

BITS AND PIECES FROM A ZOO DINOSAUR

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In July 1959 I was fortunate to serve as a student intern at Ueno Zoo, Tokyo, thus making an entry into the zoo field. Ten years later I moved to America, zoo-hopped across the country as keeper and curator until retirement in 2005. Those years should qualify me to become a zoo dinosaur and entitle me to write a bouquet of zoo-related subjects. So here goes.

Deeper than “Skin-deep”

“Walking a picket line, sitting at a lunch counter, asking for a book in a library: It could get them arrested, beaten or killed. They did it anyway.” It was in 1961 at the University of Georgia. Black students faced considerable hostility by an angry white mob, 2,000 strong, after the courts forced the university to integrate its classrooms. (Allen, 2021) Have the race relations improved in America to an acceptable level? But this essay is not intended to offer an arena to discuss unrests, hostility and all. Instead, let us take a look at one of the pockets of white bastions.

Here is something so obvious, hidden in plain sight, when you step into an American zoo. Almost unconsciously you know you are in a white man’s universe. This is despite the fact that black people share ca. 14% of the country’s population. Of course the racial makeup of the country is fluid and dynamic. For instance, Hispanics are now 18% of the population. Yet so often, many issues appear simplified in the white versus black context. So let us probe the two groups for a moment, adding animals from Africa in the mix. It is a viewpoint seldom brought into an open zoo forum.

If you look into the geographic origins of zoo animals at least half of the crowd-pleasers are from Africa, represented by gorillas and chimpanzees, lions and mega-herbivores such as elephants (increasingly African), giraffes and hippos in addition to ostriches. And we can reasonably assume: “... many would agree that those animals receive better medical care than African tribesmen do. Compared to them, zoo animals have all the essentials of comfortable modern life such as heated shelter, food and water.” (Kawata, 2014) Ironically they are cared for by mostly college-educated, Caucasian (or white) keepers, something we take for granted. Racial issues and wild animals hardly appear in popular news media but there are rare exceptions.

Comedian Wyatt Cenac, on the “Daily Show with Jon Stewart”, “pounced on PETA in 2012 for filing a federal lawsuit on behalf of five orcas at Sea World seeking their release ‘from slavery’ under the provision of the Thirteenth Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution]. Cenac, who is black, interviewed Lisa Lange, the white senior vice president of communications at PETA, and playfully goaded her into saying that PETA members were ‘the freedom riders of the whale liberation movement’. Cenac also spoke with civil rights activist and former Black Panther Party leader Elaine Brown, who denounced PETA’s unsuccessful lawsuit as ‘a cruel racist joke’. (Davis, 2016) Obviously PETA’s position is based on gross anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism.

Turning the table around, do animals distinguish human races? My limited experience in this aspect takes us to the 1970s when restrictions were quite lenient for keeping rare and endangered species as household pets. In a Mid-American residence I saw a cheetah living with a family “He does not like black people,” the owner said. (At that time I had my doubts about its accuracy. The animal might simply have reflected the master’s attitude for blacks.)

Dating further back, the subject was a young male gorilla in Berlin, presumably at a zoo. William Mann, then director of National Zoo in Washington, D.C., noted, *"He would play in the sand with the negro boys like one of them ... an interesting trait, for many apes display an inexplicable dislike for the black race. (This is very noticeable in our big chimpanzee, Soko, perhaps from memories of his capture)."* (Mann, 1934) "Boy" is now an offensive term and could have meant grownups in the 1930s America. Now back to humans under the lens, into the front-line work force at zoos.

Craig Saffoe, 47, of the National Zoo in D.C., was often one of the few (if not the only) zoo-keepers of colour in the room. He didn't fit the profile of most zookeepers in America: white and female. Even as his responsibility and prestige in the field grew, his black friends would dismiss his work as "white people stuff" - and indeed, the field was about 74% white. When he was at work at the National Zoo, where he had been for more than 25 years, people who didn't know him often assumed that he was a volunteer or even a janitor. The same thing happened to Jordan Veasley, a black animal keeper at Cougar Mountain Zoo in Washington state, who said he got asked "if I'm a janitor or if I clean the bathrooms" when he was walking around the zoo. It seemed that two words, black and zookeeper, were not usually heard combined together. (Dvorak, 2021)

But why such a racial chasm? There does not seem to be a safe and tailor-made answer for an easy way out. Why not increase black population in zoos? For sure, that requires conscious efforts on the side of those in the driver's seat, the white. From the black side I once heard a voice by a young keeper. There are colleges traditionally for blacks across the country, he said, and some of them are bound to have departments of agricultural and life sciences. So why not send recruiters there and encourage students to consider zoos for future employment? That sounded like a good start. But I wonder: Has that ever been done, even on a small scale?

Interestingly, two British scholars offer an explanation. Firstly they put the issue in an international perspective. The pattern of attendance reflected the ethnic composition of the community as noted in Singapore and Sydney. However, in North American zoos the limited black attendance stood out. The two authors cited examples including zoos in Seattle, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Typically, in Washington, D.C. with approximately 80% black population, they consisted of only 10% of the National Zoo attendance.

