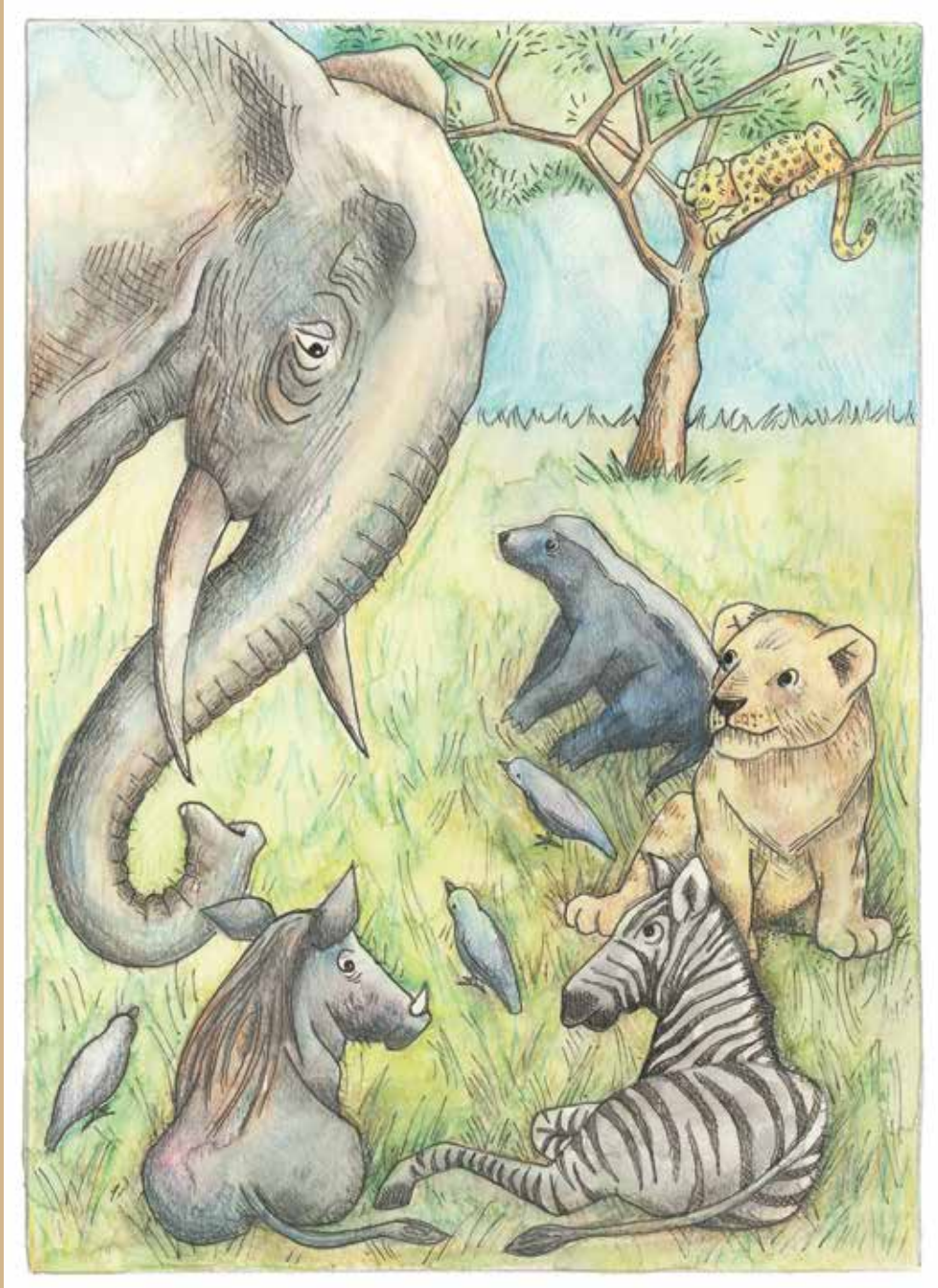


Animals

WILL TEACH YOU



Larry Kaufmann
and
Sarah O'Keeffe

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Illustrations by Rachel Main and Sarah O'Keeffe

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ANIMALS WILL TEACH YOU

by
Larry Kaufmann
and
Sarah O’Keeffe

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
ask the birds in the sky, and let them tell you...”
said God to Job (12:7).

