

A Traveler's Tale

A Tale of Two Rhinos

by Jan Kriel and Kathleen Schumann

This is the story of two rhinos-and two perspectives of one very close encounter. Kathleen, on a guided walk, experiences first hand what the safety briefing is all about and Jannie, her guide on the walk, shares his experience of that same incident...

“It is difficult to put this specific walk into words, I still can feel how furiously my heart was beating,- everything happened so fast-at least that’s how it felt to me-I had hardly registered what was happening before it was all over...

Let’s start from the beginning.

We drove out to the place where our walk was starting from. Jannie, our guide, gave us the briefing about what to do and what not to do in a dangerous situation- and two male lions walked by on cue.

This made us really pay attention to the briefing, and it’s a good thing we did... A little frisson of pleasure, fear and anticipation crawled deliciously up my spine-At the same time however I didn’t realize that I may have been, quite literally, putting my life in my guides’ hands. And faced with a dangerous situation, I was armed with nothing but trust.

A short while into our walk we saw, at a very safe distance, two rhinos lying down and having a good rest by the look of things.

We watched them for quite a while. The wind was in our favour but just as we were walking off (still at a very safe distance) the wind must have changed and they woke up and started running in the opposite direction from where we had been. No problem-we carried on. They didn’t seem interested in us at all.

The Rhinos had been running to the left of us and disappeared while we watched. But suddenly they must have turned because the next thing I recall is tons of angry grey rhino charging at us at full speed!

Jannie told to stand still. I hardly registered what was going on-and bewildered, heart, racing-I tried to recall the briefing...stay still...listen to the guide...don’t panic... Jannie and his back-up, Andrea, started shouting and throwing rocks at the rhinos. The rhinos

were very close when we heard the first shot go off right in front of them. They kept coming. I stood there...

There was another shot and this time the rhinos turned mere meters away from where the guides were standing to face them.

It was amazing how fast everything happened, and how my reactions and emotions left little time for me to consider my options. It felt like the whole incident lasted a few seconds, but for the guides it must have felt like hours..."

"We did see the rhino's running away from us but as we came over a hill, there they were again, standing about 30m from us. When the wind suddenly changed they charged without warning. Immediately my back-up came and stood next to me cocking his rifle. I did the same thing.



I have set an imaginarily line in my mind as to where the point of no return lies. This is when I will shoot to protect. This line was about 5m in front of us and we had two rhino's charging us...and they were coming fast-two little bushes marked the spot.

Andrea and I were throwing rocks and swearing at the rhinos, both to scare them off and buoy us up psychologically- but the rhinos kept coming. The whole situation played out in super slow motion and it was as if I was watching a kind of slide show in my mind, yelling and shouting and thinking calmly at the same time. Everything I have learnt from books and experience passed through my mind. I kept the two knob thorns in my line of vision. The guest safety was my priority. The adrenalin was pumping.

When the rhino reached the "point of no return" a little voice told me that I should not shoot to kill so I made a decision to give a warning shot, trusting and hoping that if they did not stop, that my back-up would shoot the rhino.

As the shot went off the rhinos turned towards Andrea-this gave me time to give them a reminder that taking us on was not a good idea. My second warning shot went off just behind the rhino's and they actually ran away this time, tails between their legs..."

For Kathleen the walk was unforgettable, "The trust you put into a person in such a moment, in a person you actually don't know, is astonishing. It felt as if the guides knew exactly what they were doing though. Everything went so smoothly-there was no panic and not one single moment where I doubted their competence"

For Jannie, the incident stresses his responsibility. "The safety of guests is the priority and killing the animal must be the last possible resort. All the information you have ever learned on that specific animal goes through your mind, your rifle training kicks in, then you start getting tunnel vision and you can only see the danger in front of you, in super slow motion. Never will two situations be the same, and each one needs to be treated

differently depending on what animal it is, what situation you found it in, it's attitude, the topography and escape routes for you and the animal, among others”.



Guiding is all about trust and training. You have to trust yourself, you have to trust your partner and they have to trust you. You have to trust the guests to do as they are told-and they have to trust you to keep them safe. You also have to trust those instincts that say shoot to kill, or stand your ground. You have to override the instinct that says run...and at the end of the day, guest or guide, you've looked that rhino, elephant or lion in the eye-and lived to tell the tale.
