



Sterlington Stairlift Stories for Children

The Crocodile's Dentist

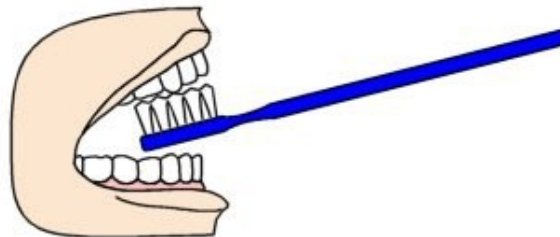


Part One, The Beginning

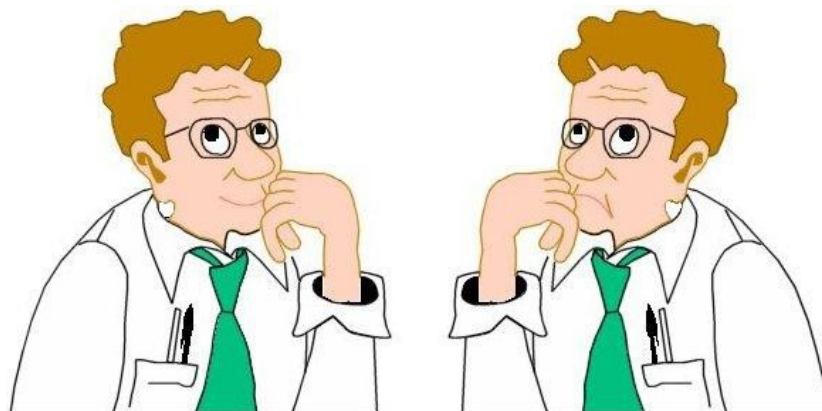
This is a story about Les Rice, FRCCD, DADS, PSADS, the cleverest and bravest dentist in the world. He was even braver than Rhino Rawlings, Hippo Harris, Buffalo Bill and James Bond.

Leslie was his real name and he did his training first of all at Kings College Hospital Dental School in South London.

He knew all about people's teeth and did a very good job of fixing them, or pulling them out, making crowns, caps, dentures, and all sorts of other things that dentists know about. He was good at Latin, too.



His twin brother, Donald, was a vet and they used to talk for hours about people's teeth and animal's teeth to see how much difference there was.



Les used to read lots of books about Africa and India and Australia and other foreign places when he was a schoolboy. He really wanted to go to visit them. So that's what he did.

Les had saved lots of money because he didn't go out to expensive places very often and he lived near the hospital, so he didn't need a car or bus fares. He could drive, though!

He had thought a lot about the natives in the countries he heard about at school and wondered what they did when they had a toothache. Come to that, what did animals do? Donald had told him some of the answers, but Les thought he'd have a look for himself anyway.

Part Two, Africa

Les went to Africa first. Africa is a great big piece of land called a continent and used to be called the "dark continent". There are lots of countries in Africa and all sorts of animals - far too many to write down in this story.



The ship that took Les to Africa was called "Marwell" It was carrying some great big cages with zoo names on the sides. The cages were being sent so animals could be taken back to England for the zoos there.

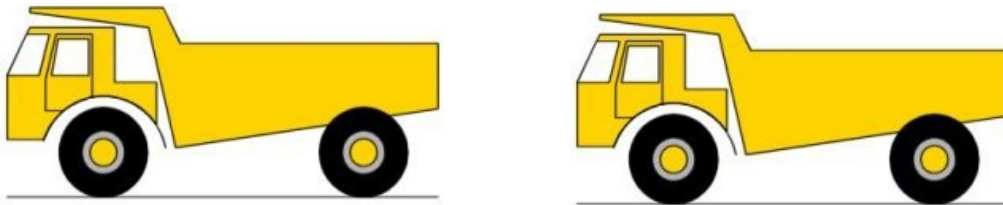


Les tried to guess which type of animal would go in each cage. He wrote his guesses down on a pad, then one evening he had dinner with the ship's captain and asked him about it.

Unfortunately he didn't get them all right first time, but on the next day he found that some of the cages were upside down or the wrong way round so they looked as if they were for different animals - no wonder he got them wrong!

Before the end of the trip, though, Les had them all worked out and knew exactly which type of animal was going where.

Les got off the ship at a great big seaport called Mombasa. All of his equipment was put on lorries and he set off into the mysterious jungly bits.

