

With My Soul Amongst Lions

By Gareth Patterson

From Chapter One

The first time Julie and I suspected that Furaha and Rafiki realized Batian's loss was one evening when both his sisters appeared together outside the camp. I went out and sat between them. Missing Batian, I almost unconsciously began calling softly the lion proclamation, "Oowhey, ooshey, oowhey." Immediately, both lionesses looked up at me with staring open faces. Julie, who was watching, wrote later, "It was as though they thought of Batian--Both became attentive to him. It was a strange scene to watch. Gareth is their pride male now."

From Chapter Six

Back at the camp, I continued with the depressing work. With a sledgehammer, I would slam against the concrete walls--first the mess hut came down, then the kitchen and finally Julie's bedroom, the old store room.

For hours, I sweated as my muscles strained. I was determined that if we had to leave no one else would live her again. It had been a special home for Julie and me, one where there had been laughter and tears, a place where nearby we had buried Batian. But as I worked, the familiar became mere memories. When in the days ahead, I left Tawana to set up the new camp, I blocked the road with branches and logs to deter the curious from driving in to see what remained of our home.

Fortunately, a sympathetic landowner to the east of Tawana granted me permission to site a new camp on his neighboring land, for which I was relieved and grateful. I knew the area well as it was deep within the lions' central territory and one afternoon, I set out to look for a new site where I would erect a new base camp. I was drawn to a high plateau area, probably the highest point in all the bushlands, which had sweeping views down the ancient Limpopo valley where the dense green riverine trees bordered the sand river. To the west was a plain, and beyond it were the Tawana and Pitsani valleys. I could see the northwestern lands and, on the horizon, tiny dots which were in fact gigantic baobab trees, dwarfed by the immensity of the landscape. I was drawn to this beautiful spot in part because it was here where Rafiki had led

Batian and me many months before. She had led us to a secret place where she had given birth to a single cub, who sadly had been stillborn.

From Chapter Seven

My pride was now, and had been for over two years, removed from the world of man in which they had grown up after the death of their mother when just days old. The rehabilitation initiated by George at Kora and completed by me in the Tuli bushlands had, against great odds, been a success and now the new generation of Adamson lions, Sala and Tana, were heading toward sub-adulthood.

However, my pride was not always left undisturbed in the bushlands and in the past two years had probably been viewed from the game drive vehicles by several hundred tourists. Almost all the tourists who saw my pride would have been totally unaware of their background, not knowing that they had been reared and successfully released back into the wilds by man. Because of my conservation watchdog presence, and perhaps also because of professional jealousy, I learnt that the game guides of one particular safari company had been instructed by management not to tell the tourists of the pride's fascinating history. A ridiculous policy as the tourists' bush experience would have been enhanced by the lions' story. Photographs of Batian, Rafiki and Furaha probably exist in photo albums throughout the world and, sadly, these tourists are unaware of the special lions they had seen hunting, lazing, and playing while in the bushlands.