

# If my mom were a platypus . . .

. . . I would have hatched from an egg!

## How Were You Born?

To get ready for me, my mom built a nest beside a stream. In it she laid two leathery eggs the size of grapes. Platypus babies usually come in pairs. Our two eggs were stuck together so we wouldn't come apart or roll around. My mom scooped the eggs up with her tail and placed them on her belly. We rested there for ten days until hatching time.

I was bean-sized, bright pink, and hairless when I hatched with my eyes sealed shut. I clung to my mom's fur. Milk began to ooze out from the milk patches on her chest. I lapped the milk up from her fur.



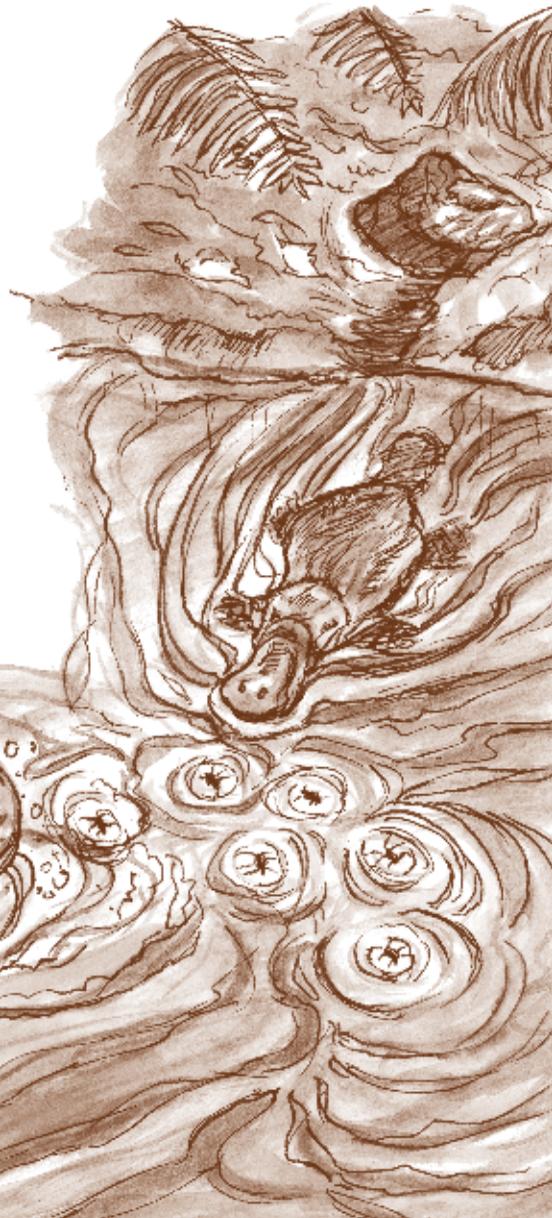
### How Did You Grow?

For nearly four months, I lived on my mom's milk. As I grew, my brown fur came in soft and silky. My eyes opened and I could crawl, growl like a puppy, and make kissing sounds. When my mom left the nest to get food for herself, she always plugged the entrance with mud so my twin and I would be safely hidden. Each time she returned she had to dig her way back into the nest.

### What Do You Know?

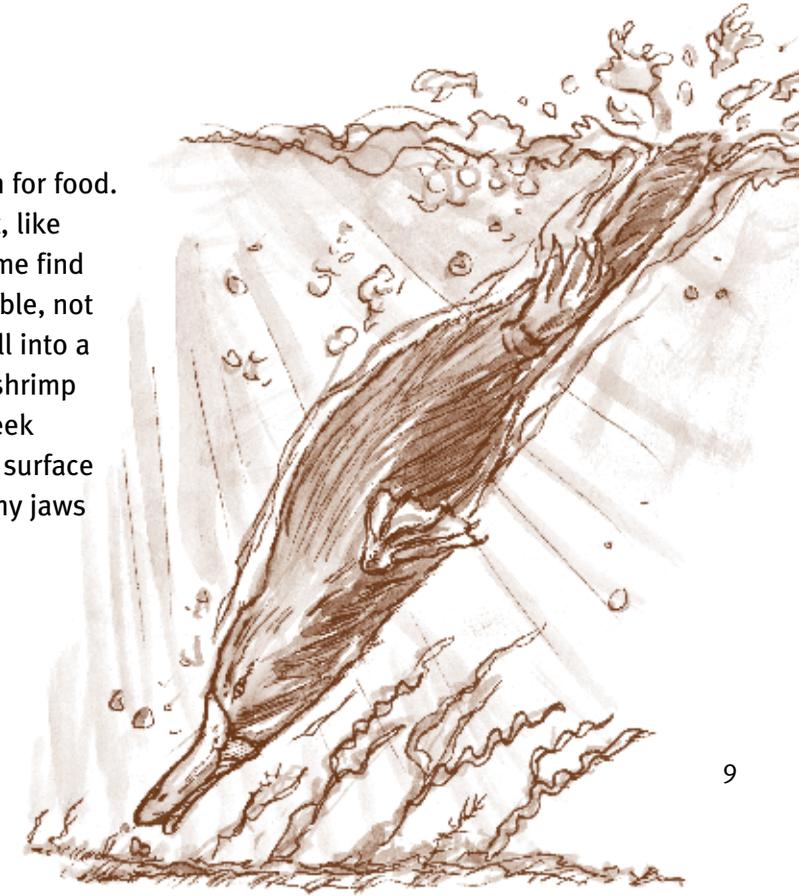
When I was four months old, I left the nest for the first time. I was already over a foot (30 cm) long and weighed about one pound (454 g). My mom led me into the water for my first swim. She showed me how to catch insect eggs, which she crushed between two hard plates in her jaws for me to eat.