The animals in these stories are some of those whom Job consulted
and the lessons they taught him.



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STORIES

by

LARRY KAUFMANN



Introduction

As a child I loved the animal stories which my grandfather, 'Pop' Campbell, told us. Two of his favourite characters, Jakkalas and Duifie, are in this book. While many details are lost to me today, I remember that there was always a 'moral of the story'.

Pop's stories conveyed lessons of love, kindness, generosity, self-acceptance, forgiveness, reconciliation and other virtues. These qualities are also found, we know, in the Christian Gospels. Consider Jesus and the way he preached Good News through the medium of stories. In fact, several of his parables are not overtly religious and don't even mention God, yet they ultimately lead to an understanding of God as a warm and loving parent. Jesus' parables also highlight the priority of human compassion over religious ritualism, of loving-kindness over law. My stories are inspired by this.

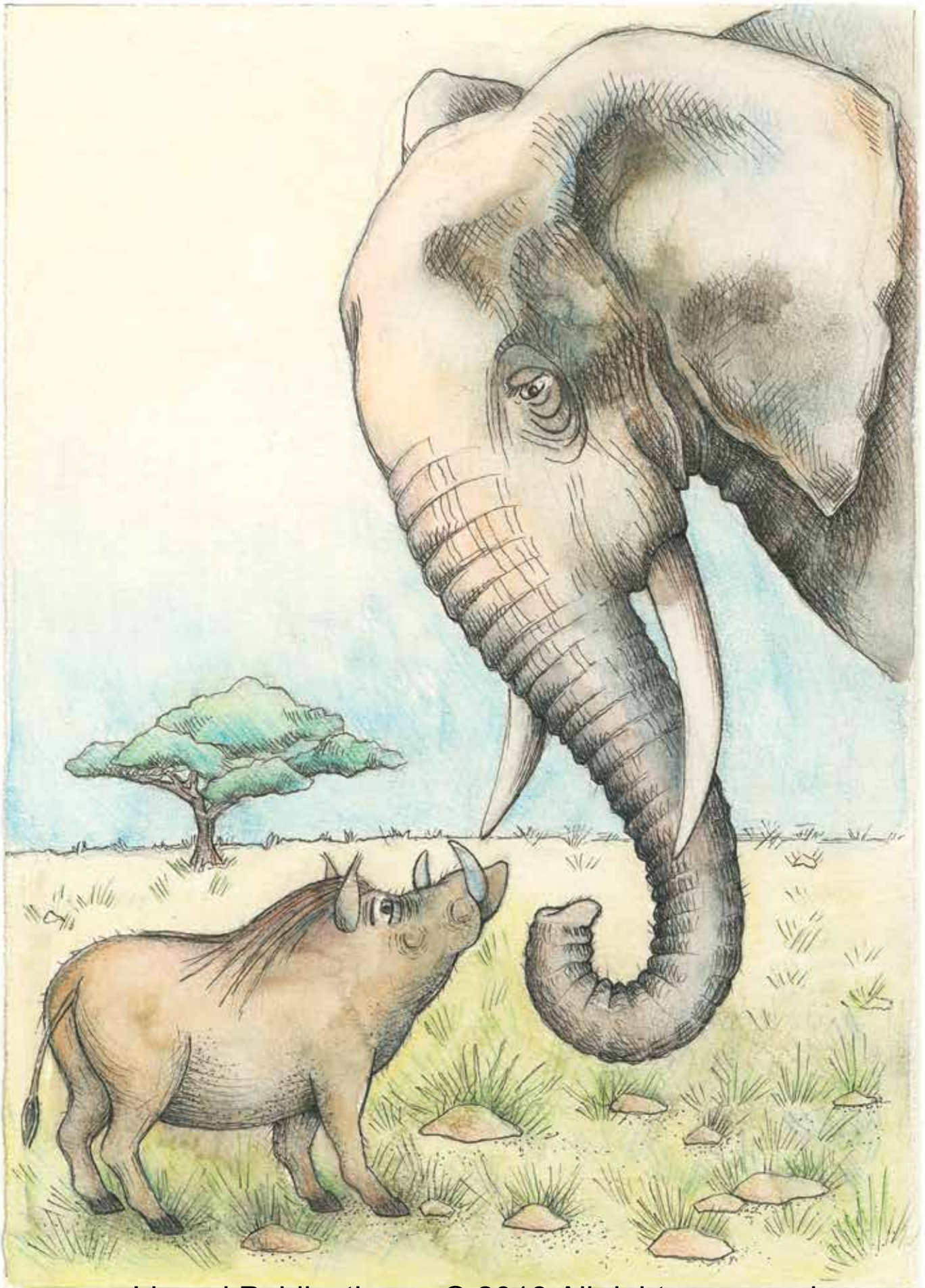
One of the blessings of divine providence which I have experienced as a priest has been the joy, as well as the heart-ache (if truth be told!) of parenting, when I took a young teenager named Reeza under my wings, having lost both his parents. Today he and his wife Cheryl-Ann have three sons of their own: Christopher, Ross and Connor. So I'm also a grandpa, and grandparents have to tell stories, don't they? These three boys feature in the story about the waterbuck – technically the only 'true story' in this collection.

Almost before he could speak, Connor knew the name of every African animal. He and I had a game. He was allowed to name any two creatures – whether of land, air or sea – and there and then I would have to make up a story about them. If I hesitated too long, then he won. Happily – and mostly – I also won. The stories that follow are distilled from that game.

I am delighted to welcome as my co-author, Sarah O’Keeffe, whose ‘fairy godfather’ I am. It was her idea to provide a list of lessons to be learned after each story. Thank you, Sarah, I’ve copied your idea! Readers, or children listening to the stories being read to them, may want to add other lessons too. Or even make up their own stories! See the exercise in the Conclusion.

Sarah has faced and overcome the challenges of Noonan Syndrome. She will introduce herself in her own section of the book.

Bushman’s River
November 2017



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Wilfrid the Willful Warthog Learns to Love Himself

Wilfrid the Willful Warthog wanted to be an elephant and sometimes he even pretended he was one. He would moan to himself:

“Why am I a warthog with only tiny tusks, compared to an elephant which has long beautiful tusks?”

Often Wilfrid would go up to a tree and try to push it over like an elephant, but of course he wasn't an elephant. He – and his tusks – were too short. Besides, his tusks were not there for pushing over trees; they were there for digging in the ground to find edible roots and bulbs, and of course to defend himself against predators. But no, that wasn't good enough for Willful Wilfrid. He kept wanting to be an elephant and imagining that he was one.

One day he was busy trying to push a huge leadwood tree down. Now this was really silly because that particular leadwood tree was over six hundred years old. Its roots were deep and its trunk was indeed as heavy as lead. Poor Wilfrid, he could never accept his limitations! But so determined was he to push the tree over, grunting and groaning as he did so, that he did not hear a family of elephants approaching on their soft, padded feet. However, he could not help but hear them laughing after they had formed a circle around him.

“What on earth are you trying to do?” one of them asked.

Wilfrid blushed. He didn't want to admit to the elephants that he was pretending to be one of them and that he was trying to push the tree down. But one of the young females, Elephant Emma, guessed and said:

“You were trying to push that tree over, weren't you?”

