

PAUL MYBURGH RECALLS HIS TIME
WITH THE /GWIKWE OF THE KALAHARI

The LAST *of the* FIRST *people*

It begins always in my blood – a faint stirring at first, and then a quickening as the recalling of that time comes out of the life body of the earth and into my being, my feelings and thinking. And so the memories come to consciousness: first the sounds, the voices and then the words as our story comes slowly to life.

It was late afternoon in the Autumn when I returned to the Kalahari. I had walked for many days. One soul coming to understand more of the reason for being human.





For seven years, I lived with the First People, they who come from the ancient race. Four of those years were lived with different tribes – //Xo/xei, Jun/uase, /Aiekwe – and three with the last band of wild /Gwikwe on the great sand face, #Guam/tge, the Earth, immersed in the lifestream in which we lived as humans.

It is now 28 years later now; four cycles of seven have passed, and I know more than ever that I must bring forward, in a right way, the story of that which was before us. From this impulse, I have written my book: *The Bushman Winter Has Come* – and it is just the beginning.

As a gift, I remember that time with the Bushmen, the /Gwikwe. /Gwi in their language means “bush”, and *kwe* means “people” – and so this is the name by which they call themselves.

I am asked to remember what stands out as significant in my memory of this time, and I can think of nothing that was more important than anything else; no moment that was greater than any other. Perhaps this is how it should be.

There were the men, hunters, lean-limbed and silent. I remember how we lived in the world together: bound one to the other by the thoughts within us, and

bound to the world around us as a living Being who offered all that we needed; ours was to seek, and find.

We hunted long days and many miles across the great sand face of our Kalahari world: we and the animals, joined by threads of destiny that would unravel through our days. Animals that would die so that we could live, and all preordained to be this way because this is how the Great God has made it.

I remember the endless miles walked through heat and dryness, some hunts as far as 60 miles away, and the silence of knowing that this was life – our life – and so there was no wanting for what was not there, only the sharing of what was given. It is difficult for the disconnected human of today to see it this way. One must look within to see how one stands in relation to the world: to see what is given as yours, and to know that it is enough.

Through those years, we lived within the kingdoms of nature: the mineral, the plant, the animal and the human – each in sacrifice to the other, and redeemed only by our knowledge and reverence of that truth. We lived, impelled by forces of both Heaven and Earth.

Modern humanity has forgotten to remember how completely we are part of the world, natural and spiritual, and the tragedy of this separation weighs heavily

on our souls; somewhere within we still know this must surely change if we are to continue.

And so we men lived and hunted in the world ‘out there’, and in this way, too, in the world within ourselves.

And the women – the gatherers – I remember well. Mothers to the children, they brought a softness and joy into our lives in the way that women do. I remember always their voices, lilting, up and down, soft in the space between the shelters, soft in our hearts, and then punctuated with exclamations, shrieks and laughter at the simple joy of life lived in freedom. Theirs is a world of feeling and touch, of spontaneous laughter and love given into the lives of the children and so returned to life.

ABOVE: Run to exhaustion, the kudu stands as if in a trance while Gening! u cautiously retrieves his spear and then from close range pushes it through the kudu’s ribs into the heart.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The joy, innocence and the uninhibited beauty which flows from these children is a reminder of truth for all of us.



Many days we walked together, gathering from this place and that – so many slow, wandering conversations we shared as we wound our way through miles of Kalahari in search of what the Earth would offer as sustenance. Sisters and mothers they were for me, granting me an access to the world of women, which I will not forget.

Bearing the weight of carry bags filled with what the Earth had given, we would go back to the shelters, from where the voices of family and friends would reach out to guide us home before dark.

And a thousand nights around fires that burnt light in the darkness filled with stars and moon, a constellation of cosmic bodies in movement which had everything to do with our lives of stories and songs sung with voices that reached beyond what we could see into that place of dreams and revelations.

The Spirit world always so close, we lived on the threshold between the physical and the spiritual. For us there was no separation – it was one world, which included that which we did not know and could not see.

There was a child, little Seka, who chose to fall asleep with me whenever he could. His mother was very close to me and I to her. It was a love shared only in the world of spirit, and never consecrated in the flesh; because of his closeness to his

mother, little Seka responded to me with the same love.

His mother told me that when I went away, he would stand every morning upon a little rise of sand and, looking to the south, he would ask: “Mah Paulau?” “Where is Paul? When is he coming?”

