the head, stick spears in him, but he does not let go until he has finished what he came to do. Many men have been punished in this way by the ratel."

Billy the Bongo was bursting with a question: "How does the ratel get the honey out of the beehive without getting stung by the bees? It can't be easy. The ratel's body is all right inside that thick skin of his; but what about his face and eyes and fine nose. How does he protect himself?"

"Well," said Leo, "the ratel is very clever. When the ratel has spotted the entrance to the house of the bees, he is very careful to approach it backwards, with his tail tucked in right behind his

legs. When he feels himself to be close, he will flick up his tail quickly, jam his behind fast into the entrance of the hive, and before the bees inside can even wonder why it is suddenly night, he will let off one terrible smell after another straight into the hive. Billy, you cannot know how bad that smell is until you have smelt it! The bees cannot stand it. They fall down, all those who are inside, as if dead, and the others smelling it from afar keep well away. Then the ratel turns about and quickly scoops out the honey for himself and his friend.

Upon hearing this, Billy the Bongo and Ricky the Dik-Dik thought it was the funniest thing they had ever heard. Both rolled over and over on the ground, holding their sides in laughter, until they were so out of breath they could laugh no more. In slightly disgusted amazement, Lilly and Eleanor watched as the boys writhed in uncontrollable laughter. They both turned to Leo and, with more than a hint of annoyance in their voices, asked, "Why do boys find such silly and disgusting things so funny?" Leo had no answer. Eleanor offered her opinion, "Maybe they are just easily amused."

After the boys collected themselves, the six hikers continued their journey to the Great Mountain and back to the watering hole. What they found at Great Mountain is a story for another day.

And that is the end of Chapter 6, of Leo the Lion, "King of Beasts in all of Africa"---the Ratel and the Honey Diviner---a story about dogged determination, interdependence, true collaboration, and genuine friendship.

Good night....

Leo the Lion Story

Chapter 7

A Sewer System for the Savannah

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

Then, as usual, they woke up at the exact same moment. Leo opened his right eye and looked up to Mercedes; Mercedes opened his left eye and looked down at Leo. Their eyes met, they smiled gently at each other, and this was their signal that nap time was over.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

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“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so agitated and out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “Leo, we have a big problem on the Savannah!”

Babs went on to say: “Almost all of the young animals in our part of the savannah are suffering from diarrhea! It is an epidemic, and we don’t know why it’s happening or what to do about it.”

Leo thought for a moment, then asked Babs to gather all the parents at the south end of the watering hole that evening. In the meantime, Leo and Mercedes walked down the hill, circled the watering hole, and surveyed the land where most of the animals lived.

At the evening meeting Leo spoke: “Mercedes and I have checked things out and have concluded that we need to build a sewer system for our part of the savannah. We think the children are getting diarrhea from drinking contaminated water from the north end of the swimming hole.” A sudden loud collective gasp could be heard from the listening animals. Leo continued, “There are too many bacteria in that part of the watering hole, and that is because we do not have a sewer system. Our survey of the land shows that most of our animal homes are on a small hill near the north end of the watering hole. When the young animals need to poop, they have often been doing so on the side of the hill that slopes down to the watering

hole. Then, when it rains, bacteria within the poop trickle down and flow into the watering hole at the north end.” Another gasp was heard from the parents. “When the young animals drink that water, they drink in too many bacteria and get sick with diarrhea,” Leo continued to explain.

“The way to solve this problem is to create a sewer system.” Leo then pulled out a detailed drawing, a map of sorts, that he and Mercedes had prepared (see below). “It starts with each family digging a latrine on the side of the hill that slopes away from the watering hole---the side of the hill that faces the Great Mountain. The latrine can be three feet deep, three feet wide, and three feet long. That is where the animals should poop.”

“In addition to that, we will lay several long six-inch diameter hollow bamboo pipes, end-to-end, that run from the bottom of the latrine down the slope of the hill that faces the Great Mountain. Each pipe will be 10 feet long and will have many holes drilled into its sides. To lay the pipe, we will need to dig a long two-foot deep trench, that starts from the bottom of the latrine and extends 40 feet down the slope of the hill. We will place sand on the bottom of the trench, then place the pipe on the bottom of the trench, then cover the pipe with more sand, so that the pipe is surrounded by sand. After four pipes have been placed, end-to-end, along the bottom of the trench that slopes down the hill (that faces the Great Mountain), the trench will be filled up with dirt, so that the piping is completely buried, no longer visible. Each family is asked to dig a latrine and lay pipes in this fashion.”

