

1952-06-11

Dons Augustinus, Paul Brian

PAUL AUGUSTINUS

'The Biography of a Wilderness Artist'

Paul Augustinus was born in Denmark in 1952 and has spent all of his life in Africa. It would be a very interesting life but he was just starting out on a journey that would take another 58 years to complete before a very romantic, extraordinary circle of fate was closed by the delivery of a package in March 2010.

He grew up in Kenya and Tanzania. His father, Knud Dons Augustinus, was a civil engineer and an adventurous entrepreneur who amongst many other things explored and retrieved artifacts from the scuppered German battleship *Koeningsberg* in the Rufiji delta, and also salvaged illegal ivory from the sea floor off Mombasa's old Dhow harbor. He, along with Bill Travis, his partner, formed *Martin and Paul* - a small company that would start the first business in Somalia after its Independence in 1961. This wildly speculative venture (doomed after Travis was discovered by Russians inside one of their Cold War naval installations on the Red Sea Coast) was an attempt to can turtle meat for the European market. These adventures are immortalized in Travis's classic book *The Voice of the Turtle*. Paul's father, a gifted civil engineer (but flawed when it came to his own finances) also liked to design the buildings that he built and was an avid watercolourist, completing sketches of buildings where the trees and vegetation were stylistically inked in in crimson. Paul's few, but nonetheless vivid, memories of his father were of watching him paint these architectural designs - thus started the slow artistic evolution of Paul Augustinus.

Mombasa and East Africa were the places that formed Paul Augustinus's African identity. Mombasa in the 50s and 60s was a very romantic place, steeped in a strong Coastal Arab atmosphere and yet at the same time close to the game fields that lay just inland. His father left home for another woman, Giselle Carvill in 1959 and then effectively disappeared in 1964 (never to be seen again by his son). This was an event that Rosemary never recovered from and about which she always refused to discuss with her son. Paul Augustinus was taken to what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) by Rosemary when Knud's support payments dried up in 1964, on a roundabout trip that took months and whose route included long stays in Egypt, Lebanon, Italy, Greece and Ireland - a trip that convinced the future artist that he was never going to live anywhere else other than East Africa. He went to high school in Harare in Zimbabwe - a part of his life that he did not enjoy after the romance and colour of the much more interesting East Africa. However it was in Zimbabwe in the late 60s that he discovered the wild country of the Zambezi Valley and the fabulous game fields of what was then the Portuguese Overseas Province of Mozambique, where his uncle Manuel de Andrade, the blonde haired, aristocratic Portuguese was a professional 'white' hunter with Mozambique Safariland on the Save River. Wilderness and wildlife became an important part of Paul's life from that point on.

Eventually Paul Augustinus graduated from the University of Natal in 1977 with a BSc and worked for one year as a geologist but that was all that it took before he realized that he would never be able to work for anyone else but himself. Much soul searching and contemplation of his few apparent skills brought him to the conclusion that he would search out the wildest part of Botswana and try to make his way there selling paintings of wildlife to visiting sportsmen on safari!

His career as an artist started in a very small way, in 1978, when he arrived in Botswana with the intention of experiencing the fabulous freedom and adventure that its game fields offered. With an ancient Toyota Landcruiser 4X4 pickup, a white colored 'studio' tent and enough money to last for a year, he set off into the remote hinterland of the Northern wilderness areas. His plan, to spend a year in the true African wilderness, painting wildlife, and selling to the tiny number of hunters that came to Botswana to hunt big game (there was no tourism in those early days), succeeded and he remained in the Okavango and Chobe areas of Botswana as a permanent resident for more than a decade. His wilderness bona fide was established in that period, and it was a bona fide that was earned in the hard way. He carried his own fuel, water, food and equipment with him, and camped in areas so remote that many months passed before he saw another vehicle. Big game, such as elephant, leopard, and lion, passed by and through his little encampments by day and by night. He lived under canvas in many different parts of the Okavango and Chobe for more than ten years. And when he had 'done it all' in Botswana, he looked further afield for other challenges. Thus his bona-fide also includes three years under canvas in the Namib Desert, Damaraland, the Skeleton Coast and the Kaokoveld. This period of time led to many evocative wildlife paintings of unusual desert game such as the rare desert black rhino, the sand-dune traversing elephants of the region and the exotic coastal lions of the Skeleton Coast. He has spent months in Alaska north of the Arctic Circle, (see box below) and months in Indonesia.