Wilfrid blushed even more, which only made it obvious to the other elephants that Emma must be right. The young ones were squealing with laughter, when suddenly Bennet the Big Bull Elephant, trumpeted out loud:

“Stop making fun of that warthog. Be quiet, all of you!”

Then turning to the embarrassed warthog, he asked in a very kind voice:

“What’s your name?”

“Wilfrid the Willful Warthog,” came the embarrassed reply.



“Well, young Wilfrid the Willful Warthog, look at me. Look at my long tusks. Look at my strong head and big trunk. I’ve pushed many trees over with them so that the younger members of my family can eat the leaves, and I’m even happy if other animals like impala and nyala eat some leaves too when the grass is too short and dry for them in winter. But one thing I can assure you, even I would never be able to push this old leadwood tree down. It’s been here longer than you can imagine, longer than all our ages put together. I know what I can do, and I know what I can’t do, and that’s just fine. Don’t try to be something that you are not. Just be happy that you are who you are.”

Wilfrid looked at Bennet with big eyes. No one had spoken to him so gently and kindly before, so he decided to be honest with the big bull elephant.

“To tell you the truth, Bennet sir,” he said, “I’ve always been jealous of your lovely elephant tusks. Mine look so ugly on my ugly face. I wish I had been born an elephant.”

Big Bennet smiled.

“Don’t be silly, Wilfrid, you are who you are, and you are very special and important to Mother Nature. Every one of us has a role to play. You can do things that we can’t do, and we can do things that you can’t do. Tell you what, why don’t you hang out with us for the rest of the day and see how we can learn from each other.”

So off they went, the Elephant family and Wilfrid the Willful Warthog, his tail sticking up in the air like an aerial as he trotted along.

“How do you do that?” asked Elephant Edwin, a young male. “I can’t do that!”

“Do what?” said Wilfrid.

“Keep your tail up like an aerial.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” replied Wilfrid. “It comes naturally to us warthogs. We use them like little flags in the air so that we can see and follow each other running through the grass.”

Soon they came to a little forest of trees. By then they were getting hungry, so Big Bull Bennet pushed a tree over and the other elephants started chomping on the leaves. Wilfrid thought he’d try some too.

“That’s gross!” he exclaimed. “The leaves taste funny. I’m not used to eating leaves from tall trees. I’d rather go over to that bush there and scrounge under it for some juicy roots.”

In no time, Wilfrid was digging up bulbs with his tiny tusks and having a good old snack. “I much prefer this,” he said out loud to himself, not noticing that Big Bull Bennet had quietly come close – for elephants have such soft, padded feet that you can hardly hear them walking.

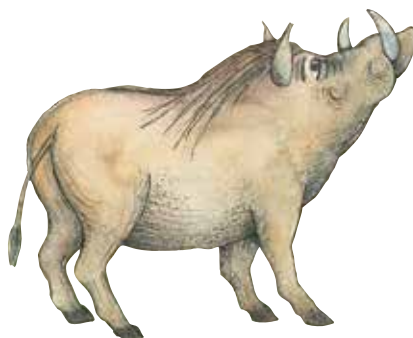
“You see!” said Bennet. “You like your food and we like ours. And only you can do with your little tusks what we cannot do with our big ones. Aren’t you glad now that you’re a warthog?”

“Now I’m beginning to understand,” said Wilfrid. “Thank you for teaching me to be myself and to love myself as I am.”

“You’re welcome to come walking with us whenever you want,” said Bennet, “but I’m sure you are missing your Warthog family and they are missing you. You can be proud that you are who you are and that you belong to them.”

So from that day on Wilfrid the Willful Warthog was less willful about being an elephant. He willed to be a warthog and to be proud of his tusks and tail and everything that made him who he was. And do you know what? He even changed his name to Wilfrid the Willing Warthog.

LESSONS



Be your best self.
Love yourself.
Learn from others.