Now I am five months old. I still return to my nest to sleep with my mom. Very soon, though, I will leave to dig my own tunnel in another stream. There I will make a nest for my own babies someday.



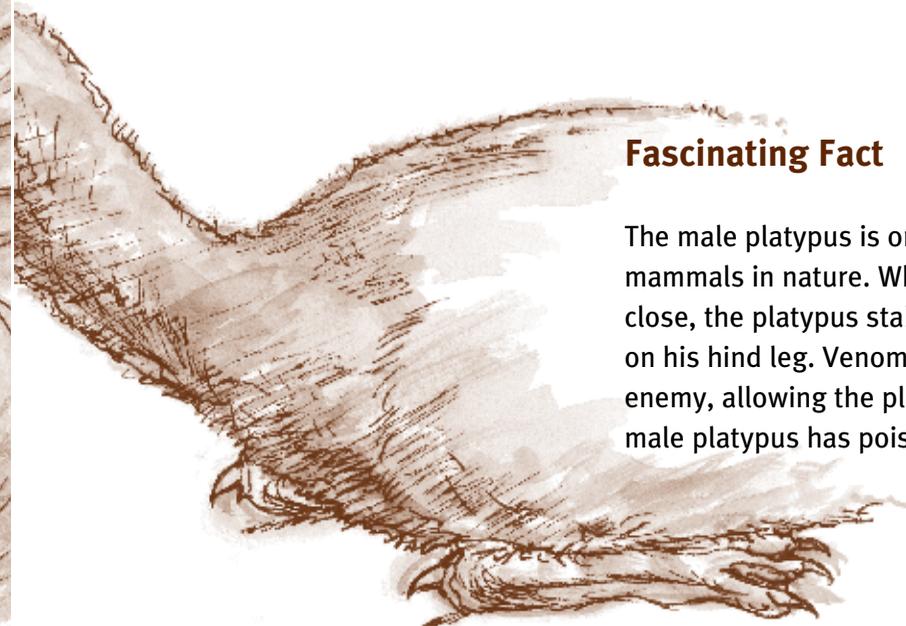
### And What Do You Eat?

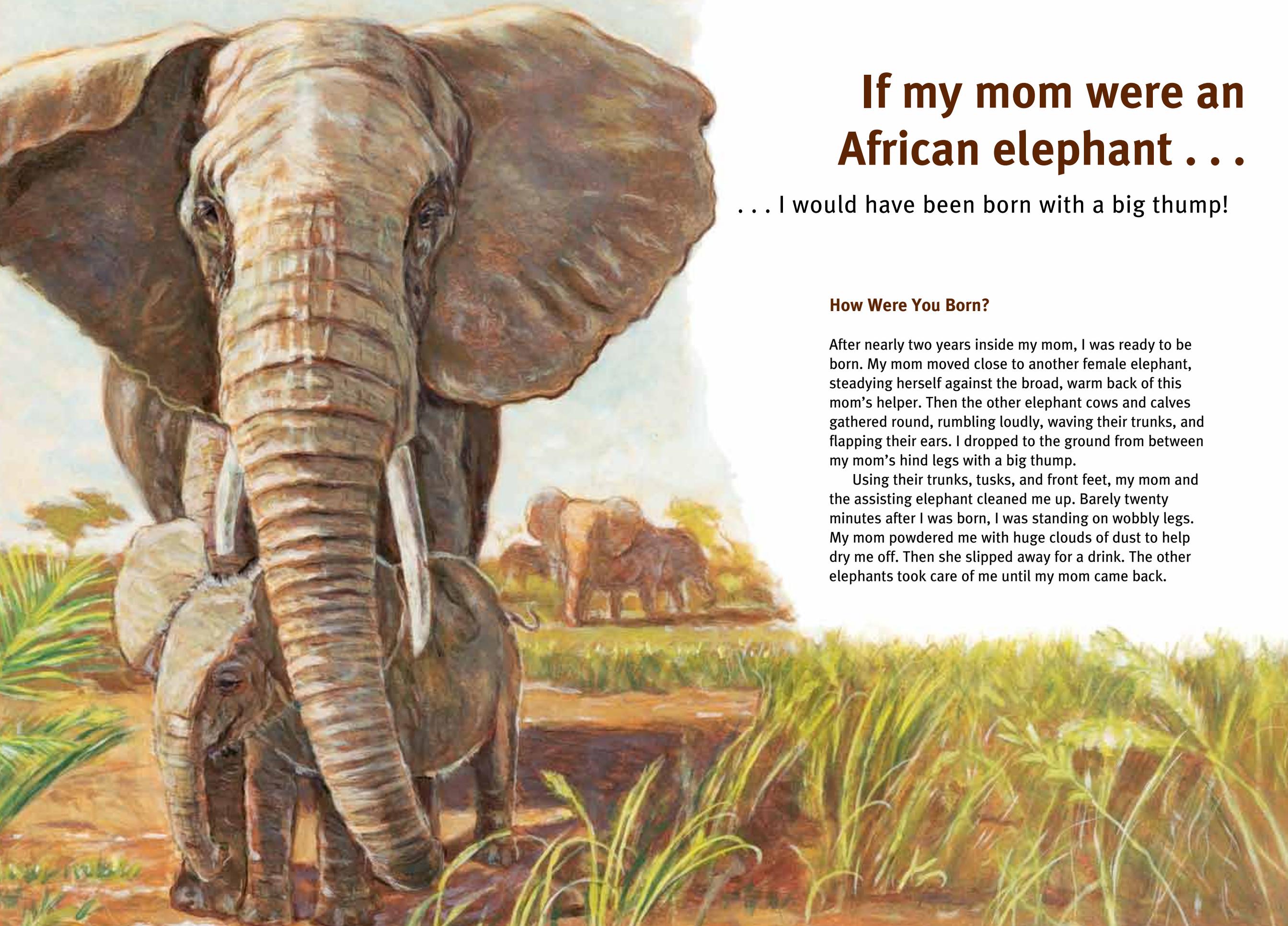
I look on the bottom of the stream for food. With my bill I find creatures to eat, like shrimp and worms. My bill helps me find food I can't see. It is soft and flexible, not hard like a duck's bill. I curl my bill into a flat tube that I use to suck in the shrimp and worms. I keep them in my cheek pouches until I get back up to the surface of the stream. I grind my food in my jaws while I float in the water.