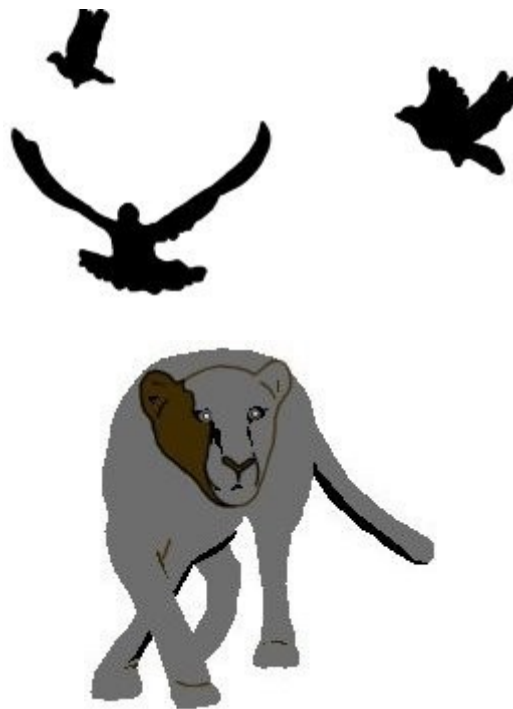


He had lots of natives to give him a hand. They were all very helpful and knew the jungle like the back of their foot.

When the roads finished the natives unloaded the equipment and carried it into the wild.

Les found a smashing place near a river and decided to set up his camp there. When the boxes were unloaded he showed the natives how to put up the tents. Then he said they'd have to think of a name for the camp.

They lit a fire and kept it going all night by putting tree branches and leaves on it. Les could see all sorts of different coloured animal eyes looking at him from the jungle around the camp. "I bet some of them would like me for dinner", he thought.



It was very strange trying to sleep in the jungle for the first time. Les had been camping with the scouts lots of times, and he had been to France as well, but this was different - lots of peculiar noises from the jungle and lots of splashing, slithering sounds from the river. But he did fall asleep in the end, and woke up full of curiosity about what would happen that day.

Part Three, That Day

He brushed his teeth with lye water, made from tree bark, and thought it tasted alright but was not as good as his favourite toothpaste, "Glint".

There was no hot water, no toilet, no airing cupboard or anything, but that didn't matter to an old boy scout, did it?

Les and four of the natives walked along the river for ten and a half miles that day. They saw all sorts of animals, some snakes, beautiful coloured birds, and his first wild !!!!! crocodile.

It was a great big long one, with eyes bulging out of its head as if they were going to pop, and a tail that could cut a man in half with one swing.

"Gosh!", thought Les, "I wonder how Donald would get on with that in his surgery".

(Come to think of it, I wonder how Les would get on with it in his dental surgery!)

The crocodile was quite still at first, that's why Les and the natives didn't see it until they got close. It could have been an old log laying in the river for all they knew, but when it moved it certainly moved quickly, and really gave them quite a start.

The natives said if they kept away from the edge of the river they would be safe, but if they went into the river they were likely to get eaten.

When they got back to the camp Les decided to call the camp "Tooting Bec", after one of his favourite pieces of common land in London, England. The natives liked it because Tooting and Bec were words they could pronounce easily.



They even invented a dance to go with it and chanted the name as they danced round the fire in the evening; "Toootin' bec, jabba jabba, tooti'n bec, jabba jabba", and so on. Les thought the rhythm was quite exciting and he was glad he had given them something to sing about.

During the next few days Les and his native team went along the river a long way. They found a place with enough rocks to cross over and they walked along the other side as well. Les thought it would be nice if they could build a bridge near the camp to get over the river more easily. But that was difficult and they didn't have anything long enough.

Part Four, What Happened on Thursday

On the first Thursday they found a crocodile that looked a bit different to the others. It was the same colour and the same length, but it didn't look very well. Its eyes were funny and it wriggled about as if it were in pain.



Les threw it some meat but the crocodile ignored it and started swinging its tail about very angrily. "I wish crocodiles could talk" said Les. "Then they could tell us what was wrong".

The natives told Les that there wasn't much crocodile food at that part of the river and that this crocodile was a male.

Les thought quite hard and said "There's only one thing I think is wrong with this crocodile - he's got TOOTHACHE".

What happens next?

Les thought that if the crocodile had lost his appetite for food he wouldn't try to eat him, but he might swing his tail and knock him down into the river, then other crocodiles might eat him. So the tail was the thing to watch.

He got a stick and drew a picture in the dust near the river bank. It showed what he wanted to do and helped the natives to understand what to look for.

They went off with their big jungle knives and came back later with a long, thin, tree trunk and lots of creeper plants which looked like like green string.

Les cut some notches in the tree trunk with his scout knife



and the natives plaited the creepers to make a long piece of rope.

What they ended up with was like a giant rope loop on the end of a pole.

From the river bank they floated the pole out past the crocodile, twisted it until the loop passed over his tail, then pulled the rope so his tail was tied against the pole.

That kept him still while they did the next bit.

They had some more tree trunks and while the plaiters were making the rope, some other natives made a tree trunk raft. They floated the raft out into the river, then tied one tree trunk along each side of the crocodile's tail and body to keep him still while Les had a look at his teeth.

