

I've Always Been Crazy, But It's Kept Me From Going Insane

I had to borrow the title of this blog post from one of my favorite Waylon Jennings tunes because I talk to animals, and some people would say that makes me crazy. Crazier yet is when the animals talk back to me...

As it is always tremendous fun for me, yesterday's visit to the zoo did not disappoint. And while we made our way to the exit near closing time, I was turning over in my head the questions I ask myself and my co-visitors after every zoo trip: what was your favorite animal that you saw today and why? I was having a hard time deciding; everything was great, but nothing stood out as being extraordinary... until my chat with the cheetah. He was looking directly at me, and I said, "Hi Cheetah!" and he said, "Mew." I couldn't believe it, so I said it again, to which he gave me another, "Mew." Now I didn't realize that cheetahs meow and sound just like your average housecat, but upon much research when I got home, this is one thing I learned about an animal that never fascinated me as much as others until it talked to me. From now on, I will always stop by the cheetahs to say "hi" because I think we are now buddies. I also found a cute little video of cheetahs meowing, much like my new friend at the Toledo Zoo!

The Great Zoo Debate

This is a sad post for me to write – a veteran trainer, Dawn Brancheau, was killed yesterday by an Orca whale at Sea World in Orlando, Florida. Reports of the incident have been conflicting, but it seems that the trainer was pulled into the tank when the giant sea mammal grabbed her ponytail. She subsequently drowned. Unmistakably, this is a tragedy – pure and simple.

But it also re-awakens the great zoo debate – should humans be able to keep wild animals in zoos? As they say, you can take an animal out of the wild, but you can't take the wild out of the animal, and tragedies such as yesterday's incident at Sea World prove this. It is also apparent that no matter how many precautions are taken to avoid tragedy, an accident can always occur. However, I love zoos, and I strongly and truly believe that the conservation education and money raised by zoos has been and will continue to be detrimental in helping certain species survive and bounce back from the brink of extinction. Many other people disagree, and tragedies such as this and the fatal Siberian tiger mauling at the San Francisco Zoo in 2007 always add fervor to the great zoo debate, which is depicted in this video from Good Morning America and features zoo advocate Jack Hanna debating with the Vice President of an anti-zoo organization, Born Free:

In my opinion, they did not let Mr. Hanna have an equal part in the debate. He has some good points, and it's very difficult to say where the status of certain endangered species would be right now if it were not for the conservation efforts of zoos and wildlife parks – no one knows what **could** or **would** have been either way, so how can that be a part of the debate? As Mr. Roberts points out, the number of tigers has greatly dwindled over the past century. But one can also point out that no one knows for sure if it would have been worse had zoos not been educating the public about tigers or if they had not been learning how to breed them in captivity to continue the species.

The bottom line is, in my opinion, (and this is MY blog, so I get the bottom line) zoos and aquariums have taken great strides forward for the preservation of many animal species. I believe their work and conservation efforts are **invaluable** to conservation (not to mention how many thousands of jobs zoos, aquariums, wildlife parks, and conservation programs bring to societies in hundreds of countries); in fact, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums have funded more than 3,700 conservation projects in more than 100 countries and spend nearly \$70 million on conservation initiatives annually. Remember my post about the [Kihansi Spray Toad](#)? This is just **one** example of a creature that would be completely extinct (it is believed to be extinct in the wild but still exists in just two zoos in the world) if it weren't for the efforts of zoos trying to save it.

Obviously what happened in Orlando is a tragedy of great proportion. And I'm not trying to undermine it, but Dawn's friends, family, and colleagues are all stating that she was aware of the inherent risks of her job and that she would want nothing but for her work to go on despite what happened. Perhaps changes need to be made; maybe certain species of animal require bigger and better habitats and different types of interaction and stimulation – the modern zoo world is

relatively new, and experts are still learning. But I think their hard work is invaluable to the world, and I hope that someday, all of this is just as obvious to the nay-sayers as it is to us zoo-lovers.



Kind of puts this into perspective now... I wonder if Marineland in Niagara Falls Canada still allows this after recent tragedies involving the killer whale?

Reading Dog?

Have you seen the dog who can read on the news lately? The really cool-looking dog named Willow was on the Today show in October; here's a snippet:

So what's your opinion? Can he really read or is it much ado about nothing (ie, the owner is doing something else to signal the trick)?

[poll id="14"]

Dear (Deer) Friends

It's always fun to read about friendship that crosses the boundaries between animal species. I received some cute pictures of a cat and her deer friend via an email forward. What's interesting is that friendships between cats and deer don't seem to be as uncommon as one would think – I was having trouble getting the picture from the email to the blog, so I did a search for cat and deer pictures, and I came up with pictures of at least 5 different cats being friendly with deer! But thanks to Hubby for graciously taking the time (even during football playoffs) to help me get the original pictures from my email. These are cute!





My Favorite Amphibian

Recently, a friend and fellow tangents blogger wrote a [blog post regarding her bucket list](#) – for those who haven't seen nor heard about the movie of said title, a bucket list is comprised of things you want to do before you die. Her post got me to thinking about my bucket list, and maybe I'll post it in the future. For now, I know that one of the items on my bucket list – or many items, depending upon how I write it – will involve seeing certain species of animals; many of them endangered and rare. If seeing rare animals is on my bucket list, then I can cross off one item – last week I got to see several specimens of the [Kihansi Spray Toad](#) – an animal that is considered *extinct* in the wild!



