

Wild, funny friends

Before leaving Africa, the Kid must meet media stars Owen and Mzee. The unlikely pair lives at Haller Forest near Mombasa, Kenya.

Owen, a baby hippopotamus, survived the tsunami that struck on Dec. 26, 2004.

Mzee, an Aldabran Tortoise, is over 130 years old. His name means "old man" in Swahili.

When Owen was less than a year old, a flood washed Owen and his family down the Sabuki River and into the Indian Ocean. Then, tsunami waves struck. He was separated from his mother and stranded on a reef.

He was rescued near Malindi, a small coastal town about two hours north of Mombasa. People named him Owen, after a young man who helped rescue the baby hippo.

A truck ride took Owen to his new home at Lafarge Park. The baby hippo arrived tired, afraid and confused.

After Owen was released at the park, he went right over to a huge tortoise. Perhaps the big gray mound looked like his mother.

Mzee hissed angrily and walked away ... Owen followed. Mzee was not excited about sharing his space with a 650-pound baby hippo. But



Owen was looking for a friend.

Mzee was about to become a stand-in parent.

By the next morning, Mzee had accepted his new friend.

Normally, tortoises are not social. They don't move around with each other and don't care for their babies.

Hippos are different. They are sociable and live in herds. A young hippo will cuddle and stay close to its mother for four years.

Hippos get very large. An adult hippo is about the same size as a rhinoceros, about 11 feet long and five feet tall. An adult weights 5,000 pounds or more.

Hippos have short legs, a large body and large head. They are cousins to whales.

In the wild, hippos spend most of the day in water and come out at night to feed. When they are out of the water they often rest their heads on objects.

Owen rests his head on Mzee when they lie together. Somehow, Mzee has accepted being followed and cuddled by Owen. The two go into the water together, walk together and sleep together. If someone ap-



Owen, an orphaned hippo, selected Mzee, a tortoise, as his adoptive parent. The friends live at Haller Forest.

proaches Mzee, Owen tries to protect his friend.

Hippos have muscular lips that they use to tear off grass. They also use their lips to nuzzle things around them. It's their way of touching and checking things out. Owen likes to nuzzle and nibble on Mzee's foot.

Soon, Owen will be introduced to Cleo, an adult female hippo. He will learn to interact with other hippos. A new space is planned so Cleo, Owen and Mzee can live together.

Owen and Mzee live in a beautiful animal sanctuary built from a quarry wasteland. The founder, Dr. Rene Haller, created a paradise by replanting rock quarries. The United Nations has recognized his work.

A book written by Craig Hatkoff and his daughter Isabella, "Owen & Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship," is published by Scholastic Press. A movie has also been made.

Owen and Mzee prove that differences really don't matter when you need someone else. This is a lesson we could all learn: overlook differences and find a way to walk together.

Going Together

Match these pairs

Adam	Jerry
Ben	Ham
Penn	Cookies
Green Eggs	Eve
Bert	Teller
Milk	Ernie
Mario	Arrow
Cats	Luigi
Lennon	Dogs
Bow	McCartney



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