Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Natural Treasures of Uganda
BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

by

Dennis Lubega

Illustrated by Nicholas Kagongo Arinaitwe
They looked back at me and smiled as they walked around the edge of the bushes. Then Grace shouted back to me, “We shall be back in a month.”

“That’s a long time to wait! But I’ll be waiting right here,” I called back laughing.

Grace and Maureen were my long-time friends and fellow mother warthogs. They had come to visit unannounced, which I rather like because it showed how close we had become. This was the first time the three of us had come together again since I gave birth to my second litter one month earlier.

They had said that it would be another whole month before they would return. I would miss their company and warm warthog smiles.

They love excitement and are a lot of fun. They wanted to return at a time when my babies had grown big enough to start grazing so that we would
not be so busy with them and could have more time to ourselves.

Although warthog litters suckle for four months, after the first two months they are able to graze on grass as well. From that time on they get most of their nourishment from grazing. So when Grace and Maureen said that they would be back in a month’s time that was what they wanted to see: my babies grazing. Yes, I knew my friends well.

Their visit had been a breath of fresh air. Before they came, I had been lost in thought.

I was worrying about my older children. Separating myself from them had not been easy. We had been
quite close and they had actually refused to leave. I had not wanted them to leave either but I had to chase them away. It was my natural instinct and something inside of me told me that I was doing what was needed and everything would be okay. I was sure they would meet up with other solitary warthogs and have their company for a short time before going on their own.

Chasing them off was a challenge as I had developed a fondness for my little ones. After all, I had nursed them for four months, each one suckling its ‘own teat.’ As female warthogs do, I had assigned each of my four teats to one of my babies. They would always return to their own teat and were very good about not trying to suckle from one of my other teats that belonged to their brothers or sisters. This was also the nature of warthogs and how we were created.
I stood up at once and examined my home from all angles. It was only a shallow hole and very unsafe indeed! Well...I had not dug it myself. Rather, I allowed an aardvark to do the heavy digging! That is another habit of warthogs that has stuck with us for as long as anyone can remember. We like turning holes that have been dug in the ground by other animals into our homes. And by the way, it’s not that we cannot excavate. We can! We simply prefer to allow others to do the hard work for us.

While our homes were usually quite safe, I hoped that no predator would ever find us. It would be hard to escape from even the slowest predators with my four piglets trailing behind me. That made me worry a lot about how safe my family and I were inside our home.

That very day at dusk, I was just outside my home when I saw a movement in the distance. It was quite dark, so I wasn’t sure whether it was only my imagination or something else. But then I saw it again and this time it was closer. Thinking that it was a
predator, I quickly went inside the house to join my piglets.

After some time sitting in my hole in total silence, I decided to peep outside to see if all was clear. I focused my eyes. Once again I saw the movement. I did not think it was a predator as it did not seem to be prowling around. The animal moved more like a warthog and I would swear upon my sleepy ancestors’ names that it had its piglets in tow. Within seconds, I realized that it was my sister Nina and her piglets. What a strange time of the day for her and her young ones to pay us a visit. Hooray! Hooray!

As young piglets, Nina and I had grown up together and enjoyed each other’s company very much. Although I had not sent her a message saying where my hideout was before giving birth, I was not surprised that she had found us. Knowing her, she must have asked every single warthog in Queen Elizabeth National Park where I could be.

This was a good thing about living in the Park. While some warthogs argued that Queen Elizabeth National Park had some of the fiercest predators in the world, we always considered it to be a cozy little backyard for ourselves. Warthogs seemed to know each other and get along better than the other animals in the Park. The lion and other predators who took themselves so seriously just did not seem to have as much fun. For example, the leopard, that animal with very beautiful
spots, always seemed afraid of being seen in public. The spotted hyena certainly wasn’t as friendly as us and nor were the snakes. In the Maramagambo forest, there were pythons that never left the bat caves. Warthogs would get bored with such strange behaviour. We like to move about and get around as much as possible.

Coming at this late hour with her young babies meant that Nina must have come to stay with us. That was okay! Warthogs live in family groups of a female and her young, sometimes two families of related females, so we enjoyed the companionship. It’s the males that live by themselves, only joining female groups to mate.

“Nina, how lovely it is to see you,” I cried with joy as I ran to meet her.

“Lovely to see you too, Maggie. How have you been?” she inquired happily.

“You guess? What is going on? Did your delivery cause you any problems?” she asked with increasing concern.

“Oh no, no. It was smooth and normal. It’s my older children. I still miss them,” I replied sadly.