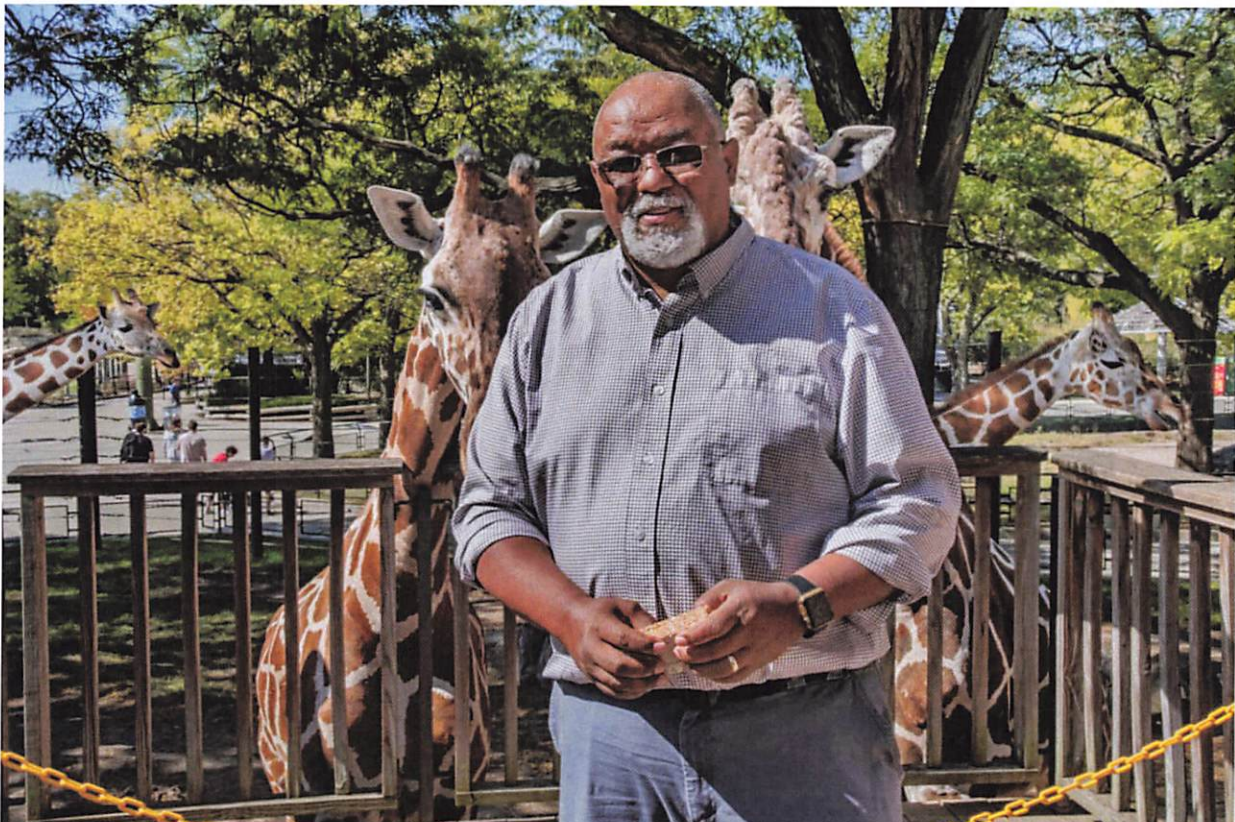
"So zoos in the United States are white-centred but it is difficult to be certain why this is so. Some of the zoo personnel we interviewed suggested that many blacks might view the zoo as a prison and would not want to associate with an institution which persecuted animals. In other words they empathize with the plight of captive animals. There was also a general sense that they were not keen to establish relations with animals, that they were essentially urban-orientated and had little interest in the countryside or in discovering the world of nature. Many American zoo professionals suggest that those living in inner-city areas do not have what might be called an affinity to animals and that most of them register negative attitude towards them. This, some argue, is hardly surprising when their most immediate experience of animals is probably that of guard dogs, stray dogs and rats." (Mullan et al., 1987)

That viewpoint is in agreement with my observations during ten years of living and working in the inner-city of Detroit, a majority black town. I heard that chains on elephants' feet were a reminder of slavery. In any city, school groups visit zoos, often in May; they included a large number of black children. One would assume that it is an introductory step to zoos, and years later they may return with family members and friends. A fair assumption that it may be, but it is rather doubtful. As for world of nature, in national parks and other nature-oriented institutions across the land blacks are hardly noticeable.

The issue of racial dichotomy in America captivates us and as a result, we seem to have reached an almost automatic assumption: Countries other than U.S., especially European, do not face this “alphabet soup” of multi-ethnic reality, that they are solidly lily-white. Not necessarily so, Gunther Nogge reminded me. His observations:

“It has always been my impression that the percentage of non-German zoo visitors does not mirror its proportion in the population of Cologne. The biggest fraction of people with a foreign background obviously is the Turkish. Many of them have the German citizenship, many are born here in the first, second, even third generation. All these people count as Germans, but many maintain their culture and even speak their native language. So it is difficult to define them. Anyhow, whenever I listened into the crowd of zoo visitors I heard a lot of Slavic languages, but rarely Turkish. It is my belief that among the various nations there are differences in culture including zoo-culture. In Czech Republic 37.5 % of the population visit a zoo per year, in Turkey 1. 4%. Of course there are many more zoos in Czech Republic than in Turkey, but this again reflects the different interest in zoos”. He added that in Africa, “The visitors of National Parks are almost 100 % white.” (Email, 3 July 2021)

Back to the U.S.A. it is gratifying that my long-time colleague, a black man, was appointed the director of one of the major zoos in the country. *“The County Zoo has never had black leadership in its 126-year history and in the spirit of the first focus area of our strategic plan, intentional inclusion, we’re proud to continue building a county government that is representative of the diverse array of talent our area has to offer”, Milwaukee County (Wisconsin) Executive David Crowley announced. Amos Morris had 33 years of experience in management of zoos. (Dirr, 2021)*



Amos Morris, 2021. Photo courtesy of Milwaukee County Zoo.

“My parents were teachers, so we spent the summers travelling around the United States. ... We would camp in the national parks, and leave our campsites to go see each city’s museums and zoos.” “I later found out that African Americans in that time couldn’t get hotel rooms in a lot of places, so when they travelled, they either stayed with relatives or there were hotels and restaurants that were registered as friendly to African Americans,” Morris remembered. “For my parents, camping was the way we found safe places to stay.” However, on racial aspect “I

don't focus on it. I've been doing this for a lifetime and I'm often the only African American in the room. It's not a profession with a lot of African Americans." But he said that there is more diversity now than before. Over his career at seven other zoos, where he worked variously as a keeper, curator and director, Morris has often been involved in elephant care. That has included hands-on caring for elephant pedicure, scrubbing their skin and vaccinating them, as well as administrative activities. *"I started off as a keeper of hoofstock, so I'm used to dealing with bigger animals"*, said Morris. *"You don't get any bigger than elephants. At least not terrestrially"*, he added, laughing. (Schwabe, 2021)

This needed to happen, also, to the other gender in the frequently male-dominated position. Denise M. Verret, the director of the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens, is the first female black zoo director accredited by AZA. She spent 19 years as the deputy director of the Los Angeles Zoo before being confirmed to the seat of director on 28 June, 2019. As deputy director, Verret oversaw all areas of the zoo's proceedings including finance, information technology, human resources, admission, public relations, development, education and interpretive programs. She directed and developed the zoo's strategic and vision plans in this time, also managing the organization's business and marketing plans. Verret was serving as interim zoo director when Los Angeles Mayor nominated her for the position of the director. (Wikipedia, 2022)

The next topic brings us back to the Milwaukee County Zoo staff, firstly during the early to mid 1980s.

