

Local dentist shares passion for African wildlife in new photo exhibition



By Brock Weir

Shame.

It is just one word, but it is a singular utterance that summed up a range of emotions for Aurora's Ron Goodlin as he joined the ranks of millions around the world horrified by the killing of Cecil, The Lion in Zimbabwe by American dentist Walter Palmer.

It was a shame Goodlin felt not just as a lover of wildlife, with a particular passion for Africa but, as many people around Aurora might have guessed, as a dentist as well.

“He tracked it for 48 hours as it died a slow, agonizing death,” recalls Dr. Goodlin, throwing his hands up in the air. “Are you kidding me? How can you do that? I was ashamed and embarrassed, not just as a dentist, but for the whole human race. What we do to these poor animals and our environment is just shameful.”

But there is a palpable sense of pride shared by Dr. Goodlin as he shows off his vivid photographs of lions, rhinos, hippos, wildebeest and zebra in their natural habitat, now available for all to see at the Aurora Cultural Centre.

When Dr. Goodlin was a boy of 15, his father was diagnosed with cancer. At the time, his mother was looking for ways to get her young son's mind off this weighty matter and, while on a shopping trip one day, hit upon the idea of getting him a camera.

“I took it home and thought it was pretty cool and got me pretty interested in it,” he recalls.

Influenced by famed World War Two photographer Stu Friedman, who died this month, he became enthralled by the photographic process, particularly as images emerged from soaking paper in the dim light of the darkroom.

“You're hooked,” he says.

From there, he parlayed his passion into working on his school's yearbook before heading off for a course at the New York Institute of Photography before embarking on his dental studies. But, there too he was able to exercise his passion, although happening upon a way to do so came out in an expected way.

In his second year, he and his fellow students were taking a class trip to another dental school in Buffalo and, as a prank, decided to

take one of their school's dental chairs as a gift to their host faculty. As such equipment was then worth over \$30,000, that didn't go over so well with the dental brass in Toronto and the future Dr. Goodlin was already skating on thin ice.

Back at home, the school's dean suggested he funnel these high spirits into creative avenues, setting him on the path of taking photos for dental publications.

By the end of the summer, I wrote a paper on how to do dental photography, he says with a laugh. I had never written one before, but after second year I was now the world expert in dental photography! After I graduated, I kept this photography business going.

That eventually branched out into fashion and wedding photography before he got tired of working for everyone else and charted his own path, setting his viewfinder on landscapes and wildlife all on his own terms.

In between balancing his work in his successful Aurora dental practice, Dr. Goodlin made his first trip to Africa in 2011. Accompanied by his wife, he says she was skeptical of their expedition at first, but bought her a video camera in the hopes she would be inspired by the nature around her.

There was no interest; it was like me buying a blender for our anniversary! he says. But, the night before, she asked how to use the camera. We landed in Kilimanjaro and went to Arusha the next day. There were a bunch of monkeys jumping around and she thought that was pretty cool. We got back into the truck and turned a corner, and it was like a ride at Disneyland. You turn a corner and there they all are. We saw hundreds of zebras and wildebeests in front of us and my wife is going, Wow! Wow! Where's the camera?! She filmed the entire time.

As he looks over his photographs, Dr. Goodlin becomes wistful of the majestic beauty Africa offers, despite the best efforts of poachers who have decimated populations of elephant and rhinos for their tusks and horns, either for use in the ivory trade or, in the case of rhinos, for aphrodisiacs popular in Asian medicine.

It is not just the wildlife that have captured Dr. Goodlin's heart, this love also extends to the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania, whom he has visited with fellow doctors to help build schools and provide simple medical treatments to the populations, whether looking out for their basic oral health, or applying Polysporin.

I want people to have an understanding of how wonderful these animals are and how horribly humans are treating these animals, he says. I want my photographs to bring some awareness and maybe give more insight to stop the madness of poaching and killing, and encourage a love of these animals in the wild.

Ron Goodlin: A Lens on Africa is on now at the Aurora Cultural Centre running through November 21.