

The Rhino and the Tapir
by marcitos

Long ago, before any of us were born, but after spiders and monkeys and birds were already building webs, flying through trees, making nests and calling their calls to each other, there lived a Rhinoceros named Richard. Well I know what you're thinking. If people weren't born yet, how do I know Richard's name? Animals can't write their history.

It's a very good question, but I'm not going to answer it right now. If you wait till later you'll find out. But for now, just take my word for it. This little Rhino was named Richard.

When Richard was only as tall as the tall grass that surrounded the jungle where he lived, he got lost. It wasn't his fault. Richard was trying to keep up with his Mama, Rhoda, as she ran here and there eating leaves and things. Richard was playing in the tall grass and soon he got lost.

"Richard, Richard, where are you," called Rhoda the Rhino. But by then she was deep in the jungle and Richard was nowhere to be found and could not hear her.

Very far away in the tall grass Richard began to cry. At first he only cried tears but after a while he became so sad that he started to trumpet loud noises. He almost sounded like a trumpeting elephant or a trumpeter swan, or a horned screamer.

Then he ran to the river nearby. It was a bright day, but the sun was beginning to set in the west. The water was cloudy green. Richard looked down at his reflection in the smooth water by the edge. He saw his own reflection in the river and was startled. He stopped crying. He did not know what to think. "Is that me," he thought? What has happened to my nose. There on top of his nose was growing a big bump. He didn't know how it got there.

Richard knew his mom, Rhoda, had two big horns on her nose, but he had never had one and he thought that only mama Rhinos had those things. Or maybe only his mama.

Richard stood there looking in the water for a very long time puzzling his mind over the strange bump and feeling sad and missing his Rhoda. He stayed by the river so long that the sun set and the dark of night covered up the grasslands like a blanket. After it was so dark that Richard could no longer see reflections in the water, there was a sudden loud noise behind him. Crash!

Richard was startled by the loud crashing noise and he fell into the river. Richard was splashing around in the water trying to swim when a bigger animal, the one that had made the noise jumped into the water and gently nudged Richard toward the shore with its long curved nose. It pushed and pushed, a little bit here and a little bit there until finally Richard got his legs on the sand and walked out of the water.

"Thanks," said Richard to the bigger fellow who reminded him of his uncle, Ringo, the Rhino. Now that Richard thought about it Ringo had one of those horns on his nose too. Not the same as his mom, who had two, but still a nice looking horn. But this friend had no horns at all.

“I’m Richard, what’s your name?”

“I’m called Tiny,” said the Tapir. “I’m 3, but you’re still tinier than me, Tiny.”

“I’m not tiny,” replied Richard. “I’m Richard.”

“Does your mama call you ‘Dick’?” said Tiny.

“Don’t be silly,” answered Richard. “My ma calls me by my real name, Richard. Are you a Rhinoceros, too?”

“Nawww,” moored Tiny. “My name is Tiny. That begins with a T because I’m a Tapir.”

Just then there was a rustling in the trees beyond the grass at the far side of the meadow. The rustling came from the Jungle. There was a screech like a cat or a howler monkey.

“Sshhhhh,” whispered Tiny. “I’m not supposed to be out here talking to others. My dad would be really steamed. Tapirs stay hidden in the dark shadows of night and we don’t talk to strangers.”

“I’m not a stranger,” whispered back Richard, taking a hint from his older friend. “I’m just me, Richard.”

“But Richard, Tapirs are different from Rhinos. We don’t like to attract attention. And I’m still too small to fight off a hungry hyena or three.”

Richard thought a long hard thought about what Tiny just said. He stood there for a while admiring the fur on his friends back. It was thin and brown, not really a fine coat, but very different from his hard leathery hide. Tiny had an unusual fragrance.

“Do you see this bump on my nose?” Richard asked Tiny. “Do you know what it is? Am I getting sick?”

Now Tiny was only three years old but he had seen enough Rhinos to know that the bump on Richard’s nose was the beginning of his new horn. The thing Tiny didn’t know was whether Richard was a one horned or two horned Rhino. So he answered Richard like this.

“You are beginning to grow your Rhino horn, Richard. That’s a wonderful thing. But tell me does your mama have one horn or two horns on her nose? And, by the way, where is your mama?”

Suddenly remembering that he had lost his mama in the Jungle, Richard began to get sad again and he did not at first answer. “Oh, I see, said Tiny. You’re lost then.”

Richard shook his head. Finally he said, “My mama has two horns but my uncle Ringo only has one. We were out grazing on the edge of the forest and I went to play in the grass. When I looked up she was gone.”

“I’m sure she’ll call you soon,” said Tiny. “Mamas always keep calling.”

“I know said Richard, but I haven’t heard her. And I don’t know which way to go into the Jungle. Do you live in the Jungle too?”

“Yes, I live in the jungle. I don’t know how to find your mama for you, but you can come home and stay with me tonight,” Tiny replied. And so Tiny led Richard through the jungle back to a clay cave where he lived in a dark ravine. And they became fast friends.