Higher Education Re-visited

Steve was a keeper, being paid to care for zoo animals. But he did not identify himself with the zoo; his heart was firmly committed to the labour union. Thus he routinely took an anti-management position. One late afternoon he went around the zoo's work areas, and in the small mammal house he saw Nina, a dedicated keeper, caring for animals near quitting time. "Hey, why do you work so hard?" he quipped. Being harassed, tears welled in Nina's eyes. Steve tended to be sarcastic, and his chuckles were often irritating (to me at least). I once showed him a journal article I wrote and asked his comment. Having nothing to say about the content, the animals, he looked at the "literature cited" section and told me that I cited too many references. One day Steve invited me to his house for dinner. I accepted, assuming we would talk about the zoo. But throughout the night, he talked so seriously that "You management people should form a labour union". (I was one of the four top administrators.)

Ideally, employment at a zoo must give a solid sense of belongingness to something outside of himself. But that was out of step with him, so alien to his identity and he was not alone. There was also Jack, another keeper, a big middle-aged man, having sloppy appearance with wrinkled uniform. Keepers were well-paid at that zoo but rumour had it that Jack had money problems. He was one of those who did the minimal amount of work (to put it generously) to get by every day. Steve and Jack had more than what they deserved in terms of employment advantages. They took to this municipal job like ivy onto the wall, with rewards such as medical coverage and the pension system.

At the front desk of the office was Carol, a receptionist. She had a pleasant personality and I heard she was well-raised in a middle class family. She wanted to transfer to the animal department but it was so apparent that she had little interest or knowledge in animals, and moreover, little desire to learn. Having an abundant opportunity to study so many interesting animals around her daily should give rites of initiation and guidance, yet sadly, that was not the case. One day three staff members got together and agreed that someone ought to tell her to read books (it was before the arrival of the computer age and learning often meant reading books). But they soon gave up the idea before even trying.

Steve, Jack and Carol had something in common. They were totally unfit for the leadership role and all had four-year degrees, not from big name universities but a reputable one. For sure, they did not constitute the real building blocks of the zoo's foundation. Jack used to reminisce about college days. So often, the more people talk about their college days, the more it reveals the emptiness of what is inside. This is not to say all degreed employees fall in to this category. There were other degreed people such as Dick, tall and middle-aged, and you couldn't find a more gentlemanly man with an admirable personality in this workplace. He did daily animal care duty in a sincere approach but beyond that, judging from casual conversations, he did not seem to devote his own time for studying animals and zoos. He had another source of passion: Classic music. Not all keepers across the land, degreed or not, belong to these types. Some are there for the secure municipal job, of course. Conversely, some keepers are committed to their work for personal reasons, as Rothfels asserts:

The people who work directly with the animals in zoos do so because they feel called to. This is not work that is highly paid, and it is often barely noticed by people visiting the zoos. This is not a nine-to-five job; these people are passionate about the work they do and passionate about physically caring for the animals. This means cleaning up the mess, preparing food, interacting with the public and answering the same questions over and over again with a smile. (2021) Zoo visitors were certainly unaware of behind-the-scenes human aspect.

The employer of people mentioned above, Milwaukee County Zoo, has had a long history. It dated back to the old zoo that opened in 1882 in Washington Park. During the period of post-war economic prosperity of the country, a plan was being made for a new location.

The new zoo was built with all the latest technical developments from scratch in a perfect location. It had the backdrop of a mature forest, filled with towering trees. *"...a constant stream of construction projects from 1958 to 1968 saw the zoo eventually reach a finished state" and that "this zoo has a pleasingly homogenous feel about it with stone-faced animal houses and semi-geometric rock formations for moated enclosures". "Many enclosures are in a Hagenbeck theme, with open, dry moats, grassy animal spaces and mock-rock backdrops. One area in the very centre of the zoo is a perfect example of this. There is a large exhibit that is a combination of zoogeographical ungulate enclosures with predators displayed behind them, separately via dry moats."* (Brown et al., 2019) Naturally, Milwaukee's new zoo was a sensation in the America's zoo circle.

It goes without saying that the quality of a zoo often reflects the type of behind-the-scenes people. On the ground level (literally), this zoo was supported not by an equal share of all employees. As in all zoos of the world, a relatively small number of dedicated employees took a larger load of work to keep the zoo going, as Rothfels indicated above. They kept building and adding to the foundation of their zoo. I admired one of them, Roger the elephant keeper. It was the time of hands-on approach in elephant care and we stepped into the animals' living quarters every day, ankus in hand. Elephant care comes with a varying level of danger, and Roger had the knack for the work. A man of few words, he had good rapport with elephants (animals knew it). Cautious with calm confidence he knew when to take a chance, always coming up with another approach to improve the well-being of elephants and colleagues.

One step up at a lower supervisory level, there was Ralph at the cat house. He maintained a pleasant and stable personality with a disarming smile and soft voice. He knew his animals almost instinctively. That reflected on his keepers as well as on animals; they were calm and relaxed. Ralph knew how to ship out animals, making sure the crate was solidly built, comfortable for animals. He knew how to coax animals into the crate, or how to introduce new animals into the new situation without stressing them unnecessarily. My assistant curator Hugh told me, "Ralph is the best area supervisor we've got." Neither Roger, Ralph or Hugh had college education. Evidently *"Higher education has little to do with zoo keeping. And if a college graduate doesn't take serious interest in what little he learned at college and make*

their work a lifelong endeavour, a degree becomes a mere piece of paper, a 'union card' of sorts, a ticket to put your foot in the door". Additionally, there are just too many college-degreed people in the country. (Kawata, 2020) Some people might think that college-graduates are "better people", which is laughable, utter nonsense. Continuing on formal education and Milwaukee, here follows a snapshot of the upper level in the workplace hierarchy.

The Time and Legacy of George, Bob and More

In 1961, when design and construction of the new zoo were in full swing, the national zoo directory listed two senior staff members for Milwaukee's old Washington Park Zoo: George Speidel, Director and Robert Bullermann, Assistant (Anon., 1961). Speidel was born in 1912. After graduating from Oak Park High School in Illinois, he began hauling sandstone and cement for a family-owned building material company. When the nearby Brookfield Zoo opened, in 1934, he was hired as a guard and later moved into the animal department. Speidel went to work as director of Racine Zoo, Wisconsin in 1946. The next year he became the director of Washington Park Zoo in Milwaukee, where Edward Bean, his father-in-law, had been the first director years earlier. (Knoche, 1996) Thus was formed the Bean-Speidel family line, the most prominent zoo dynasty in this country.

The zoo had grown to have 100 permanent full-time employees, peak season 132 by a decade later. In addition to George Speidel as director, Robert Bullermann as assistant director, five others were listed as senior staff. (Truett, 1970) I worked for Bullermann for years and he was a dear friend. To the best of my recollection, none of the staff members had a college degree. That, however, had little to do with the *quality* of the zoo as a public institution.



Bob Bullerman (left) c.2004, courtesy of Thomas Bullerman and George Speidel (right) courtesy of Milwaukee County Zoo

Time has changed, however. Nationwide, as conservation was placed in the centre stage of zoos' missions the nature of work became more sophisticated. The scope of requirements for zoos expanded beyond the boundary of the old-school "animal men" (it was predominantly a men's world then). As a result an increasing number of those with advanced degrees began to join the senior staff to meet the demand of our time. If anyone knew it first-hand it was Bullermann himself. He began at Brookfield Zoo hired by Ed Bean on 6 January 1944, assigned to the small mammal building but was soon drafted into the U.S. Army. "Before I left Brookfield Zoo for military service, I broke in a new keeper who was to take my place. His name was George Speidel." After the military service Bob had a series of stints in zoo-related

positions until 1959, when he arrived at Milwaukee as Assistant Zoo Director where he stayed until retirement. Reminiscing about all those years, he noted:

"If I were to talk about the 'good old days', I would have to tell you about many of the fine people I have been associated with over the years, not only here in Milwaukee, but throughout the professional zoo world as well. I would also have to tell you of some of the incompetents, drunks, weirdoes and bastards I have known." He added: "The zoo greats of the past, the Crandalls, Beans, etc., could not hack it in today's zoo. It would be like Abe Lincoln or George Washington trying to run our modern-day federal government. They would be incompetent as hell and would screw it up even more. Times have changed, Charlie. Nowadays, the zoo director is no longer the kindly old fellow that walks around his zoo and talks to his animals. He is a hard-nosed businessman that has to run his zoo in accord with the economic times of the day. He has to develop his staff and trust their judgement to help him run the zoo. No one knows this better than you as a zoo director. No, Charlie, I don't think anyone would be interested in the changes that have taken place." (Letter to Charles Wilson, 8 April 1983)

Bob's letter indicated the global trend. A voice from The Netherlands, a purist's view nevertheless:

"In the last couple of decades a new type of zoo person has been infiltrating our isolated population in ever increasing numbers. Commercial professionals of various kinds enter the zoo as they would have entered any other business. After a year in office, most of them are still provokingly incapable of distinguishing a rhea from an emu. It does not matter. A good manager is a good manager whatever he may happen to manage. These days, fewer than half the personnel at most zoo managerial staff meetings consist of 'animal people'. Winds of change are blowing, even in the ... sometimes much envied ... stronghold of the solidly science-based German zoo community." "New marketing strategies and new business approaches, though, are not possible without people who can interpret the old feelings. Hagenbeck, Chipperfield and also more contemporary revolutionaries have all come from pure hands-on animal backgrounds. Real innovations stem from those with a lifetime knowledge of, and a genuine interest in, animals. They are the singers, the musicians and the composers without whom new music will not materialize."

"Therefore I would like to make a plea for the early childhood zoo fanatics, the zoo biologists and those zoo directors who base an innovating business philosophy on solid animal care experiences. For those who become genuinely excited when faced with a guenon subspecies never seen before. And for those who plan all their holiday trips among the great zoos of the world, convinced that Birmingham is only an inconsiderable small town between Dudley and Twycross." (Van Viet, 2006; two zoos mentioned are in the United Kingdom.)

Back to this side of the Atlantic Ocean. *"In my view, zoos are becoming corporate entities run less and less by biologists. The unfortunate truth is that we did not prepare the younger generation to write a scientific paper AND read a budget spreadsheet AND fundraising so we are now reaping our collective indifference. Business types invaded the vacuum and are now becoming the new 'normal.' At Dallas, the director when I retired was a former air force colonel who had only kept a dog his entire life ... not even a goldfish!" (Jim Murphy, email, 1 August 2015) Colonel Richard Buickerood, the new director of Dallas Zoo and Dallas Aquarium, "will supervise and direct a staff of nearly 200 employees engaged in zoo and aquarium operation". "Mr. Buickerood previously was Commander of the Air Force ROTC Southwest Region, based in San Antonio." (Anon., 1992)*

Appointment of a total stranger to direct a large organization is by no means limited to the zoo and aquarium field. Colleges today often employ more senior administrators than professors. Universities operate, every day, more like corporations, a more pernicious trend: the creeping corporatism of the American university. Like Disneyworld, the average college campus now

leaves the distinct impression of a one-party state. Moreover, a new generation of students has become acclimated to the experience of college as luxury resort hotel. (Deboer, 2015) Universities, the "hatchery" of future senior staff of the nation's zoos, produce a new breed of citizenship now. At this point an episode that took place before the Bronx Zoo was opened (1899) illustrated a clear contrast. A python, 5.4 m. (18 feet) long and weighing 59 kg (130 pound), was delivered but promptly escaped, then was found underneath the platform steps of the Cook House.

"Returning the python to its cage seemed to offer a difficult problem but the task was performed in a comparatively simple manner. Dr. Hornaday [William T.], always on hand for all such emergencies, was the first to reach under the platform and he took a strangle-hold on the animal's neck immediately behind the jaws and dragged it to the opening. A line of eight men was quickly formed and as the exposed portion of the monster's body slowly appeared, a man seized a piece and hung on for dear life. Finally each of the men possessed a portion and was responsible for keeping about two feet of python in alignment." (Blair, 1929)

It is hard to imagine today that a director of a major American zoo would ever dive into such an activity. Traditionalists became a dying tribe within the zoo world long ago. Against this potent tide, one of the remaining tribe members ran a zoo *his* way for a brief moment in history, his rein ending at the dawn of the new millennium. He did not even have the prestige of acquiring a bachelor's degree.

Kingdom of Ed

The home to the last of the species, namely of the passenger pigeon (1914) and the Carolina parakeet (1918) left an unavoidable image of the Cincinnati Zoo for us old-timers. Be reminded, then, that the origin of the zoo dates back long before those dates, to 1873 when the Zoological Society was incorporated; history of this zoo has ably been documented by Ehrlinger (1993) and by Brown et al.(2019). As human institutions zoos experience ups and downs over the decades. After a period of stagnation, Cincinnati's zoo began to draw attention of colleagues in all areas of zoo professionalism. Even with core skills, not many zoo administrators can make the leap so rapidly, recognized domestically and overseas. Nationwide Bronx, Smithsonian's National, Brookfield and San Diego are among the homes to the powerhouses in the American zoo world; their names carry prestige. People soon started to realize that Cincinnati was in the race into this elite league of zoos.

To cite but a few examples, rare species in the collection since 1987 included: Sumatran rhino, okapi, Lord Derby eland, zebra duiker, rusty spotted cat, Douc langur, shoebill stork and Japanese giant salamander; the world's "first list" during the 1980s included birth of an eland through nonsurgical embryo transfer, an eland born following transfer of a frozen-thawed embryo; bongo born to surrogate eland mother; birth of an eland via embryo transfer from a split embryo (or demi-embryo); several endangered species of *Trillium* wildflowers reproduced through tissue culture, and Indian desert cat born to a domestic cat surrogate, which was not only the world's first cat born from interspecies embryo transfer but the first wild feline species born from *in vitro* fertilization. In other areas of excellence, *"While many American zoos are looking more and more alike today, the Cincinnati Zoo, in its recent renovation, has developed a distinctive style, using in-house designers and local architects for the design of its exhibits, architecture, and landscape". Indeed, "Throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s the Cincinnati Zoo was a leader in the zoo world in a variety of areas including its exhibits, animal and plant collections as well as its education, research, marketing, and volunteer programs".* (Ehrlinger, 1993) Behind all this stands Ed Maruska; what I see, metaphysically, is a profile of ethos.

At this juncture, let me bring up an example of my favourite exhibit in Cincinnati: The World of Insects that opened on 5 August 1978, not that I am interested in insects but because of its

uniqueness. Potentially over 90% of animal life forms on Earth are insects, yet they have been neglected by zoos for so long (other than the infrequent, token butterfly exhibits). Even with that number, their appeal to the public is dwarfed compared with the popularity of lions and chimpanzees. In Cincinnati Zoo, on the side of a man-made mound there is the entrance. While it appears nothing special, one step inside a visitor is transformed into a world of its own; layer after layer of interpretive introduction to insect life. It is a living museum presenting biology of insects in such a way that it is impossible *not* to learn.

Unbeknownst to the visiting public, captive maintenance and breeding of insects are far more complicated, requiring intricate and technical methodology. After all, manoeuvring metamorphosis into practical terms is a light year away from feeding monkeys and parrots. Additionally, there exist laws and regulations restricting importation of insects. These may be the reasons that insect exhibits almost automatically refer to *preserved* (dead, to be exact) beetles and butterflies, pinned in boxes and on shelves. It appears hardly feasible, financially, to invest on a large insect facility, particularly considering their limited public appeal. Conceivably it is easier to display tigers and bears and penguins than those “bugs”.

Weather patterns in the Midwest are often unpredictable but luckily, I arrived at Cincinnati on a sunny, pleasant morning. At the zoo I stepped into the director's office. Ed pulled out one of the drawers of a big file cabinet, which was jam-packed with well-organized hanging files, each holding sub-files. Each contained documents on a variety of topics on entomology including captive care. The file cabinet represented the foundation, or the brain of the insectarium. It must have taken years to gather information before the design and construction of the insect building started.

“Let's go see the zoo”, Ed led the way out of the office building. As usual he tended to be impatient. One of the typical characteristics of the traditional zoo directors is the instinctive habit of trash-picking. They cannot stand litter visitors scatter in their zoos and Ed, walking fast, began to do just that. We hopped from one exhibit to the other; the walk reinforced the nature of a man with insatiable curiosity, creative juice and mental energy.



Edward J. Maruska began his zoo career as an animal keeper at Lincoln Park Zoo, Chicago, 1956 to 1962. Later that year he became Cincinnati Zoo's general curator, a position he kept until 1968 when he assumed the executive director position until 2000. Mark Rosenthal, as part of Zoo & Aquarium Video Archive project, interviewed Maruska on 19 August 2011; Ed was then the Director Emeritus of Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden. Here follows bits and pieces from the interview (Rosenthal, 2011).

Edward J. Maruska, courtesy of Los Angeles Zoo

“I had to quit school at an early age, but I went back to school [at] nights”, Ed said when the topic of formal schooling came up, adding that due to family problems he left high school but finished high school after he got married. He took some college education at Wright University in Chicago, after which he headed for Cincinnati. (At the time of interview Ed had received two honorary doctors of science degrees in addition to authoring or co-authoring about three dozen articles. Honours and awards also included Ohio Department of Natural Resources Conservation Man of the Year, 2001.) Then the conversation shifted to the subject of the animal collection.

"...I think in our zoo, the collection has always been the core. It's our reason for being. It's the only thing that nobody else can compete with us. I mean we can have education programs outside the zoo, we could have gardening programs outside, ... but the collection is what gives the zoo, the city, a certain amount of pride. It gives prestige to the collection." "Well, I've been referred to as a collector, I won't deny that. I appreciate diversity. I think that's the bottom line". To the question, "Are there zoos in the world that you particularly admire?" Ed responded, "A zoo man's zoo [that] a good old animal collector like Ed Maruska likes is the Berlin Zoo because they have a diverse collection and they have a good breeding record". But for zoos, the tide of time has been changing.

"Well, when I started in the zoo profession, certainly it was an advantage to have passion ...passion for my chosen profession. But today, I think it's obviously a more complex world. It requires perhaps a little more. When you consider that communities, municipalities are facing problems, in terms of budgetary issues, many zoos are on the bottom end of that when it comes out to issuing taxation money. ... So a zoo director today has to be more attuned to business. He has to have more business acumen, and he also has to be a good fundraiser because this is where it's all at." Near the end of the interview he could not stay away from animals. "I think my most happiest day I had in my life was when our gorillas bred. We had two gorillas born in a nine-day period."

Now back to touring the zoo. From the exhibits Ed and I entered the off-show animal holding areas, checking up on animals and keepers, continuing onto the lab section on the hillside to see his animals. Ed's interest is wide and diverse; at the time of visit he was enthused about salamanders. At one time, due to a keeper's foolish error the zoo lost giant salamanders, so rare in American zoos. I then remembered that Ed called me at home: *"I could not sleep at night, I kept tossing and turning"*. Anyway, we walked into an off-show building into the salamander holding area. Ed began to talk fast again, steeping into biology of salamanders, rolled up his dress shirt sleeve, dipped his arm into a tank and scooped up a hellbender, water still dripping from the shirt. At this moment, suddenly the zoo director morphed into a little boy, reaching out into a cookie jar, so mesmerized by this slimy giant amphibian.

As mentioned above, gorillas certainly stayed in Ed's heart. We will now take a look at a gorilla who made history.

The Sunny Side of Colo's Story

"A mother will fight to the death in protecting her young, much as any human mother would do", noted C. Emerson Brown. Baby gorillas were snatched away after their mothers were killed in their natural habitat, then taken into a treacherous route before arriving alive at the zoo. Continuing, Brown quoted another author: "a mother discovered in a tree with her young watched closely the movements of the hunter, and, as he took aim, motioned with her hand in the same manner as a human being would, to have him stop. ...gorillas have been described as trying to stop the flow of blood by holding a hand over the spot". Their ordeal took no break at zoos. Until 1923, "few of the beasts had been brought into this country [America] alive; only five have been landed, and none lived for more than a year." (Brown, ca.1931) William T. Hornaday stated that agents were constantly looking for gorillas for the New York Zoological Society "and whenever one arrives, all persons interested are advised to see it immediately,...before it dies of sullenness, lack of exercise, and indigestion." (1918)

At every step of the ordeals of capture, transfer and life in zoos, a large number of gorillas succumbed to inadequate human handling. *"The first living gorilla in Europe, a female Jenny arrived in 1855 at a travelling menagerie by Mrs. Wombwell in United Kingdom. She lived only six or seven months. Henry A. Ford (a U.S. missionary?) kept a gorilla for four months (1851) in Gabon, but never outside Africa. The first gorilla to U.S.A. was on a show on 2 May 1897 by Edwards brothers in Boston and it survived for only five days". (Richard Weigl, email, 27*

December 2021) Such a harsh and wasteful history notwithstanding, as more gorillas were delivered at the zoos' gates a race was on for the first breeding in the world. Helen Martini described gorillas at the Bronx Zoo:

"No Great Apes Building in any zoo is complete without the greatest ape of all, the gorilla. A gorilla has never been born in captivity, and indeed gorillas do not readily adapt themselves to captivity. In fact, the Bronx Zoo had the only full-grown pair living together happily in the United States. Oka and Makoko were approximately fourteen years old, which is the earliest age for breeding...according to the limited information available on the subject. After fourteen years, anything could happen. And although no one said very much, it was common knowledge that zoo officials all over the world had their eyes on our Great Apes Building, built especially that Oka and Makoko might have the sunshine and clean, fresh air they needed." (Martini, 1955)

The winner of the race hit the press the year after Martini's book was published: Columbus Zoo, a "dark horse", not a big name in the zoo world but a modest Midwestern collection, a newcomer to the international fame. Nowadays a gorilla birth is so common that it no longer makes an international front-page headline. Today's zoo staff members have absolutely no idea how sensational an event it was, with a cinematic quality to the image projected into our



collective memory. Indeed, it took nearly a century world-wide, and nearly six decades in this country, from the time of the first public exhibits to the first birth of this species at a zoo. It was a seismic shift which makes us realize the fragility, as well as resilience, of gorillas in our midst. The female infant, born on 22 December 1956, was named Colo, indicating Columbus-Ohio. The story was chronicled in Nancy Roe Pimm's volume *Colo's Story* (2011), foreword by Jack Hanna. Richly illustrated the volume covers major events about Colo, also mentioning conservation and the bush meat issue. The first chapter is titled "Gorillas Discover Columbus".

photo of Colo at Columbus Zoo, 1970, by Ken Kawata.

For sure, there would never have been Colo without the aforementioned gruesome events of capture, away from the eyes of the admiring public. We have to remember that zoo gorillas we see today are the descendants of the small number who survived the ugly past, to become the founders of today's successful breeding program in zoos across the world. In fact, recognizing the ugly past is a necessary step in order to truly appreciate what we have in zoos now. Yet the book skips gorillas' brutal captive history, the "dirty laundry" in the collective zoo closet. That shows how slippery the past can be, and how some people, well-meaning they may be, can distort the lens of history.

In that sense the beautiful story, told in her book, represents a one-dimensional, unbalanced view. At best it reveals only the sunny side of Colo's life. Some might say that is okay, since it is for zoo-going public. Yet, precisely because it is for the general public the balanced, whole story must be told; only those in-the-know, a minority in the readership, can see through the zoo issues. Unpleasant as the fact may be, we now stand on heap after heap of dead gorillas in world's zoos, all wild-caught, prior to Colo's arrival. One should ask at this juncture: Did importation of wild-caught gorillas ever stop after December 1956? Also: One of the ways to take a peek at the quality of a book is to examine the reference section, to know what sources have been consulted.

Most of the sources appear to be from popular news media. Ms. Pimm's book is not "technical" by nature. Yet there is a need to borrow basic information that relates to Colo's story from scientists. One page of the book is devoted to Diane Fossey, a publically popular figure, yet George B. Schaller, the famed field mammalogist who carried out extensive research on gorillas in Africa, is nowhere to be found. Not even his book for lay audience *The Year of the Gorilla* (1964, the University of Chicago Press). Ms. Pimm brings up the generous monetary donation for "name the baby gorilla" contest by Clark Gable. However, mentioning a popular movie star but skipping Dr. Schaller's work appears rather odd. But most of all, Ms. Pimm did not cite Columbus Zoo's own published account, an informative article by Audra Gibson who introduces us to the genesis of Colo's life. In those days adult gorillas were routinely kept in solitary confinement, instead of group housing in the "immersive" enclosure as we know today. Warren Dean Thomas, a veterinary student, noted something in an adult gorilla pair, Barron (may also be spelled Baron) Macombo and Millie Christina. Often referred to as Barron and Millie, they were in adjoining cages:

At certain points during the month, Thomas noticed playful behaviors between the pair. Millie would back up to the mesh where Macombo was sitting and the two would vocalize. Taking a risk, Thomas began to secretly combine the pair. He and a co-worker would leave them together overnight and then sneak them back to their respective cages in the morning. After a few of these 'secret rendezvous' the playful behavior ceased. Although he could not be sure, Thomas suspected that Millie might be pregnant. Warren Thomas and his co-worker decided it was time to share their suspicions with Superintendent Davis. ... Thomas' suspicions were confirmed on 22 December 1956. While feeding the gorillas their morning breakfast he noticed that Millie was not acting like herself. ... As Thomas went to the front of the cage to get a better look at Millie, he noticed a baby gorilla lying on the cement floor, still encased in the amniotic sac. After quickly shifting Millie out of her cage, Thomas scooped up the baby and carried it into the kitchen. There he broke the sac and cleaned the baby off. The little gorilla was not breathing very well so he cleared the mucus out of her mouth with his finger and began to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Finally, the gorilla cried out and started to move. (Gibson, 2006)

Thomas (who was known as Dean Thomas at that time, to my knowledge) carried Colo with him in his thoughts. It was apparent, decades later, when we got together to chit-chat in his house in New Mexico.

The curtain for on the stage for Columbus gorillas, at this point, has not yet fallen. The scene now sails across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. Turning the clock one generation back to the beginning, according to Richard Weigl, on 8 January 1951 three gorillas arrived at Columbus: Christopher, a male, Christina and Baron. All three were captured by the American hunter the late Bill Said. Christopher went to Zoo Basel on 16 September 1954, where his name was changed to Stefi; he mated with Achilla and they became the parents of the first gorilla to be born in Europe. "*I remember still well Stefi,*" Weigl recalled. (Email, 27 December 2021) Thus Columbus Zoo reached out to Europe, to add another important episode to the world zoo history.

Three decades, the time span equivalent to a full generation for humans, passed after Colo's birth. The public's perception of the gorilla had evolved from the monster in the Dark Continent to the gentle giant. As the gorilla population steadily took up tenacity, so to speak, zoos invested more resources for the crowd-pleasers. Concerning gorilla populations Marvin Jones reported the following statistics as of 1985:- Estimated gorilla populations in the wild: about 5,000 western lowland gorillas *Gorilla g. gorilla*; about 400 mountain gorillas *Gorilla g. beringei* and about 400 eastern lowland gorillas *Gorilla g. graueri*. Number of gorillas in captivity in the world: about 800; number in North America: about 250. Viable gorilla births from 1956 to 1981 in North America: 154 births in 32 collections, all western lowland. Average in 1980 and 1981:

16 births. Outside North America during the same period: 114 births in 21 collections. They were western lowland subspecies except five eastern lowland. Average in 1980 and 1981: 14 births. (Jones, 1985)

Falling in Love

Zoo animals are the subject to manage, maintain for perpetuity and to exhibit for the public. Not to be forgotten: They also are breathing living things with feelings. That said, while on active duty I usually kept an emotional distance from animals. Separation will strike you sooner than later as they are sent to other zoos, or, as living organisms they (or I) will die sometimes and when it comes, it can hit you hard. Back in Tulsa days I grew attached to George, a young Asian elephant, but I was unaware of it at that time. He was found dead one morning unexpectedly, and the sorrow stayed with me for a long time. At night at home a bottle of Scotch became my companion. Once sorrows set in, it must become obvious to others. "Come on Ken, snap out of it!" a keeper named Dwight said to me as I was making a round of the zoo. I just smiled. If I could "snap out of it" on my own I would have done so. Therefore it was a self-protective mechanism to keep a distance from animals, never to be drenched in emotions again. That should leave little room for that warm, fuzzy feeling like "This is it".

Nevertheless, there still is a moment when that clumsy barrier crumbles down. On World Okapi Day, 18 October 2021, John Roth told me that the okapi is *"...most certainly the most amazing and gentle animal on this Earth. At the Basel Zoo (known as Zolli) I saw my first okapi when Heini Hediger was director and managed to acquire the first pair. Many years later at Dallas Zoo, first time ever I touched an okapi's soft fur."* (Email) In response I shared my experience with him.

Years ago in Antwerp Zoo, I think it was, I walked into the off-exhibit animal holding area with keeper Bobby. A stall door was opened and an okapi stepped into the tight service aisle, kept walking into the keeper office area. "Hey you, stay there", not knowing the keeper's practice I tried to block the animal. "That's alright, they're allowed in that area", Bobby informed me. It was then I suddenly realized: With the big body the animal could have smashed me into the wall. I was a total stranger with new smell, voice and appearance. Even without eye contact the okapi was aware I was there, yet did not ignore me nor push me around. I noticed that the animal was not only gentle with no ill feelings, but also clean with smooth, soft fur. I may have been facing an exceptionally gentle individual. Anyway I immediately fell in love with this okapi.

There are creatures that come to you for friendship and affection, such as elephants and young great apes. Some animals stay aloof with humans and they include raptors; they tolerate our handling. Some others remain even more withdrawn (in human terms), preferring to live quietly, such as snakes. They receive irrational fear and hatred as if the Creator designed them to evoke negative feelings by humans. Since early childhood I've been rebellious about everything, family, school and the society. People's attitude toward snakes prompted the rebellious kid to take a role as a friend for snakes, something I have retained to this day. The more humans around me hated snakes, the stronger I became attached to them and defended them, taking it so personally.

Okapi's lasting impression, however, represented a rare event. As we continue to be humans, live and work in the human world, we face mundane human problems every day at zoos. Zoo work is people work, not animal work; Zoo problems are not animal problems per se but people problems. The dynamic of interactions by people within zoos, positive or negative, is something so unknown to the general public. Also, many colleagues would agree that once you walk outside of the warm and comfortable sphere into the street filled with non-zoo crowds, you may realize that they live on a different planet. *"Zoo people are crazy. I used to say, you have to be crazy to work in a zoo. And if you're not yet crazy, you will become crazy"*

working in a zoo”, observed Gunther Nogge, who entered the zoo world after having been a scientist and a professor. (Email 26 July 2019) Along the same line Theodore Reed once noted: “‘The Zoo’ is a weird, wonderful, exciting, frustrating, glorious, rewarding, disheartening, beautiful place to work. We who are privileged to be part of zoos, to associate with the animals and involve ourselves in the thrilling activities, explorations, and research of the Zoo, are indeed a special brand of people.” (1979)

Binturongs Who Wrote the Scenario

Bob Kurtz was my right-hand man while I was the general curator at Staten Island Zoo. We were probably the last of the male team from “the old school” to manage an animal collection in the New York area zoos. We had back-to-back off-days and before my two off-days, I usually left him brief hand-written notes to update him on what went on, with no further communications via email or telephone. In 2005 we were to receive two binturongs from a zoo 411 km (255 miles) away. A phone call came on Bob’s off day: “We will do you a favour and deliver the animals,” the message said and my response was “That is great, thanks.” It was on 9 April. Late afternoon a van pulled up at the zoo, and two women got out of the vehicle and unloaded the crates. But there was something unusual in the air. They appeared stressed and misty-eyed.