“But, Leo, how do the pipes work to solve the problem?” asked Ellie the Elephant’s mother. “Well,” said Leo, “When the poop and the pee land in the latrine, the poop eventually liquifies and seeps to the bottom of the latrine. Then, the liquid flows from the bottom of the latrine into and through the carefully lain pipes. As the liquid flows through the pipes, it oozes through the holes in the pipe and flows into the surrounding sand, where it is out of harm’s way and gets purified by the sand and its constituents. That liquid then seeps deep into the earth. This process keeps the liquid from flowing to the surface or to any place where it could cause harm. And, this system would certainly keep our watering hole clean.

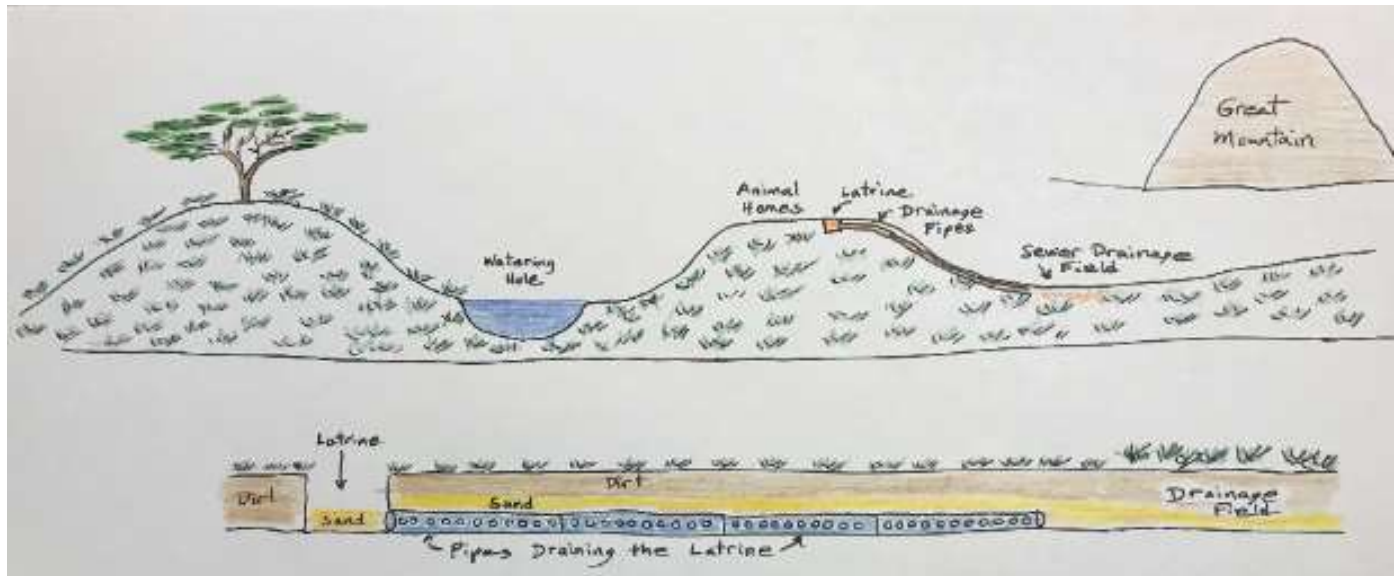
Over the next two weeks the animal families worked together to build a latrine and lay piping near each family’s home---first working on one family’s system, then moving on to build the next family’s system, and so on, until each family had its own system. In the meantime, the children with diarrhea were treated with small amounts of clean, clear liquids, given at frequent intervals, until they got better, which only took a few days for each.

After the savannah sewer system was finally finished, all the animals celebrated by swimming together in the watering hole, which had become cleaner and more refreshing than ever before.

Babs was very pleased. Sammy the Secretary Bird made certain to chronicle this event in case it might be helpful to other villages on the savannah.

And that is the end of Chapter 7 of Leo the Lion, King of Beasts in all of Africa---A Sewer System for the Savannah, a story about public health and public activity.

Good night.....



Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 8
The Lion Who Did Not Want to be King

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below; with his best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, to-and-fro in his little red hammock high atop the same acacia tree.

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Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did a triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed deftly on Leo’s soft mane. Bouncing off Leo, he stood before him and joyfully asked: “Are you ready for the rest of the day!”