Now unless you have a Rhino for a pet you might not know that they can not see very well at all. Rhinos get around almost totally by sound and smell. And that is why Rhoda was having trouble finding Richard. She had to search very slowly because of her poor eye sight. But she kept on trying to find him.

One day a Rhino doctor noticed her sadness and her searching and asked about this. Rhoda told him what had happened, and so the Rhino doctor gave her a pair of Rhino eye glasses that would make her search easier.

Meanwhile Richard was actually doing fine with Tiny who taught him how to dig up termites and other bugs and roots to eat and how to swim and play in the mud hole like a hippo (even though neither of them were hippos they did run into a happy young hippo named Hi). Meanwhile Richard’s horn was growing very very fast, thanks to the great food that Tiny was helping him find.

One day, however, Tiny’s father, Timoteo, came for a visit to his cave. “Hi Pa,” crooned Tiny. “Hi son,” replied Tiny’s father in a loving voice. His tone changed when he saw Richard.

“What have we here,” Timoteo said to Tiny.

“Oh, he’s my friend. He’s a Rhinoceros. Richard, meet my dad, Timoteo.”

Richard wanted to be friends with Timoteo Tapir too, but Timoteo (who you can call Tim for short) scolded his son: “How many times did I tell you that we Tapir’s have to stay to ourselves and not get involved with others?”

“A lot of times,” responded Tiny. “A whole, **whole** lot of times. But this little fellow needed help. He was lost, and he fell in the river. And, and besides he’s got this horn we use to help root up things that we both eat.”

“Hmmm...” mused Tim. “But what if the Hyena or the Big Cat sees you?”

“Oh we talk about that too. Two heads are better than one, you know. We can distract the hungry cats and besides we can always call you. I’ve got that cellular you gave me.”

“Hmmm...” mused Timoteo again. “Very interesting. But where is Richard’s mama. He wasn’t cut out to be a Tapir, you know. “

After a little while Tiny had convinced Timoteo that all three of them should set out on a trip through the jungle to find Rhoda and take Richard home.

The very next night Timoteo drew a map of the whole giant jungle and on it he put all the places where he knew that Rhinos lived. He made a copy of the map on some tree bark lying by the edge of the cave and gave one copy to the two younger animals.

“We will start here at area A ,” he told them. “And work our way through to B, and C, and D, and E and F and G. And if we don’t find Rhoda by then we’ll go backward from G to F to E, and D, and C and B and then start all over again until she turns up.”

And they did exactly that.

But it only took a little while to find her. On the very second night of their hunting they came to area C and there in a clearing was Rhoda. She smelled them from 100 yards a way and started running through the Jungle to meet Richard. Indeed, she ran so fast in a straight straight line, like Rhinos do, that she ran smack bang right into a tree. Richard ran up to his mom.

“Oh, mama, mama he cried. Are you ok? I didn’t mean to get lost.”

Rhoda took a deep breath and she was ok. “Oh Richard, I missed you so much. When I smelled you I ran so fast and forgot to put on the glasses the doctor gave me to correct for Rhino bad eye sight. I hope I didn’t hurt that tree too much. How are you dear? Who are these animals with you. I can see they aren’t Rhinos.” (In fact Rhoda had accidentally knocked down the small tree she ran into. It was uprooted, bam).

“Mama, this is my friend Tiny Tapir who helped me out of the river when I fell in and taught me how to use my new horn to dig with. Look at my new horn, mama.”

“Yes, it’s very stunning, Richard. You’re growing up faster than fast. But I don’t use my horn that way. And who is this bigger fellow?”

“That’s tiny’s dad, Tim Tapir. He helped us find you. He’s really good with maps.”

“Tapir, Tapir, that sounds familiar but why can’t I place the name?” puzzled Rhoda. “I seem to think they’re our relatives.”

“It’s because we’re solitary and nocturnal,” answered Timoteo. “But it is nice to make your acquaintance.” Then he continued, “Your son and Tiny seem to have defied the logic of the jungle, but I’m pleased that I could help Richard get home. He’s a nice young fellow.”

With that Rhonda felt so kindly toward Tim that she gently brushed her horns along side of the Tapir's face in a show of affection rarely seen from Rhinos. "Thank you so much for helping out," she said in a soft voice. "And to act against your nature takes courage too."

"It was Tiny who put me up to it," responded Timoteo shyly. "I couldn't refuse him his friendship with little Richard." And so Tiny and Richard remained friends for the rest of their lives and they became cousins.

And now that we have come to the end of the story you may still be wondering how I knew the names of the animals who lived so long ago, before any of us people were born on the earth. And so I'll tell you. The story came to me this way: It was when a boy named Max was sent to his room and didn't get to eat his dinner and went off to the place where the wild things are. Max heard this story from one of the wildest of wild things. And when he came back to his room over the ocean and through the garden and ate his dinner and went to bed and slept as soundly as a lamb, the next day he awoke and told me the story.