



Stripe's Story

THE STORY OF STRIPE

by Belinda Low



Once upon a time, there was a Grevy's zebra called Stripe. Stripe was born in the District of Samburu near a very nice water hole. He had many other young zebras to play with as the mothers all gave birth near the water. Stripe asked his mother why this was, and she replied that it was because babies drink milk and for the mothers to make the milk they must drink water every day. She told him that this land also belonged to a very great zebra called Mzee, and that it was good he was here because he would protect them.

One day, Stripe was resting on the ground next to the other children while their mothers grazed nearby. Stripe was dreaming about the rain which his mum had told him about, but which he still hadn't seen. He imagined the sound and the smell of it and wished he could feel the cool water on his back. He had noticed that the water hole was much smaller than when he was born.

Suddenly, Stripe heard a tinkling noise in the distance. He moved his big round ears towards the sound, trying to find out the cause. The sound was beautiful and in his dreamy state he was sure this must be the sound of rain. Slowly, the sound came closer and closer. Now all the mothers and children were looking towards the noise. Stripe realised that this was not water, when he saw many creatures walking towards them. These animals were of different colours and some had very large horns. Behind them were two creatures that walked on two legs and had bright red fur. Stripe had never seen these things before and he was a little scared so he walked over to his mother and stood close by her side. He wondered whether Mzee would come and protect them against these creatures.



“Mum, what are they?” asked Stripe.

“The ones with four legs like us are called cattle. The ones on two legs are called humans. The humans guard the cattle and help them to find grass and water. Do not worry, they will not hurt us but we must leave



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the water so they can drink too” said Stripe’s mother.

Closer and closer they came, until Stripe realised that the lovely sound they made came from bells the cattle were wearing around their necks. He thought he could listen to that sound forever. “Come on Stripe, it’s time to leave” called his mother. All the zebra mothers and children walked away in a big herd, leaving the cattle and the humans to drink the water.

Some months had passed since Stripe was born. One day the zebra mothers had a big discussion and decided it was time to leave the water hole to find better grazing. Being in a big group they had eaten most of the grass near the water and so it was time to leave. “Will we find another water hole?” asked Stripe. “No,” replied his mother “we will have to use this one. There are not many water holes here and this one is a good one because it never dries up”.

After an hour of walking, the zebras found a lovely open plain with plenty of grass. Because it was quite far from the water hole, the mothers left the children together in a nursery as they walked away to water every morning. Now, they were still inside Mzee’s boma, but none of the children had seen him yet.



One day, when their mothers had gone for water, the children stood in a tight group enjoying the warm sun and cool breeze. Suddenly a deafening sound startled them, and they looked up to see a huge male zebra crossing the plain towards them. “Is that Mzee?” they whispered to each other. Suddenly, they heard the sound of hooves galloping behind them and they realised that this must be who Mzee was shouting at. It was another zebra but he looked younger and determined to fight. “Olayuni, I am the chief of this boma!” thundered Mzee’s voice. “I challenge you!” cried Olayuni.



It was just next to the nursery that the fight happened. Stripe would never forget it for his whole life. Mzee and Olayuni reared up and tried to push each other over as they stood on two legs. Then Mzee bit Olayuni’s neck, at which Olayuni twisted way and tried to pull Mzee down by biting his legs. But Mzee was too powerful and the younger zebra could not keep his grip. Mzee kicked out hard, striking Olayuni in the chest. He then whipped round and pulled Olayuni to the ground, pinning him there. Blood



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dripped down Olayuni's neck and Mzee told him never to try challenging him again.

As Olayuni limped off, Mzee approached the nursery. "Hello children" he said in his deep, rumbling voice. "I am sorry for the fighting. This happens often because my boma is the best. It contains the water hole where you were born which is very precious to zebras like your mothers, and of course it has excellent grazing. I am constantly getting younger boys coming to fight, and every time I win. One day you boys will be doing the same, but I warn you, do not try and get this boma. I will rule this place until the day I die." There was silence among the children. They did not know what to say to this mighty zebra. Stripe wanted to ask Mzee some questions, but he was too scared. After some moments, Stripe plucked up the courage to ask how long Mzee had had the boma. "Mmm, well let's see... It must be going on five years now. I won it after a very big fight with Chuma, one of the greatest zebras in history". Suddenly, all the children started asking questions at once. "How big is the boma?" "Where is your wife?" "Will Olayuni die?"



"Hold on!" said Mzee. One at a time. He was in the middle of answering a question when he stopped in mid-sentence. "Don't move!" commanded Mzee to the children. There was total silence as everyone froze in position. Stripe wondered what was going on and then suddenly he caught a smell in the air which made his stomach turn with fear. He did not recognise the smell but he knew it must be something very bad. Mzee had his eyes fixed on something behind them. He started walking very slowly with his head held high and he had never looked bigger to Stripe. Suddenly, he broke into a charging gallop, shouting as he went. The children turned to see a huge lion crouching behind a small bush. On and on went Mzee, getting closer all the time. Never once did he slow

down, and keeping his eyes fixed on the lion he plunged through the bush so that the lion was forced to flee in case he got kicked.

