

Extract from **Belly laughs and a beautiful cry**

Lindsay Slogrove Saturday Star 6 November 2021

.... The crying bit came when I was moved to tears by the story of wilderness guide Sicelo “Black Lion” Mbatha, whose book extract and story we featured last week. (Black Lion: Alive in the Wilderness by Sicelo Mbatha with Bridget Pitt, Jonathan Ball.) I hate crying and seldom do. My eyes hurt for days and it’s just draining. But reading Mbatha’s book really touched a nerve. If I had my way, I’d make every single person in the world read it. Specially those at COP26.

Billions of words, in books and in documentaries, have been used to describe the natural world and instruct us on why we need it. But Mbatha’s storytelling invokes a fireside in the wild, with glowing eyes of hyena and lion and owl, and all the accompanying sounds around you. The glow of the stars and smell of the soil and breeze rustling through the trees.

On a bush walk, you feel the heightened alertness and the joy of being alive and tapping in to the healing the wilderness gives. It also describes one man’s determination, no matter the unfairness and obstacles he faced, to make his way in the only world he wanted to live in – and share with anyone open to its lessons, even if they are not aware they need those lessons for the health of their souls.

Please read it; it’s beautiful and as soul-restoring as a good laugh.