When the crocodile was properly tied up, they lifted him onto the raft and floated him to the river bank. They tied the raft to some wooden stakes knocked into the ground and that made a nice working platform for Les.

He had to get the crocodile to open his mouth next but wasn't sure how to do it. So he asked the natives for ideas.

One of them, who couldn't speak much English, made some signs showing that the crocodile's mouth should be pulled open.

Then Les remembered what Donald had told him once. Donald said that crocodiles and alligators, which are something like crocodiles, have very strong muscles to close their jaws, but the muscles which open them are quite weak.

He said that a man could hold a crocodile's jaws together with just one finger and thumb, simply because the opening muscles were so weak.

Les wasn't worried about the opening - he was worried about the closing!

Anyway, he was a brave dentist, and he had an important job to do on this poor old crocodile with toothache. So he pulled its jaws open, which he found was quite easy, then he got his torch and shone it all around inside the crocodile's mouth.

Les soon saw the problem. It was a great big bad tooth right at the back on the crocodile's right side.

"That will have to come out", he said.

"Go back to Tooting Bec and get my special green box", he told one of the natives.

Soon the loyal native returned with the box of equipment. He and all the other natives were absolutely amazed at the things Les was doing and stood around under a kind of spell as he worked away at his next tasks.

Les got a little tiny metal hammer, put his head right inside the crocodile's mouth, shone the torch on the bad tooth and hit it with a 'clonk'.

The crocodile screamed and nearly deafened poor Les, who still had his head in its mouth.

But the crocodile didn't close his jaws!

Les had already worked out that people and animals find it awfully hard to scream with their mouth shut, and as long as the crocodile was uncomfortable, it was unlikely to bite Les's head off.

The poor croc also knew that it hurt when he closed his mouth and bit on the bad tooth, so that was another good reason for keeping his jaws open.

Dentists have to tap bad teeth to make sure they've got the right one. It certainly wouldn't do to pull out a good one!

Well, that was the right tooth and all he had to do now was pull it out. "I'd better get a strong native to help", thought Les, "I don't know just how tough this might be". But the natives wouldn't get close enough to the crocodile's mouth to help and Les realised that all tooth pulling would be down to him alone.

So he made a clever helping device. It was a wooden frame which went inside the crocodiles mouth, to keep his jaws open and there was a special lever with pliers fixed on the end, to help him pull out the tooth.

He put the frame in place, then crawled through the middle of it, clamped the pliers on the tooth, and pushed the end of the lever down. "Screeelllcchhhhhh" went the tooth as it came out.

"Hooray" went all the natives. "Gosh, I'm glad that's over", said Les. "OUCH" said the crocodile, in crocodile language of course!

Les put a big wad of cotton wool over the gum where he had taken the tooth out, so the bleeding would stop, then he removed the frame and let the crocodile close his mouth."

No more sweets for you!" he said, as a joke.

After a little while, when the crocodile was feeling better, the natives untied the tree trunks and let him swim away down the river.

A few days later they saw him again and this time he looked quite normal and was busy eating again. "That's good", said Les. "I wonder if I am the first dentist from London to pull out a crocodile's tooth to make him better!"

Les wrote down everything he had done, and all the things the natives had done so that he could send his notes to the dental school in London. Then all the other dentists could learn more about his adventures and the important dental work he was doing in Tooting Bec, The Jungle, Africa.

Part Five, Time For Some More Clever Stuff

A few weeks after the first crocodile, Les was shown an older one by one of his natives who called himself Mr M Gower. Mr Gower had an old bowler hat which he found near the Mombasa docks and someone had written the name on the front.

Les just called him Gower.

This crocodile was certainly quite old and looked a bit ill, but a different kind of colour to the first one.

Les talked to the natives again and they found that you could tell how old a crocodile was by using a special counting method. They reckoned that this one was a granny and she probably hadn't been eating too well because her teeth were worn out.

Les thought that if her teeth were worn out, she couldn't bit his head off and if she was weak through not eating, she couldn't really smack him very hard with her tail.

So they paddled the raft out to her and gently pushed her to the shore. Les opened her mouth and just stuck his head straight inside, without using the frame.

It was then that the helicopter flew over and the newspaper photographer took his picture.

Les couldn't hear the helicopter because his head was in the crocodile's mouth and the natives didn't hear it because they were all too spellbound by what Les was doing.

Les got some plaster and took a moulding of the old lady crocodile's teeth (or what was left of them) and then he let her go. Before she swam back into the river, though, the natives floated some special soup onto the surface of the water so she could have a nice bit of lunch.

Les worked very hard that day, all evening, and right through the night. He had a sleep for a couple of hours the next morning, but was anxious to see how his new invention would work out.