“Please give us ten minutes to say good-bye to them,” one woman pleaded, tears welling in her eyes. In the room adjacent to the quarantine area keepers were ready to transfer the animals, and it was approaching quitting time. If keepers were to stay their overtime pay should be authorized. “Okay, ten minutes,” I said and asked the keepers to clear the room. They too had already sensed something was up, and left the immediate area. “Five more minutes,” I opened the door a bit. There, two women were crying, reaching to the binturongs through the wire mesh. Another long five minutes passed, as our keepers were ready to settle down the new animals. “Time is up,” I played the bad guy, fully aware that it wasn’t enough for the two women. “We may come back tomorrow morning to say final good-bye,” one of them said.

It was the light bulb moment. That evening, after coming home I called Bob at home. He wasn’t there so I left a voice message and emailed him too. He later said, “What’s all this, I HAD ENOUGH, I HAD ENOUGH OF THIS!!!? I thought you’d quit the job the next day”. Also, my wife Jean thought I was so fed up and would walk away from the zoo the next day. The binturong episode was the last straw that broke this old camel’s back. Our generation inherited the legacy from previous generations, and we worked to build up zoos. That cathedral-like structure came crushing down in front of my eyes, and the silent crumbling became deafening. Zoos spiralled down to this level, and it was no longer my world.

Staten Island Zoo marked “the finish line” of my zoo career. The zoo afforded an “up” note and the overall impression was it was a happy ending. Yet even that zoo could not be immune to the tide of history. Vin Gattullo, a biologist and educator who hired me, had to leave the director’s position. He was replaced by a man who was a racket ball buddy of an influential board member, according to a rumour. In many zoos across the country the story sounds similar: The helm of the zoo has been given to political appointees who could not tell a mouse from a moose, and experienced, knowledgeable man would present a threat to their insecurity and mediocrity.

By that time I had cut off my AZA ties. My involvement with this association began in 1969 when I attended an AAZPA annual conference in Oklahoma City. Later I served on the Ethics Board and as a committee chairman among other offices. However, American zoos shifted their directions as the new millennium rolled in. To “feel” the situation first-hand let me cite just two examples from my correspondence file. “*It is clear that the AZA, which is a support organization, is at least attempting to be a control organization*”, a man who stays anonymous

put it succinctly: *"It would appear this is what the AZA directors want, and what the zoo directors want. ...it is also clear that they do not want any negative input from peons. I will therefore refrain from making my views known".* (Email, 2 August 2004) Reflecting this Hal Markowitz told me: *"I long ago abandoned the AZA and after giving keynote talks at the first few biannual international conferences on environmental enrichment, I no longer attend those because I want others to take up the cudgel. However, I have been sorely disappointed by the fact that the most powerful spokespeople in those venues have no real understanding of the difference between 'it works' and it 'empowers animals'."* (Email, 7 May 2004) Enter another prominent figure.

"Roger Conant is the nation's senior herpetologist, the doyen of an unrelentingly intense group of specialists whose enchantment by reptiles adds interest to their profession as well as their subjects. Scientist, editor and author (of more than 240 papers and twelve books), Dr. Conant's encyclopaedic knowledge of 'herps,' zoos and the care and mentoring of more herpetologists is as instructive as it is legendary." (William Conway) *"Roger Conant is one of the most famous herpetologists in the world today, and his impact on herpetology is fundamental."* (Göran Nelson, Göteborg University, Sweden) (Both cited in the back cover of a Conant book, 1997) Also, a herpetologist told me that Roger was the last Victorian-style gentleman in American herpetology and zoos. A former director of Philadelphia Zoo, Roger served as AAZPA president, 1946-1947. In retirement he lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

When Sydney Butler, AZA Executive Director, met Dr. Conant at an AZA conference he had no idea who Roger Conant was. All he needed was to introduce himself and ask Roger who he was, but instead, he insulted Roger in public. That convinced me never to break bread with AZA. In his letter to me Roger commented, in part: *"The AZA is now too formal and much too slanted toward his majesty, Sydney J. Butler. Someday I'll tell you how he insulted me at the*



meeting here in Albuquerque when HIS organization was holding its sessions". (Letter to me, 12 February 2001) Alas, before that opportunity arrived Roger moved on to the other side of life. I used to visit his house just to enjoy conversation, and to have lunch at his favourite restaurant. Maybe I forgot to ask him about the incident when we got together and if so, it would have been better. Why stir up the memory of such a worthless event? But embarrassing episodes do not recognize the national boundary.

Roger Conant, Philadelphia Zoo, 1970. Photo Ken Kawata

"A well-known and AZA-accredited U.S. zoo (which I will tactfully not identify by name) announced the birth of two 'critically endangered' Bactrian camels, of which 'fewer than 1,000 still live in the wild'," noted Nicholas Gould. The problem: *"...the two calves concerned are representatives of the domestic form of the species, of which an estimated one to two million are still kept in Asia. The Bactrian camel which the IUCN lists as critically endangered is the wild form"* hence that does not apply on domesticated form. He adds that *"The incident does suggest, though, that zoos should be careful that any statement issued in their name is checked beforehand by someone with a good knowledge of zoology".* (2009) For some zoos, at times it is not easy to maintain proper equilibrium.

Back to Staten Island. Not too many weeks after the binturong episode, the new director took me on a golf cart. He began to drive and stated that the zoo was in a financial bind, and had to save money, that my salary took a small chunk of the budget. "So I want you to quit by

September," he said. I did not have to think. The binturong episode pounded the last nail on the coffin, so to speak. The zoo world was no longer worth my life and time. But no one should tell me when to leave in my opinion; that decision should be up to me. My answer: "How about the end of December, John?" He may have expected that I'd fight, so there was a slight sigh of relief. "Yeah, that'd be fine," he said, adding that if I was to leave in September the zoo would have to compensate for unused vacation, etc., anyway. That was that. There was no bitter taste in my mouth, not even sentimental notion or nostalgia. There is a time to love and a time to leave.

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