



the SURVIVOR

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Benton 25th Anniversary Bash
Jarbidge Wilderness
Namibia Simple





Judy Kendall

Judy and Austin with meerkat at Ugab Wilderness Camp

Simple Africa

Richard B. Rood, Ann Arbor, MI

Simple Africa is a playground, a place where the night sky is bright with stars, dark with galactic dust. There is no human light, no noise from human machines. The noises of the dark are, first, the animals of humans: chickens, cows, and goats. In the fenced confines of the wild animals, the jackals are like the sirens of war, the lions like the rumble of tanks and trucks and troops surrounding the camp for siege.

In this playground, the big animals are the favorite toys, where we first run. There is calm in Etosha, a wary laziness. The lions walk around the water holes, sleep in the stones. The boks and the giraffes watch for a tensing of the lion's muscles, for focus in its eyes; they scan the perimeter. There is awareness; there is diligence; there seems to be some signal, some sign that distinguishes the dangerous lion. If there is anxiety, it is still and quiet. An evolved behavior holds energy in reserve, recognizes the scarcity of water, of food. Most of these animals live their lives knowing that they are always the possible meals of others; most of these animals live their lives looking for easy opportunity; most live their lives avoiding making themselves the opportunity of others.

The humans have reduced the opportunities they might provide to the lions by killing the lions. It makes sense. Killing threats is at the top of the list of human behavior.

The big animals have been confined to reservations. There,

they don't bathe (and yet they don't smell – they use a smoking fire and perhaps their natural diet prevents odors), the leather and iron-bead jewelry the women make, the fact that they don't cover their breasts, the animal skins they wear as skirts, the two bottom teeth they knock out at age 13 to demonstrate membership in the tribe, and even the binge drinking that has begun to run amongst the young men. *Where Fire Speaks* is a great introduction to their world and the dilemmas facing their community. I admired the harmony they seem to live in, and thought that perhaps simplicity is what allows them to succeed.

Something I found fascinating in Namibia is that unlike some governments who might try to change villagers, the Namibian government makes concessions to them (such as picking them up on election days so that they can voice their opinions in the polls) because their existence is a tourist attraction. These villagers therefore have an incentive to remain as they are, but the contact with tourists, some young people heading off to school, and non-traditional commerce increasingly bodes change for them.

The Bushmen and Himba are the original desert survivors. And of course the wildlife has been surviving for centuries. So, who were we? Among our group, what made us desert survivors? We were survivors of cancer, family tragedy and political oppression, drawn to the desert for its beauty, its diversity, its mystique...but above all, I believe, for its simplicity. To survive and thrive in the desert is to distill life to its elegant essence: sustenance, warmth and community.

today, they have value. They are the favorite toy in the playground, and there are people with money who want to play in this playground. Rangers, nature soldiers, protect the animals. The survival of big animals depends more and more on the value they have to people from outside of Africa.

Even this simple Africa is built on tension; it is built on the messy interface and intermingling of cultures, where survival and demise are often the same.

This is a playground in a land where a quarter of the population has AIDS, where the wealth remains in the hands of the colonialists, and where concrete walls, barbed wire, and electrified fences surround the camper's lodges, restaurants, and the houses of the cities.

These are not as simple as contradictions. Not as clean as paradoxes. There is a reality of Namibia, of Africa, and at first it is simple – these realities exist. They exist and they push against each other; they move; they bulge; they explode.

We came to Namibia. We traveled in a capsule, with our sensors pointed outward, exercising our imperatives of acquisition. Dry Earth was laid before us. Animals inhabited this land. All forms of Man expressed dominion over the animals. They expressed dominion over each other. Through that dominion we were welcome to visit, to play in the playground, to see, to be part of that moving, bulging, and exploding reality.