He had been busy making a lovely set of crocodile's False Teeth. They looked super, all gleaming and sharp, just the right length, and hollowed out at the back so they could be stuck in place. All he had to do now was find the 'old lady' and see if they would fit.

It took quite a long time to locate the old crocodile, because she had crawled up onto a small island down the river and fallen asleep under some leaves.

They had to throw a lasso over her head and pull her into the river because there were other crocodiles about which had very good teeth and an even better appetite!

After a while they got the old crocodile to the river bank and Les opened up her great big jaws. He gave her worn out old teeth a good clean up with his special battery powered brush, and then tried the false teeth. they needed just a little bit of trimming, and then they fitted as snugly as anything.

Les put lots of lovely dentists' glue on the back and stuck the new teeth in place.



He had to be very careful of the next bit, though, because the crocodile had to close her jaws slowly and keep them shut while the glue dried.

He put a pile of logs between her jaws, then took the logs out very slowly, one at a time, while he pushed her snout down and looked carefully at the new teeth closing together.

As the last log came out he said "perfect", then held her top jaw down with one finger while he tied her jaws together with sticking plaster.

"Two hours for you", he said, "then we'll have another look and see how they've stuck".

Two hours later Les had a look and decided that the old lady crocodile could be allowed back into the river. But just before he let her go he fitted a ring through her nose, so that he could recognise her again.

One of the natives followed her as she swam along the river, and at the proper testing time he threw her a nice juicy steak. 'Glop' it went, and the native was sure he saw the crocodile wink at him.

Part Six, George Groves

In London the photograph taken by the man in the helicopter arrived at the newspaper office, and the next day it was printed in the newspapers.

A great big coloured picture showing a white man with his head in a crocodile's mouth, and lots of natives standing around with spears in their hand.

Some people thought the natives had captured Les and made him put his head in the crocodile's mouth. Others thought someone was making a new Tarzan film and the crocodile was a dummy.

Nobody guessed what was really happening, and the newspaper didn't tell them.

The photographer had heard that an English dentist had gone to the jungle and he got the helicopter pilot to fly him around in the hope that he could see him.

He saw him alright, but he didn't really know what was going on. So the newspaper printed the picture and asked readers to write in and say what they thought was happening as a competition.

They promised to print the true answer the following week. That meant that a reporter would have to go to the jungle and find out. They sent George Groves because he was very good at sorting things out, and could handle dangerous situations without worrying.

George flew to Africa in an aeroplane, then got the helicopter pilot to drop him by rope ladder near the camp.

George was absolutely amazed when he walked up to the tents and saw a great big sign saying "Tooting Bec".

He thought he was having a strange dream for a minute and pinched himself really hard to make sure. (In fact he pinched himself so hard he had a bruise for two weeks afterwards).



There were only two natives at the camp when George arrived but fortunately Les had taught them some good English words and they were able to explain to him where Les was.

They let George borrow a raft, and he paddled up the river until he saw the dentist with his head stuck in another crocodile's mouth.

"Ahoy there" he called. "Are you Leslie Rice the dentist from London?"

"Good heavens" thought Les. "Did I really hear someone speaking normal English?"

He took his head out and looked across the river. "Who are you?"

George introduced himself and they had a quick chat. But Les made him wait until he had finished his dental work before they could talk properly.

George was absolutely stupefied when he heard about all the things Les had done for the crocodiles.

"Is it true about crocodile tears?" George asked. "They say that crocodiles cry tears to make other creatures feel sorry for them, and once they are close enough the crocodiles glop them all up".

"Quite true", Les assured him. "But what many people don't know is that crocodiles also cry when they've got raging toothache, and when that happens they have no intention of glopping anything".

So Les and George talked for hours and Les agreed that his story could be printed in the papers.

The next week the newspaper printed the answer to the competition and also announced that they had a winner.

The right answer was sent in by a little girl called Matilda Todd who lived in North London.

Matilda was called "Tilly" by her friends, and usually she wasn't very good at winning puzzles or anything. But this time she had been helped a little bit by her uncle Donald, who loved her very much and thought it was time she won a lovely prize.

The prize was a beautiful great big toy crocodile made from lovely soft material and packed in a super big box.

Tilly went to the newspaper office to collect her prize and they took lots of pictures of her. One of them was sent to Les at Tooting Bec, and he was very, very pleased.

Les stayed in the African jungle areas for a few years and found that he could put his head in any crocodile's mouth without using the frame, and none of them ever tried to bite his head off.

He found ways to fix all sorts of tooth problems and got calls from all over the world to help people who had crocodiles and other creatures in trouble.

Donald was very proud of all the good work his brother was doing and they decided to write a book together so that other vets and animal dentists could share their experiences.



If you learn geography at school and list just how many countries in the world have crocodiles and alligators and zoos, you will see how busy Les had been.

He is still the best crocodiles' dentist in the world and probably always will be!



The End