### Fascinating Fact

The male platypus is one of the few poisonous mammals in nature. When another male gets too close, the platypus stabs the offender with a spur on his hind leg. Venom shoots out and stuns the enemy, allowing the platypus to escape. Only the male platypus has poisonous spurs.





# If my mom were an African elephant . . .

. . . I would have been born with a big thump!

## How Were You Born?

After nearly two years inside my mom, I was ready to be born. My mom moved close to another female elephant, steadying herself against the broad, warm back of this mom's helper. Then the other elephant cows and calves gathered round, rumbling loudly, waving their trunks, and flapping their ears. I dropped to the ground from between my mom's hind legs with a big thump.

Using their trunks, tusks, and front feet, my mom and the assisting elephant cleaned me up. Barely twenty minutes after I was born, I was standing on wobbly legs. My mom powdered me with huge clouds of dust to help dry me off. Then she slipped away for a drink. The other elephants took care of me until my mom came back.



## How Did You Grow?

I was born big—about three feet (1 m) tall and over two hundred pounds (90 kg)—just the right size for a baby elephant. When my mom was standing or walking, I fit right underneath her. I let my trunk hang down limply to one side and reached up with my lips to a nipple between my mom's front legs. I nursed for a minute or two every half-hour. Sometimes I sucked my trunk just like a human baby sucking on his thumb.

Elephants grow up slowly. Until I am nine, I will spend at least half my time very close to my mom. A male elephant leaves his family group when he is between twelve and twenty years old. A female stays with the family her whole life.

## And What Do You Eat?

My first teeth were only the size of quarters, not big enough to chew the tough leaves and grasses that elephants like. For the first three months of my life, my mom's milk was my only food.

I lost my baby teeth and grew larger new teeth so that I could eat plants. I will continue to nurse until I am over four years old and have tusks twelve inches (30 cm) long. By then, I will find all my own food. I will use my trunk to pick plants growing on the ground or high in the trees. I will spend sixteen hours a day looking for food.



## What Do You Know?

My family teaches me things elephants need to know: how to recognize each other, how to find food and water, and how to swim using my trunk like a snorkel. As I learn, my mom takes good care of me. If I wander off, she comes after me. If I stumble, she wraps her trunk around my body and helps me to my feet. She helps me up hills and over fallen logs. She boosts me out of deep mud. She nudges and comforts me with her trunk. Sometimes, if I misbehave, she slaps me with it. My favorite thing is when she washes me with her trunk.

We always travel with our herd of other elephant cows and calves. My father and the other bull elephants usually only join us when it is time to mate.



## Fascinating Fact

Elephant feet are tough enough for walking over rocks and stones, but they're also soft and spongy. Big, round feet help spread an elephant's weight over a large area. This takes the pressure of all that weight off the leg bones. With their big, soft, padded feet, elephants can move quietly, even though they can grow to weigh more than five tons (4.5 mt). Elephants barely leave footprints.