He has also spent months in India getting material for tiger paintings, and is one of the few wildlife artist to have actually seen tigers in the wild (more that 67 separate sightings). He has also made several incident filled expeditions to remote areas of the rain forest in Northern Congo-Brazzaville, the Central African Republic and Gabon. These were to get first hand material and ideas for bongo, forest elephant and gorilla paintings animals that virtually no other artist has ever attempted to see, let alone paint in the field. He is the only artist to have painted the rare forest elephant and the only artist to have painted, in the field, all three 'types' of African Elephant - the forest, savanna and desert elephants. With a small output, and high rarity value, collectors can only buy his paintings from the Everard Read gallery in Johannesburg or the Tryon Gallery in London. Several of his paintings have come up for resale at Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams' auctions in the UK and South Africa. He has taken part in many group shows around the world and has also produced a series of postage stamps for the Botswana Postal Service. He has also been the subject of several documentaries and has also made documentaries for broadcast television, one of which was about his foot safari in the rain forests of Northern Congo.

He is also the published author of two books, one of which was listed by *Getaway*, a leading travel magazine dedicated to the African continent, as amongst the ten best books published about African wildlife and adventure in the Southern African region. This book, *Botswana -A Brush*

With The Wild, dealt with the artists early years in Botswana and was lavishly illustrated with paintings and photographs. Published in 1987, it is now out of print after three editions and one updated edition. Paul Augustinus second book, *Desert Adventure* was published in 1997 in South Africa by Acorn Books and in the United Kingdom by Swan Hill Press and is also lavishly illustrated in a similar fashion.

Paul Augustinus lives presently in East Africa with his wife Dr. Clarissa Augustinus and is working on several book and show projects in between safaris to the Mara, Crater Highlands and Serengeti, as well as dhow trips along the Swahili Coast north of Lamu.

Having last seen his father in 1961, and without knowing what had happened to him for 50 years, fate intervened in 2010. Quite by chance, while researching his own upbringing for a major book project that he is presently working on - he discovered a package in Nairobi that had been sent to him years previously by Jackie Kerr when Giselle had died (her mother and the woman that Paul's father had left Rosemary for in 1959). Jackie, having no known forwarding address for Paul Augustinus, had sent the package to her ex-husband David Kerr in Nairobi. When David had been unable to locate Paul, the package and its contents had lain in a Nairobi warehouse for years, gathering dust until the moment Paul started to seriously search for information about himself and his father! When the package was finally delivered to him in March of 2010 he realized that he was about to discover the answers to the many questions that had hovered in the back of his mind for 50 years - questions he had about the mystery man who had started him on his artistic path - his father! He opened the package in his studio. Inside were the first objects that he had ever touched that had belonged to the father he could hardly remember. There were also the first photographs that he had ever seen of his father, passports, and other memorabilia as well as a photograph of his father's grave site in the Seychelles. In Jackie Kerr, who had sent the package, he also discovered that he had a step sister, a relative previously unknown to him and one that had kept an eye on him from afar while she was in Mombasa, the Seychelles and Johannesburg. Meeting her for the first time in June 2010 in Johannesburg, an emotional occasion in it's own right, but it was especially poignant for Paul Augustinus as she also presented him with the two sole surviving sketches done by his father. One was a sketch of a building that was embellished by palm trees outlined in a crimson ink. The other a pencil sketch of a dugout in the Rufiji delta - an uncanny analog of the same kind of paintings that Paul Augustinus had made a part of his own artistic career.

After 58 years the circle had been finally completed.