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Kate Kingfisher and Buffalo Bongani

Kate Kingfisher had her favourite branch on a yellow-green fever tree by the river on which she used to perch while waiting for a fish to swim past. She had good eyes and could see a fish from a long way off. As soon as one came swimming past the fever tree, Kate would fly off the branch and make a dive right into the water. With her long, straight, sharp beak she would catch the fish and then, holding it tightly in her mouth, she would fly back up to her special branch. Then, with a shake of her head, she popped the fish down her throat. Very often one fish was not enough to stop her from being hungry and so the waiting began again, until another fish swam past close enough for her to swoop down from the tree and catch it.

One year there was a terrible storm. The wind howled, lightning flashed, and the clouds thundered. Buckets of rain poured onto the mountains and hills. In no time water formed itself into little streams, then bigger streams, then little rivulets, then proper rivers, then one great big river that grew higher and higher, wider and wider, and flowed faster and faster, stronger and stronger. So fast and so strong that it started to wash over its banks and drag trees along its path. And yes, you guessed... Kate's favourite fever tree was also carried away by the mighty flood.

During the storm Kate Kingfisher huddled as tightly as she could in her nest. On and on it continued to rain until late the next day. By then Kate was feeling quite hungry, so when the rain stopped, and a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky, she decided to go fishing. Off she flew towards the river.

“Oh dear,” she said to herself, “I must be lost. I can’t find my tree. Why does everything look so different? And the river so full?”

At that instant a huge tree came floating past and then Kate realised what had happened during the storm: her favourite fever tree had also been washed away in the flood.

“Now what am I to do?” she wondered. “Where am I to perch while waiting for the right sized fish to come swimming by?”

Just then she saw a huge buffalo drinking from the river. She flew up to him and, with her wings keeping her hovering in the same place, like a helicopter, she spoke to the buffalo. First, she asked him his name and he told her he was Buffalo Bongani. Then he asked her to tell him her name and she said, “Kate Kingfisher”.

“But why are you crying, Kate Kingfisher?” asked Buffalo Bongani.



“Because my favourite fever tree has been washed away and now I have nowhere to perch while I wait for a fish to swim past for me to catch. I survived the storm but now I’m going to starve to death!”

“Don’t be silly,” said Buffalo Bongani. “I’ve got big horns.

They’re kind of ... like ... sort of ... you know... how can I

say? Like branches? I’ll tell you what. Let me stand very still next to the bank of the river and you can perch on one of my horns. And when the right sized fish swims past, you can jump off the horn and dive into the water and catch your fish.”

And that’s exactly what happened. Not just that day, but every day for a very long time.

Kate Kingfisher was just getting used to this wonderful arrangement when she noticed a change in Buffalo Bongani. He started to get fidgety and move around – and there was also a loud, rumbling noise that came from his tummy. Rumble, rumble, went his tummy.

“What’s the matter, Buffalo Bongani? Why is your tummy rumbling so much?”

“Oh, it’s nothing really,” said Bongani.

“Come on, we’re good friends by now, you can tell me,” said Kate.

“Well, if you must know the truth, I’m just a bit hungry. Standing still here while you are fishing takes away some of the time I need to go foraging for good grass to graze on.”

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner, silly?” asked Kate. “How selfish of me to think only about myself! Please forgive me! Isn’t there something I can do to make up?”

“Well, there is something, I suppose. You have wings and can fly in a straight line. I have lumbering legs that have to carry me over one hill here, a deep valley there, or around a forest of trees. That takes a lot of time. Perhaps with your birds-eye-view you could find me some nice grazing grass and, better still, show me a short-cut to get to it.”

“Of course I will, that’s a great idea,” replied Kate. “One good turn deserves another.”

And to this day Kate Kingfisher and Buffalo Bongani are the best of friends helping each other: Buffalo Bongani offering his horns like branches for Kate to perch on, and Kate flying off to look for fresh, green grass for Bongani to graze on.

LESSONS

One good turn
deserves another.

Always try to help others in
your own special way.

Be honest with each other.

