

We The People

Program 58

Tiger Tiger Burning Bright



Nearly 150 years ago in 1865 a boy was born in tropical Bombay India to British parents Alice and John Kipling. They had emigrated to India from a beautiful English town in Staffordshire by a picturesque English lake after which the boy was named. Lake Rudyard's title gave rise to Rudyard Kipling who went on to receive a Nobel Prize for literature in 1907 and in particular for his short stories and poems. Among these The Jungle Book series is perhaps the most famous featuring an Indian boy called Mowgli who was raised by a pack of wolves. Kipling's stories were often based in the jungles of India and the animals that live there, bringing them to anthropomorphic life. Surely that flash of black and orange among the shadows reminds us of the magnificent Bengal Tiger and its unassailable majesty. The early poet William Blake brilliantly penned the spirit of the tiger in his poem of the same name. *Tiger Tiger burning bright..... In the forests of the night..... What immortal hand or eye..... Could frame thy fearful symmetry.*

This love of the tiger and the natural world of jungles and wild places has fired the imagination of children everywhere and today caring people hear the words again as the tiger faces extinction. We will ensure however it will not go quietly and Rudyard Kipling's protagonist Mowgli would not exist without its omnipresence. All this brings me to the point of this narrative. Right here on the Gold Coast at Burleigh Heads we have a genuine Mowgli barely 16 years old and as this goes to air Dallas is tending the magnificent tigers of Thailand. Dallas is blessed to have a unique mother who we will call Akela which was the name of the leader of the wolf pack which raised Mowgli. Now Akela is a mother who wants her son to grow being independent and self assured yet retains a sense of place and an unselfish moral code. I have met Dallas and he is a remarkable young man full of promise with a spirit of adventure and a will to save our planet and the majestic tiger with its intrinsic right to live.

At age 12 he spent the school holidays at the Tiger Temple in Thailand with the orange robed Buddhist monks and has been back twice a year ever since. He cleans the tiger's cages, brings them water, feeds the cubs and leads these enormous 250kg cats around on a lead. Somehow he shows no fear yet these are wild animals. The boy knows his destiny lies with the tiger and has plans beyond his years to help save them. His young age and protective mother Akela prevent me from revealing his last name but I can assure you he is real and a modern day Kipling character fresh from the pages of Jungle Book, who will become a fine young man inspired by the tiger.

The monks Dallas spends his time with are gentle and kind and chant away the morning which seems fitting in this story. Their simple robes, sandals and bare crown reflect a simple life where peace, harmony and nature are inseparable. Each day the monks stand quietly in line with their food bowl while locals provide a portion of rice and fruit with a respectful bow and hands reverently clasped together. Eye contact is avoided to show humility and so for Dallas this atmosphere has a profound effect in shaping his future. Rudyard Kipling would recognise him immediately and how I wish my children could have experienced what he has and from a family with few worldly goods yet rich in heart and mind. This is Mowgli's rite of passage this century here on the Gold Coast.

I have a feeling from what I have seen and heard that our own young Dallas will make an important difference to the animals and forests on our planet as he matures and strives to find a fitting place for the magnificent Bengal Tiger. In fact I know a lot more than I can tell you now but that tiger-tiger burning bright in the forests of the night has a friend and a champion who might just have a plan to keep the story alive. From Rudyard Kipling to Mark Twain and David Suzuki to John Varty add the name Dallas because in Kipling speak "this is the hour of pride and power" and he's not done yet.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley.