



Lights CAMERAS AND... ACTION!

Most of our readers will be familiar with the film *Tornado and the Kalahari Horse Whisperer*, which was released in 2009. It tells the true story of two damaged and broken souls: a depressed young man whose frustration is manifested in acts of self-mutilation and an Arab stallion, Tornado, a broken and tormented horse – two souls brought together by chance who needed emotional therapy to repair their “brokenness” with the assistance of well-known horse whisperer and missionary, Barrie Burger.

But such therapy would only be successful in an atmosphere where loneliness, self-examination, isolation and eventually healing could take place ... a place like the remote and harsh Kalahari Desert. The word Kalahari derives from the Tswana words, *Kgala* (“the great thirst”) and *Kgalagadi* (“a waterless place”).

The San people, commonly known as the Bushmen, are synonymous with the Kalahari Desert. Many years ago, these hunter-gatherers roamed the plains of the desert, but currently there are only a small number of San people living near the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park.

For Barrie Burger, better known as “the horse whisperer”, his earliest memories are linked to the vast emptiness and harshness of the Kalahari. Since childhood, Barrie was always concerned about the underprivileged and disadvantaged and he decided to start a ministry service in the Kalahari. A horse was the chosen method of transport to be able to associate with the poor communities. It was also the only form of transport that could reach the isolated people in

such sandy terrain.

Barrie started Kalahari Missions in 1985 and since then has spent thousands of evenings alone with his horse under the stars in the remote Kalahari, on his way to visit distant communities. This constant and intimate relationship with his horses allowed Barrie to become an expert on the methods of communication with these wonderful animals. He gained a reputation for doing emotional therapy on horses and many so-called difficult horses have been helped through his methods and insight. He soon became known as “the horse whisperer of the Kalahari”.

To quote Barrie regarding this term, this is his explanation: “I think a horse whisperer is someone who understands the sensitivity of the horse’s soul, someone who knows that through cursing and fighting and hitting you can force a horse to do what you want him to do, but in the process you lose the potential of a precious relationship. With a horse you speak with your body, not with your voice. You listen with your eyes, not with your ears. And you touch with your heart, not with your hands.”

Director Regardt van den Bergh, well-regarded for his films such as *Faith like Potatoes* and *Hansie*, saw potential in the true life story of a depressed and broken young man, Pierre van Rooyen, and Tornado, an emotionally tormented horse. Pierre, once a top athlete, was crippled by rheumatism and he fell into depression and insecurity which turned into self-mutilation. Then his road crossed with an Arab stallion, Tornado, who became a danger to himself and others as he

KALAHARI HORSE WHISPERER”



TORNADO ALIAS ARLIEB KASHMIR

By Lizet Kotze

Photo's courtesy of Humble Pie Entertainment

developed a self-mutilation syndrome as well, when he was pushed too hard and too fast to become a show horse. He was found to be sterile due to his stressful circumstances and was therefore worthless to his owner.

When they met by pure chance, Pierre sensed Tornado's brokenness but also his potential and together they travelled to Barrie, "the Kalahari horse whisperer" in the small town of Noenieput in the Kalahari desert. Through a journey of healing and self-understanding, these two broken souls became close to each other and through compassion and a special relationship with each other, they became healed.

The making of *Tornado* was a challenging one, especially to find the star performer to play a convincing role as Tornado. What made it more difficult is that Tornado's double should be an Arab stallion, known for their strong personalities and changeable temperaments.

Tornado is a very descriptive name for any Arab stallion as it is an altered form of the Spanish word *tronada*, which means "thunderstorm". The nature phenomenon of a tornado means that it is a violent, dangerous, rotating column of air and in extreme cases can reach wind speeds of 480 km/h. Producer and filmmaker, Peter Lamberti, who specialises in wildlife documentaries, was the perfect person to come on board to produce the movie, but first a perfect Tornado had to be found. An Arab breeder, Ronell Coetzer from El Rosco Arabians, and well known in the SA endurance circles, had such an Arab stallion on her farm Schietpoort nearby Bronkhorstspuit in Gauteng.

Ronell met an old friend, Alana Nel, by accident after five years of no communication, and Alana told her that her mother, Anita Erasmus, was involved as creative director of a movie about a real life story of an Arab horse called Tornado. Alana asked Ronell if she, by any chance, possessed a white Arab stallion. Ronell owned a beautiful white Arab with the name Arlieb Kashmir.

Ronell bought Kashmir as a young stallion in 2005 from Alan Browne after she established her own El Rosco stud. Arlieb Kashmir was bred by the Liebenberg family from Pretoria and brought up on Alan's farm in the Rayton district. Kashmir came from well-known Arab genes such as Darius, Shari-Silic Akbar as well as Vidiko strains.

The moment Ronell laid eyes on Kashmir, she fell in love with him; to look in his bright, beautiful yet soft eyes was enough to lose her heart forever! At first he acted as stud stallion, but after his initial build-up period on the farm, he was introduced to endurance riding and rode his first competition at Dullstroom.

Ronell didn't think anything of Alana's enquiry about a white stallion, as there are many volunteers who could make it to become a movie star. But to find that specific, special horse with all the necessary ingredients and temperament to play in a movie, was another story!

About a month after their initial meeting, Alana phoned Ronell to arrange a visit to view Kashmir on their farm. What a surprise when Regardt van den Berg himself, Pierre



van Rooyen, Alana and her mother Anita, visited them one Saturday to have a look at Kashmir.

The moment they saw Kashmir, they made up their minds; his grace, proud presence, wonderful temperament and pure Arab features made them decide that Kashmir should be their Tornado. Pierre took him for a short out-ride, came back, and confirmed that Kashmir was to be their superstar!

There were a lot of external similarities between the real Tornado and Kashmir, although Kashmir's white coat was far whiter than Tornado's; a silver white which shone so brightly in the sun, that he had to be lightly coated with Kalahari sand before each shot as to not reflect too much whiteness in the cameras.

The real Tornado was also a candidate for the role, but as he is a highly sensitive and nervous horse, he wasn't suitable to become a movie star. Kashmir's calm nature and wonderful temperament made him an obvious choice.

Ronell had to separate from Kashmir and let him go to Noenieput, a very small town in the Kalahari where the movie was to be filmed. Barrie Burger described Noenieput very well: "There's not much going on in Noenieput. It's gravel roads, there's no tar roads, there's no schools, there's no nothing here! And then the movie becomes a reality. And all of a sudden it's vehicles and vehicles and lorries and lorries and lights and lights – whatever goes with it. I think the whole of town came to a standstill. Absolutely!"

The logistics to make a movie in such a small, rural town was another nightmare as only four or five houses exist. The crew was more than 50 people and with no running water, no electricity, no accommodation, no cellphone reception



and no telephones, the project was a real challenge. With temperatures of -8°C , sleeping in tents where the water got frozen each night, this was no picnic! It became clear that every crew member and creature on set had to give their full commitment to finish the movie in the shortest possible time.

Ronell did not read the script beforehand because she was so sure that Kashmir would be able to do whatever it would demand. The script also had no strict guiding lines and Kashmir was left to act naturally. There were no tricks or stunts he had to learn; he acted throughout the movie naturally and each shot was only taken once and ended in applause – Kashmir was a born movie star!

The first part of the movie was shot on Ronell's farm at the El Rosco stables. It was difficult to get Kashmir to act violently

as he had such a beautiful character and temperament, but Alana Nel, Kashmir's handler throughout the making of the movie, along with Ronell, knew his trigger buttons. For the scene in the stables where Tornado becomes vicious and unmanageable, Ronell's two stable boys actually tickled him on both flanks which irritated him and made him look uncomfortable and difficult to handle.

Another demanding scene was when Kashmir refused to climb in the horsebox, but in real life he never refused to do this. Another plan had to be made and with a mare on heat behind the horsebox, he acted perfectly, like any pure stallion should!

When Kashmir left the farm for the Kalahari with one of Ronell's grooms to accompany him, it was a heartsore moment for Ronell and she experienced feelings of uncertainty, but the contract was signed, Kashmir was insured, and there was no turning back.

The whole movie was done in four weeks of which three weeks filming were shot in the Kalahari desert. Ronell and her groom, Moses, spent the first week while Kashmir

was already in the desert, at Fauresmith at the National Endurance Championships, after which they joined the team in the Kalahari.

Kashmir welcomed his familiar people with his characteristic neigh and Ronell was more than satisfied that her stallion was treated as a king on set! His handler, Alana, saw to it that he was comfortable with everything that was required of him and even stopped the filming when she thought Kashmir had done enough for the day. Furthermore, loads of lucerne was delivered and Kashmir thrived on all the attention and flattering.

Alana became so fond of Kashmir that she made an offer to buy him from Ronell, but as he was her stud stallion and had already produced 11 beautiful foals and because of the special bond between them, Ronell didn't consider the offer. Christa Schoeman, the make-up artist on set, had a previous bad experience with a horse and was panic-stricken to work on a stallion. Kashmir's would-be wounds on his legs had to be painted on for every scene and she had to kneel before him to do the make-up. She was stunned by his good behaviour and gentleness and could perform her duties without any



incidents. When Christa took out her brushes and paint, Kashmir immediately stood in a resting position, waiting to be groomed and nursed. Christa became very fond of Kashmir and no make-up session was complete before he got a nose scratch and some pampering.

The main character Quentin Krog, in the role of Pierre van Rooyen, had a special bond with Kashmir and spent a lot of time with him during the resting periods. For the challenging riding sequences, the lead actors were body-doubled by people with a similar resemblance. Pierre acted as Quentin's double and a decision was made that Pierre would do all the riding scenes as Quentin had never ridden a horse before.

In the scene where Tornado had to be ridden bareback out to meet Meretha (played by Regardt's daughter, Lean), Quentin decided to do the scene all by himself. Everyone was tense

as Kashmir had never been ridden bareback before and Quentin had never mounted a horse before! The crew was astonished as Kashmir acted as if he'd been used to this method of riding his whole life. He was careful not to drop or hurt Quentin in any way and performed as if he had a child on his back. Although this was a difficult and dangerous scene, it was filmed only once, as were the rest of the scenes! Kashmir had a special affinity towards Quentin which was evident when they started to play in the dunes. It all started naturally and this scene was one of the most touching parts of the movie with the most beautiful shots of desert sand, movement and shadows while man and horse break down personal boundaries and a mutual love and understanding develops.

To capture the beauty and vastness of the desert was another challenge and this could only be accomplished from



the air. A chopper was used and another difficult scene came up when Kashmir was let loose in the desert to run free. This was a nerve-racking situation as there are no fences in the desert and Kashmir could get lost or hurt. For this scene, Kashmir was introduced to a mare to get familiar with and she was taken in the horsebox with him to the dunes. He was taken away to perform his free running scene and he did it just how they envisioned it – he ran all the way back to the mare at the horsebox!

Barrie, the horse whisperer, didn't have to use any energy on Kashmir to play his role; Kashmir was a natural and loved the cameras, lights and action. The crew was deeply impressed by this super natural, intelligent and stunning horse, who effortlessly performed his act, just the way Peter Lamberti and Regardt van den Berg had wished.

When Kashmir returned to the farm, he acted as if he was never away and had never earned his superstar title!

Barrie and Pierre planned a journey with horses from Table Mountain in Cape Town to the Union buildings in Pretoria just after the film was completed and wanted Kashmir to accompany them. But Ronell decided against it; it was in the middle of the breeding season and Kashmir's services were needed on the farm.

But then fate struck when Kashmir broke his leg when jumping a fence to join a pony mare on the other side.

The Coetzer family was far from home in Mossel Bay but arranged everything for Kashmir to be operated on the next day. Kashmir's dependable groom, Moses, stayed with Kashmir during the night but reported during the early hours of 5 December 2008 that Kashmir went into shock and contracted colic. The veterinarian was called out again, but it soon became clear that Kashmir had to be relieved from his misery.

Kashmir's great spirit, beautiful silver-white figure and his incredible talent as a movie star is dearly missed, but he left a treasure for all to share – a movie about a broken soul and a broken horse which found comfort and healing in each other's space.

I strongly believe that Kashmir's spirit can still be sensed and felt in the Kalahari Desert. One of the myths about Arab horses puts the origin of the Arabian as far back as the time of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. In this story, the Angel Jibril descended from heaven and woke the sleeping Ishmael just as a wind-spout came whirling across the desert floor towards him. The wind-spout gathered itself into a prancing horse, hence the old Bedouin name for a horse, "Drinker of the Wind".

So, Kashmir, Drinker of the Wind; your spirit is now free from boundaries, brokenness and pain, and you can explore the universe in the form of a whirlwind to become a Tornado.