“Trust me, I know the feeling. But do not worry so much. It will pass. It’s only that you are still a young mother and that was your first time to chase away your own children. It will pass,” Nina reassured me.

“I am just concerned about their well being. Are they getting enough to eat? Can they find water when they are thirsty?” I continued to expose my worries.

“Sweetheart,” Nina replied, using her favorite term of endearment, “warthogs consume lots of water when nature provides it to us. You know that. We live in Queen Elizabeth National Park because it has lots of water for most of the year and good grass. Warthogs love arid and moist settings. When it is dry, we can conserve water in our bodies like camels and gazelles to keep us cool. You do not need to worry about your young surviving. Warthogs are a durable lot!”

“Thank you for your words of wisdom. You always seem to take life in stride and not be bothered by too much,” I said gratefully. Nina was always reassuring in her point of view. She thought clearly and rationally and rarely got worried. On the other hand, she often tended to be concerned too much with the fashions
of the month, something I never paid much attention to. Deciding to change the subject, I asked, “How are your own children and have you heard from their father lately?”

“Well, the children are happy as you can see,” she gestured with her lips towards them. They were about my own piglets’ age. “Their father should be fine too, but as you know, we only meet when we are considering bringing forth more children. Some of my female friends claim to have recently seen him and I don’t like what they have said about him. Between you and me, I think their gossip is caused by jealousy. You see, these are the females he rejected when he chose me to be his wife.”

“Oh, warthogs can be that way sometimes. I would not give it much thought,” I consoled her.
“They say that he has become very hairy and the warts on his face are no longer pretty. According to them he is now heavy and has developed two huge upper tusks while the two lower ones have remained tiny,” Nina continued.

“It sounds like they are now taking their revenge on him because he rejected them?” I offered as a suggestion. “Male warthogs are supposed to be heavy. You know they generally weigh twenty-two kilos more than us females. The way your husband has been described is the exact way I remember him. I think he still sounds like a very handsome warthog, warts and all.”

“You’re absolutely right!” she exclaimed. “He is such a cute thing. When I fell in love with him it was because I thought he was very handsome and exceptionally kind. Whatever picture they may paint of how he looks now, he will forever remain my Mr. Handsome.”

“You’re right. Your husband was always handsome!” I agreed and smiled. “Everyone knows that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. So what do you care about what others think? What I recall of him was the way he ran. The tuft of his tail flew like a flag as he trotted across the savanna, higher than any of the others running with him.”

“I’m very glad I came to visit you. You have always had a way of cheering me up,” said Nina thankfully.
“And you, sister, have always had a way of distracting me from my worries. I’ve completely forgotten what I was saddened about before you arrived!” Indeed, I truly had forgotten about my own issues by listening to Nina and her concerns.

Nina and her young stayed with us that night. We were up late discussing how life would be when our children were grown and living in their own homes with other warthogs. I hope we will all see each other from time to time. Nina’s visit gave me hope that we would always stay in touch. That is the beauty of living in a place like Queen Elizabeth National Park. We are never too far from each other in this wonderful place where we have a lot to eat and drink. As we fell asleep that night, I wondered if all of the other animals and birds in the park had it as well as the warthogs. I smiled thinking what a tight-knit group we were, the most beautiful and handsome animals around.

THE END
1. What does it mean “each piglet has its exclusive teat”?

Each piglet has its “own” teat and suckles exclusively from it. Even if one piglet dies, the others do not suckle from the available teat.

2. Who is heavier among the warthogs, males or females?

Males

3. How are warthogs similar to camels and desert gazelles?

Warthogs conserve moisture inside their bodies to be used for cooling like camels and desert gazelles do.

4. Which is bigger in a warthog the upper tusks or the lower ones?

The upper ones

5. Where do warthogs like to sleep?

In holes dug by other animals

6. Where do warthogs like to live?

In moist and arid savannas
Learning more about nature allows us to understand our environment, respect our wildlife friends, and share our experiences with others.

Be a friend of the natural treasures of Uganda and act responsibly when interacting with your environment.

About the Author

Dennis Patrick Musisi Lubega began his interest in stories at the age of two. Then it was mostly children’s stories on TV and folktales told by his mother. Dennis has never lost this passion. Although he trained in business studies, the forty year-old recently decided to begin a new career as a writer for children and young adults. As a result of this decision, he has written several stories--*The First Claim, The Laughing Lion, The Short Giraffe that Wanted a Little Respect, The Monkey Christmas Dinner,* and *Late on PLE Day,* among others. The Natural Treasures of Uganda series of environmental education books is his first set of books to be published. Mr. Lubega lives in Kampala, Uganda, and is married with one child.

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