

The world's only living paper mills

Sharon Abercrombie | Aug. 5, 2011 Eco Catholic

I Am Mr. Ellie Pooh, The World's Only Living Paper Mill is a cheery, orange-colored children's book which I



discovered during a recent

visit to The Global Gallery, a small, funky, charming Fair

Trade shop in Columbus, Ohio. The illustrated story was displayed next to a refrigerator, decorated with a busy variety of endearing elephant magnets in different colors.

What was this corner patch of pachyderms all about?

Mr. Ellie Pooh explained. Instead of viewing the gray giants as crop-gobbling farming pests needing to be killed, some Sri Lankans are welcoming them instead --- as equal partners in a paper making business venture. And guess what the paper is made from? Elephant dung. There is plenty of this raw material to transform into story books, scrapbooking materials, greeting cards, eco-friendly envelopes, picture frames, business cards, notebooks and other children's educational materials.

"As an adult with the world's biggest appetite," said Mr. Ellie Pooh, "I eat an average of 400 pounds of food every day. My diet consists of plants which are mainly fiber." Papermakers sun dry the material for a whole day and boil it to kill off the germs. They then beat it into a pulp in a giant blender. The pulp goes into a mould submerged in a water vat. "Magically a sheet of paper is formed without cutting any trees or adding harmful chemicals like some big paper mills do."

A screw press takes the water away and forms the pulp into thin sheets. Each 22 pounds of pulp makes nearly 660 sheets of paper."

In the final pages, Mr. Elli Pooh rejoices that "what I had eaten could make a paper that could give people jobs in areas that I live in. I am told if people have jobs making paper and products from what I produce, their children will tell their parents not to shoot me. I think we can live happily together."

Peaceful coexistence between people and elephants, a thriving environmental sustainability for the trees that remain -- this is what Ellie Pooh's creators, Thusitha Ranasinghe, a Sri Lankan paper maker, and American business partner, Dr. Karl Wald, are aiming for. Wald, a Brooklyn, New York resident with a doctorate in biochemistry and molecular biology from the University of North Dakota School of Medicine, didn't want to spend the rest of his his life working in a lab. He wanted to do something to benefit the world

An animal lover, he went to Sri Lanka to shadow an elephant veterinarian. Through the vet, Wald met a friendly

elephant named Lakshmi and an indigenous paper maker by the name of Thusitha Ranasinghe. During their travels, Wald saw how many of Lakshmi's kin were being killed off by angry farmers. He saw how many humans were struggling to make decent livings. Thusitha, told him about making paper from elephant dung. Wald saw that this could be a way to help the Planet. He envisioned opportunities both for the elephants, and for folks living around them in a very poor country.

The two formed a partnership called The Peace Project with Maximus, a paper company in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and together they developed paper facilities which they located in human/elephant conflict areas. To date, some 125 villagers have been trained in paper making techniques. "Folks are looking for work and they are thrilled," said Wald. Mostly elephant orphanages supply the pooh, while Maximus makes the exotic paper. Mr. Ellie Pooh LLC distributes throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Mr. Ellie Pooh products can be found in many fair trade stores around the country, and in many zoo gift shops, as well. They were a big hit at last year's annual Green Festival in San Francisco. Annual company sales are \$250,000.

Wald said that Sri Lankans have been making dung paper for years. "We are just making it look pretty and creating something sustainable," he said in an e-mail interview on Wednesday. Pooh paper is made up of 50 percent fiber from elephant dung and 50 percent post consumer paper, "and is as organic as you can get," says his web site. www.mrelliepooh.com.

"If we are able to provide fair-wage jobs making paper, this will give value to having elephants. These noble beasts don't have to be considered threats or pests, they can be economic assets too," notes Wald

Wald and his business partner are intent "on making as much natural paper as we can. The more paper we sell, the more jobs we create. These jobs are essential if our conservation program is going to work."

Wald's [web site](#) [1] points out that paper made with 100 percent recycled content uses 44 percent less energy, produces 88 percent less greenhouse gas emissions, 41 percent particulate emissions, 50 percent less wastewater, 49 percent less solid waste and 100 percent less wood.

Thusitha Ranasinghe wrote the Ellie Pooh children's book, and the illustrations are by Roshan Martis. The Ellie Pooh folk have quite a good sense of humor. Their web site even includes an anthem based on "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

"We're turning waste to paper and we're doing it with pride.

Elephants and people now are working side by side.

The elephants are safer now by having this new role.

Their survival is our goal!"

The blessings of "both/and" solutions instead of "either/or" mindsets are making a positive difference for humans and elephants in Sri Lanka.

Here's how these blessings are taking place: Thanks to an American Ph.D. from Brooklyn who wanted to do something good for the planet, and an indigenous paper maker, Sri Lankans are making elephants their business partners. Instead of killing them for invading farmland, Instead of killing elephants for invading your farmland, make them your business partners. How so? "Elephants are the world's only living paper mills,"

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Links:

[1] <http://www.mrelliepooh.com/>