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“What is it, Babs?” said Leo. Babs was so out of breath that she could hardly speak. Finally, catching her breath, she said, “No problem today, Leo. I just came up to check on you. I have sensed that something might be bothering you.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, I do have a bit of a problem,” said Leo. I am very often called ‘The King of Beasts in all of Africa’ and I am quite uncomfortable being called that---for several reasons.

“For one thing, the word ‘King’ is so 19th and 20th century, so British Empire. It is the British Empire that has always believed in Kings and the idea of hierarchy. And, the British Empire has believed in the awful ideas of imperialism and colonialism---which means they think it is okay to take over and exploit other countries. Since the late 1800s Britain and other European countries have colonized Africa, enslaving many African people and killing African animals just for sport.”

“I don’t believe in the idea of kings, hierarchy, imperialism, colonialism, exploitation, slavery, and killing for sport. I don’t want to be associated with those ideas. I believe in equality and respect for all living things. For that reason alone, I don’t want to be called king. Incidentally,

when I say 'equality' I don't mean 'all vegetation on a level---tall spears of grass and little oak trees'¹---I mean all living things deserve to be honored and treated with dignity.

"Furthermore, placing the kings at the top sends a message that men are more capable and more deserving to be leaders than are women. I don't think that is true. Females, quite obviously, are fully capable of being great leaders and doing great things. We don't need kings. Look at you, Babs. You are a deeply caring being who quickly recognizes problems that need to be addressed; and you get them addressed. The other animals come to you; they trust you; you are a natural leader. You often come to me for advice, but you have solved many problems on your own. I'm flattered when you ask me for help, but you are perfectly capable of solving problems without me. Afterall, you are a beloved 'grandmother' figure for all the young animals on the Savannah, and deservedly so."

Finally, I am not a beast, and none of us is a beast. We are animals, and all of us are precious and valuable in our own ways. We are not beasts.

So, for all these reasons I am uncomfortable being called 'The King of Beasts in all of Africa.' I would rather be called, simply, Leo the Lion, or just Leo."

Babs thought for a moment, then said, "I understand, and I fully agree. It is important to remember our history---that once Africa was ruthlessly ruled by the British Empire and other European countries, that many African people were enslaved, that animals were killed for mere sport, and that it was then that the Lion was declared to be the 'King of Beasts in all of Africa.' But, I agree, it is time to stop using the imperialistic language of the Empires and their kings. I will start thinking of you as 'The Once-Declared King of Beasts in All of Africa' who rightly prefers to simply be called Leo the Lion."

"Thank you, Babs," said Leo. "I agree that we must remember our history and learn from it. We need to share that memory with the young animals on the Savannah---not just because of what went on during the 19th and 20th centuries, but because of the exploitation that is still going on in Africa today. I am comfortable with you occasionally calling me 'The Once-Declared King of Beasts in All of Africa,' or at least putting 'King of Beasts in all of Africa' in quotes, particularly in front of the young animals, because it will spark conversation about where that title came from, historically, and why it is not an appropriate title.

Babs gave Leo a big hug. Leo was very pleased. Babs promised Leo that she would make sure that Sammy the Secretary Bird recorded these Social Truths for posterity.

And that is the end of Chapter 8 of Leo the Lion, "The Once-Declared King of Beasts in All of Africa"---The Lion who did not want to be called King, a story about the importance of history and the evolution of thinking.

Good night.....

¹A quote from Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*.

Leo the Lion Story
Chapter 9
A Lilac Blooms on the Savannah

Leo the Lion, “King of beasts in all of Africa,” was not, on this day, taking his usual and customary afternoon nap, in the shade of his favorite acacia tree, high on the hill overlooking the savannah and the watering hole below. His best friend, Mercedes the Monkey, was taking his usual nap, swinging above, to-and-fro, fro-and-to, in his little red hammock high atop the acacia tree.

But, when Mercedes woke up, opened his left eye, and looked down at Leo, there was no Leo. “Where is Leo?” thought Mercedes.

Mercedes swung widely on his hammock, flipped into the air, did his usual triple flip with a half gainer and two and a half twists, and landed softly where Leo’s mane usually would be.

When... who should come huffing and puffing and puffing and huffing up the hill, with beads of sweat spraying to the left and right, but....no, not Babs the Baboon, but Leo himself.

