



THE PENGUIN PRINCIPLE

[A Little Story About
True Teamwork]

Antarctic Mike



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PROLOGUE: ALL THIS IS TRUE

“Antarctica used to be a tropical place densely forested and teeming with life. But then the continent started to drift south. And by the time it was done drifting, the dense forests had all been replaced with a new ground cover — ice. As for the former inhabitants, they had all died or moved on long ago. Well, almost all of them. Legend has it that one tribe stayed behind. Perhaps they thought the change in weather was only temporary. Or maybe they were just stubborn. But whatever their reasons, these stalwart souls refused to leave. For millions of years they have made their home on the darkest, driest, windiest and coldest continent on Earth. And they’ve done so pretty much alone. So in some ways this is a story of survival. A tale of life over death. But it’s more than that, really. This is a story about love.”

From the 2005 Academy Award-winning film,
March of the Penguins

Around sixty million years ago, back around the time of the dinosaurs, penguins were the size of people. And they could fly.

In those days, Antarctica was still comparatively warm.

As a result, the land held a great many creatures in addition to themselves, all of whom were hungry. And penguin chicks were very easy to catch and eat.

The original people of Australia, the Aborigines, have tales about how the animals and the world came to be. They call these legends of the “dream time.” In these tales, all things—animals, people, even trees and the sun and the moon—can speak and act.

Animals, too, have their own versions of tales of the dream time.

THE MANTRA OF THE PENGUINS

What is The Penguin Principle?

We give all we have.

To whom do we give it?

Each other, even before ourselves.

Why?

So there may always be penguins,

every season, one after the other,

for all the seasons of all time.

STORY TIME IN MODERN DAY IN ANTARCTICA

In which a modern mother begins to tell youngsters an ancient tale of the last penguins on Earth, and in so doing, starts to relay The Penguin Principle.

The light of the sun sliced through the Antarctic autumn day, reflecting off the ice in near-blinding blades that shimmered with a kind of warmth, if you could call it that when you were standing on a glacier.

A group of penguin chicks, nearly grown, were in the middle of shedding their soft baby down feathers and could feel the sun's warmth especially intensely in the spots where their shiny new black feathers had come in.

Near the place where the ice met the sea, a rowdy group of youngsters was showing off their new

grown-up look—and tottering perilously close to the edge.

“Get back over here this *instant!*” rang a stern maternal voice across the glacier. “If you think your father and I nearly *starved* for *months* and almost *froze to death* in *blizzards* and came *thiiiiiiis* close to exhaustion trudging *back and forth* and finally *hatched* you and *raised* you and kept you *safe* all *summer* long only to see you *fall* into the *sea* before you can *swim* and *drown* or get *eaten* by a *seal* or an *orca*, young man...”

The youngsters, led by an especially sheepish young fledgling, waddled over to the mother.

“I’m sorry, Mama,” muttered the youngling. “It’s only that these feathers are so different, and we were enjoying how they feel. They’re so smooth and thick and long and warm in the sun, and now our faces are starting to look like yours and Papa’s with yellow and orange!”

“Do you know how we penguins got these feathers in the first place? Do you know how we came to look like this? Hmmm? Do you know what it *took*? Do you know what *sacrifices* it required for you to

be standing there at the edge of the ice, about to fall into water, after everything every penguin in this colony has given to make sure you're standing there enjoying your new multicolored faces?" asked the mother.

All the young penguins' heads hung bowed, just a little.

"No, Mother."

"Would you like to know?"

Tiny little penguin toes drew tiny little invisible circles on the ice.

"Yes, Mother."

The mother, raising herself up to her full height, nearly three-and-a-half feet tall, looked them over. Her gaze softened. She sighed.

"Soon you will all be ready to go to the sea yourselves. When you do, you will take with you this story. Every penguin does. Every penguin always has, since the beginning. Since the first year. One day you will tell it to the chicks of your colony, after your First Egg Time—but only when they are ready."

“It is the story of The Penguin Principle.”

“What’s The Penguin Principle?” a youngster asked.

“Of all the lessons you will ever learn, The Penguin Principle is the most important. It’s the key to how we Emperor Penguins live our lives, work as a true team at the highest and survive here in the most challenging conditions in the world, where almost no other creature can.”

And she raised her head and began to sing.

Long ago before we came together

Our ancient ancestors faced the Egging Time alone

The predators made meals of chicks and mothers

The fathers did not see, for they had gone

Until one day not many penguins lingered

Our numbers down to just a starving few

They gathered near the sea and pulled together

And off to Center Island Arthur flew—

“Wait, what!?” a young fledgling interrupted, with wide eyes. “What do you mean he flew? We do not fly.”

“Hush and listen, young one. Patience is a gift.”

She chuckled. That was the part of the song where every mother-singer always found herself interrupted, and a good thing too, because that was all there was to that particular penguin song. The mother settled in to tell the rest of the tale.