When I am reminded of how all things are joined in this way, I see many other

Earth. And I remember how it was with the old man, joined with the archetypal memory of the ancient race that came before us – a memory that sleeps in the modern human, a memory we must take forward in wide-awake consciousness.

And I remember standing upon a living mineral earth, choreographed in space with other celestial beings called Sun and

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things that have come and gone in my life, so many things that might have been more if I had known them then – but that is the way of things with all of us.

I think always of the old man, Dzero O, and my journeys into the invisible world to understand that what you cannot see is also true. In all the years since that time, I have endeavoured to see into this ethereal world, and so to read the life body of the

Moon and the inner planets, each with the forces it brings to life in this cosmos we call home. And were it not for this Earth and all that lives upon its body, we would not be here – and this we forget.

I remember my animal brothers and sisters. They were always there as sounds in the air, filling our lives with their song-voices. They were there as footprints in the sand, telling the story of all their

The /Gwi women are extremely able plant ecologists, an old knowledge carried in their blood.



doings. We heard their whispered conversations in the night and their shouted voices in the day.

And how do you ever forget the powerful animal countenance of a big male lion standing before you on the sand, and you alone, with only the strength of your Soul-Spirit and your respect for that creature? You look into that animal Soul and he into you before you both turn away, each to his own path.

I can never lose the reverence I have for those moments, those encounters with a world now relegated to fenced, controlled enclosures; relegated to an outside place of fear in so many humans. We must never forget: to our animal brethren we are also joined, one to the other, to all.

Above all, I remember the human-ness of these people. I remain immersed in the simple expression of their lives in this world: the anxieties, the fears and the faith of innocence yet to be faced with what the world would bring. I am still a part of that conversation, and it is this that I would bring back into this world of separated humans – a way that once was.

It is difficult for the separated human. We have become so disconnected from the world in which we live. I think it is this way for all of us, when we notice.

For this ancient race, a journey ends. What they were tasked to bring through

earth existence into the stream of human spiritual evolution, they have done. It is for us to take it forward, in knowledge. They have never asked that we save them, only that we know them – and in that knowing, redeem their sacrifice. Our only guilt is only our failure to remember the Spirit of what was before us. This will change.

And all of this I remember, and my place in the middle of that fundamental existence, where only the truth of my Self could survive, for what was inside was bared to the outside for scrutiny and test.

The spirit world watches and waits for what we do with our time on this Earth, and for all of us it matters more than anything that we do more than we have done – and I am only just beginning... ©

About Paul

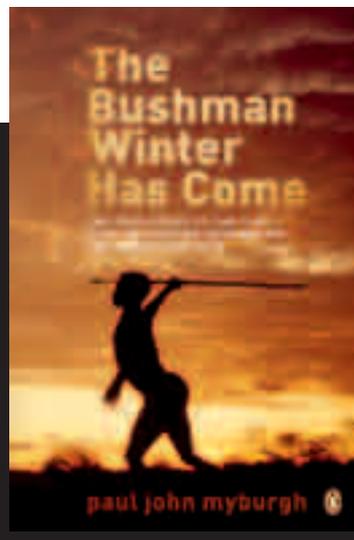
Paul Myburgh, photographer and author, spent seven years “physically and spiritually immersed” with the San and the /Gwikwe Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert. His book, *The Bushman Winter Has Come*, “imagines a continuing journey towards a place where we may, once again, know who we are in the context of our life on this Earth”.

Myburgh himself needs no introduction to the world of palaeoanthropology – he has spent 20 years working in this field, 16 of those documenting the excavation of Little Foot, a fossil hominid skeleton found in the cave system of Sterkfontein.

The Bushman Winter Has Come is a true story of Exodus, the inevitable journey of the last of the First People, as they leave the Great Sand Face and head for the modern world and cultural oblivion. When the /Gwikwe Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert greet each other, they say, “Tsamkwa/tge?” – Are your eyes nicely open? Hopefully then, we can answer the /Gwikwe greeting with a confident, “Yes”!

The Bushman Winter Has Come is more than an intriguing coffee-table centrepiece; its content should be at the centre of human dialogue. (Published by Penguin)

• Copies are available at Exclusive Books nationwide, and from Amazon, Kalahari and Kobo.



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Question: How long did Paul Myburgh live with the Bushmen?

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