"Whew!" said Stripe and his friends. "That was a close one!" Mzee returned to the nursery looking tired but triumphant. "It's lucky I was here! You kids would have been sitting ducks. I must have a word with your mothers about this!" He stayed with the children for the rest of the day, grazing peacefully and answering a question now and again. When their mothers came back, Mzee held a meeting with them. He declared that they must move nearer the water so that their children could walk with them to the water. Stripe's mother agreed with Mzee and said that although the grazing was not as good as the plain, there was a place that would provide sufficient grass for the next month.



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Two years later, and Stripe had grown into a very handsome young zebra. By now, he and his mother had travelled very large distances, searching for grazing and water. Since he had stopped suckling from his mother she did not need to drink every day and they could go without water for some days. Sometimes, like humans and elephants, when the rivers were dry, they would dig for water in the sand.

His mother was soon to give birth again and he knew that she would need to stay near the water hole for the next six months like she had when he was a baby. "Stripe, you know that it is now time to go off on your own," said his mother gently. "I know," said Stripe sadly, thinking how much he would miss her. But there were many young boys his age and he knew that he would stay together with his friends and that of course he could go and see his mother again in Mzee's boma any time.



Stripe and his friends stayed together for a few years. They travelled widely searching for grass and water. Often they would join up with many other zebras where they would spend weeks together grazing on the plains. When he was seven years old, Stripe felt he needed to find himself a boma. He left his friends and began searching for a place that would contain enough water and grazing so that the female zebras would come to his land. After many weeks of searching, he found a waterhole that was not being used by any other zebras. He remembered it as a waterhole that his mother and he had visited once and which she had liked. He decided this was the best place for his boma and set about marking it. This he did by leaving piles of dung on the boundary and also making lots of noise like he remembered Mzee doing, to let all the other zebras know he was there.



Stripe found himself alone for a few months. The long dry season had begun and he noticed that the grass had turned brown but at least he had enough water. Soon, female zebras began visiting his boma and staying there for many weeks. Many were pregnant and soon there were lots of zebra children running through Stripe's boma. He would look upon them proudly and would protect them if there was any danger.

Then, one day, some humans and their cattle came through. Stripe did not mind them using the waterhole because he knew everybody needed to drink water during the dry season. But, after the first group came, many more followed and soon there was no grass left near the water. During the day, the waterhole was always busy with humans watering their cattle



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and singing to them. This meant that the zebra mothers could not drink until nightfall. Stripe was worried because some of the mothers were not getting enough water to make milk for their children and already some children had died. At night he had to guard the children as the mothers walked to the waterhole when it was peaceful, and on more than one occasion they had been attacked by hyenas. Luckily Stripe was a strong, brave zebra and these animals were scared off by his shouting and kicking. One day, the worst thing happened: the humans had put a barrier made of thorns all around the water. None of the zebras were able to get through.



The group of mothers was becoming less everyday, as more and more of the children died. If they lost their children, the mothers would leave to find better grazing than the grass in Stripe's boma which was now as short as a matchstick. Stripe began to despair because he knew that unless the zebra mothers could drink during the day, they would not be able to survive in his boma. He decided to talk to one of the humans.

Stripe was very nervous for he had never tried to make conversation with a human. Usually, they just ignored each other. There was one human in particular who he knew he had the best chance of talking to. Oboso was a young herder who was in charge of a big group of goats and cattle. He was always singing and smiling and Stripe could see that the cattle and goats really liked him. Stripe approached the boy cautiously. "Excuse me" he said. The boy looked up in surprise. "Are you talking to me?" asked Oboso. "Um, yes. My name is Stripe." "Oh," said Oboso. "I had no idea zebras could speak Samburu! My name is Oboso. What can I do for you?" Stripe explained to the boy about the water hole being blocked off and how the zebra children were dying. "I don't know what to do," he said. "Hmm," said the boy. "It seems to me that the answer lies in sharing this water during the day. That way, the mothers can drink too. Let me talk to my village and we can see if they will agree to change the way we water our goats and cattle." Stripe was so grateful to the boy that he was lost for words.



Back in Oboso's village, a great discussion went on. The chief who was a wise old man began to speak. "Most of you will not remember the rhino. I do. The rhino was a large grey animal, with skin like an elephant. It was a shy creature and unless it was frightened, it was harmless. Now, there are no rhinos left. I believe this will happen to the zebras. There used to be many hundreds on these plains, and now look at how few there are. What have they done to us? Nothing! This zebra, Stripe, asks for access to the water we use. What should we do?"