“What is it, Leo?” asked a worried Mercedes. Leo was so out of breath and so excited that he could hardly speak. Finally, catching his breath, he said, “Mercedes, we have a new baby for the Savannah!! At noon today, Laila gave birth to a healthy baby lion. Lilly has a sister and Laila and I have a new daughter!!

“How wonderful!” shouted Mercedes. “Congratulations, Leo!”

“Come, Mercedes, please join us at the south end of the watering hole where we are having a big celebration. All the animals on our part of the savannah will be there.”

That afternoon all the animals gathered to greet and bless the new baby lion. Babs had organized a pot-luck dinner. Leo began the celebration by announcing that they were calling the new baby “Lilac”---“Lilac the Lion.” Laila said, “She reminds us of the fresh, beautiful lilac blossoms that delight us each and every spring.”

One by one, the animals came up to gently place their hands on Lilac’s golden head and press her golden paws.

Stephanie the Steenbuck was the first to greet the new baby. She stood elegantly in front of Lilac, then kneeled on her front legs to see and sniff Lilac more closely. Stephanie’s “great purple eyes” shined and smiled with endless wonder. The “saffron petals” of Stephanie’s ears were pointed high to hear Lilac’s every precious breath. With amazement Stephanie said, “She is so innocent, gentle, and beautiful---all combined in one. May Lilac always be brave and

confidently believe in Goodness.” With that, she turned to rejoin the gathered crowd, which had not only swelled in number but in spirit.

Then, the Duiker, who, along with Stephanie, was visiting this part of the savannah, stepped forward. Having learned from his Steenbuck friend, the Duiker bowed his head, then lifted it high and said, “May Lilac learn to not be full of fear, suspicion, and doubt; may she run towards life’s challenges, instead of ducking and running from them; may she be bravely open to the wonders and goodness of life.” With that, the Duiker rejoined his new friend, the Steenbuck, and stood next to her with his head held confidently high.

Then, Henry the Honey Badger, with his best friend, Harvey the Honey Diviner perched on his shoulder, approached the sleeping Lilac. “May Lilac learn to be determined, to never quit; and may she appreciate interdependence, collaboration, genuine sharing, and the true meaning of friendship.” With that, the two inseparable buddies---the ratel and his little bird friend--- re-joined the crowd.

Then, Madeleine the Mongoose approached Lilac. A soft gasp could be heard from where Lilly the Lion and Eleanor the Eland were standing, as they worried audibly about what Madeleine might say. But, Madeleine surprised everyone: “May Lilac learn the true meaning of competition and experience the joys of that understanding.” Then, Madeleine deliberately walked over to stand between Lilly and Eleanor, with one arm outstretched to hug Lilly and the other to hug Eleanor.

Then, Homer the Hippo and Bron Bron the Blue Crane came to pay their respects to Lilac. Bron Bron spoke for the two of them; “As Lilac grows, may she experience the joys of teamwork and learn that the harder she works, the more fun she will have later; may she have lots of fun, but honor when it is time to stop.”

Then, Wally the Wildebeest, representing all the Wildebeests from the other side of the mountain, came up to greet Lilac. “Welcome to the savannah, Lilac,” he said. “As soon as you are able, please come visit your Wildebeest family on the other side of the mountain. I look forward to tossing you high in the air in our watering hole, and yours.” The gathered animals let out three cheers of great approval, and Kippy the Klipspringer and Billy the Bong Bong high-hooved and chest-bumped Wally as he returned to the crowd.

Then, suddenly, the Mantis appeared in the midst of the gathered animals. Mantis slowly and reverently made his way to Lilac. All became so silent that one could hear a leaf drop from Leo’s favorite acacia tree on the hill behind. As Mantis knelt before Lilac, all the animals knelt. Mantis then led the gathering in a prayer of gratitude for the arrival of the beautiful, innocent, gentle bundle of Goodness---Lilac.

Then, Leo and Laila shared how pleased and blessed they felt to have their precious Lilac and their precious friends. They thanked everyone for coming. Everyone cheered, the pot-luck dinner began, and the young animals frolicked in the watering hole, under the watchful eyes of the life-guards, Homer and Hank the hippos.

And that is the end of Chapter 9 of Leo the Lion, “King of Beasts in all of Africa” --- A Lilac Blooms on the Savannah, a story about birth/rebirth, renewal, growth, and Social Beauty.

Good Night....

The End





LITERARY CREDIT:

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