Given my intense fear of them, I never thought that a frog or a toad would be on my list of animals to see – but the Kihansi Spray Toad is actually kinda cute! For me, it seems that the more brown and dry the amphibian, the more it creeps me out – not including salamanders, which I don't have a problem with at all. I'm not at all frightened by the beautiful blue Poison Dart frogs or other colorful species, which is strange since those are the ones that tend to be poisonous and harmful to humans. Weird. So anyway, I think the Kihansi Spray Toad is both extremely fascinating and very cute!

The Toledo Zoo is the only place in the entire world where people can view these special little toads who were first recognized as a species as recently as 1996. Not only that, it is estimated that over half of the earth's entire population of the toads live in Toledo. I am so glad I decided to venture over to the Museum of Science in the Toledo Zoo last week to see the spray toad! It was the highlight of my zoo visit; all of the other animals were kinda lethargic. Oh, there is one more thing – my 10-year-old daughter got pooped on by a bird in aviary! She was a really good sport about it, and it just **plucked** right out of her hair – no harm, no **fowl**. My daughter's unfortunate accident:



It was neat to see the local wildlife congregating in the unused Hippo-quarium. It's too cold for the hippos to be outside, but the ducks have a nice place to swim – who would have thought about what a group of ducks look like from under

the water?



My 3 daughters fit into one giant egg!



This was taken on a different day, but I had to put in this cute picture of my 2 youngest. My little guy is learning to say "CHEESE!" for the camera ☐



A New Favorite

I am a fan of many of the wordpress blogs, especially those written by my wonderful friends here on tangents.org. But recently, I came across a previously undiscovered (to me) blog that is right up my alley, and I was surprised to find out that it's a wordpress blog: designingzoos.com – does that sound like my cup of tea or what?!?

This woman ~~blogs~~ blogged (she hasn't written since July – disappointing!) about her job, which is far from boring – she designs zoos, aquariums, theme parks, etc. for a living! My dream job calling? Well, not really, I'm working my dream job taking care of my 4 wonderful kids. And besides, zoo designers sometimes have to compromise their grand zoo visions, and they go to a lot of meetings. But it's certainly fun for me to read about zoo design! I found this site while researching the history of [Brookfield Zoo](#) near Chicago, a place I was quite familiar with as a kid. I ended up finding this, which is a re-design [master plan map](#) of the zoo. If you are at all familiar with Brookfield Zoo, you might find it interesting, along with this [designingzoos.com blog post](#) about the proposed map. Many other zoos have re-design master plans, but unfortunately, these plans are forced to be nothing but pipe dreams while this economy has forced zoo visits to be much lower on the priority list for many families.

Awesome Octopi

While I'm on the subject of our visit to the zoo... well, in some ways it wasn't our best visit, that's probably why it took me almost a week to get motivated to write about it. A few of us were still recovering from the flu, while others in the family were coming down with it, so the lot of us that day were quite crabby! But we did see some amazing animal action, including the often inactive octopus – he was moving all around his tank, which prompted many questions from my kids, my husband, and myself. I did a bunch of research when I got home, and I learned what I already suspected – octopi are awesome! Here are some of the coolest facts:

- The octopus has a short lifespan; varying among species from 6 months to 5 years for the larger species held in captivity.
- Octopi are invertebrates, meaning they have no hard skeleton, and they are very intelligent creatures – considered the most intelligent of all the invertebrates. They have been known to manipulate man-made objects, like opening jars or even solving puzzles and mazes. Check out the following video – an octopus navigates a water maze by getting **out** of the water and going **over** the maze! (The major action starts about 2 minutes into the video.)

- Because of the fact that octopi don't have skeletons, they can squeeze their bodies (which is actually that bulbous looking mass most people mistake for a head – and it contains **three** hearts!) through extremely small openings.

Do Meerkats Often Sit Like This?



We had a chance to visit the Toledo Zoo the other day and snapped this amusing pic of a meerkat just chillin'. Is this a common pose for a meerkat? I've never seen one sitting up like this before last Saturday. Anyone watch Meerkat Manor?

Just A Friendly Reminder

Take care of yourself this flu season!



Taylhis' Most Wanted

During visits to the zoo, most kids will fantasize about which animal they would like to take home and have as a pet. There are many reasons why exotic and wild animals should not be kept as pets, but being an animal lover, I guess I never grew out of the mindset of a kid at the zoo – I still think about which ones I would like as pets. Well, actually, I'd like **all** of them as pets, but here are the top 10. Since this is purely fantasy, of course I did not take rational things into consideration like cost or cleaning up after or housing the animals, where's the fun in that? While you're at it, try putting your top few fantasy pets in the comments box below...

□

Taylhis Most Wanted:

African Grey parrot – Ugh, another large bird? Do I really want more bird screaming to rile up the kids? But this is a fantasy list, so I'm going to build a huge tropical aviary with a little river for my birds, no problem. Members of this particular breed of parrot are incredibly smart, and their ability for exact mimicry is hilarious! I once posted a video of a little African Grey character named Silvia who did an awesome impression of Desi Arnaz (*Lucy, you got some 'splainin*

to do!) as well as sarcastically (and hilariously) delivering the line, “Well luddy-frickin’-dah!”

Manatee – My favorite animal; manatees are gentle and intelligent. I find the manatee’s graceful movements relaxing and therapeutic. Watching my manatee swim would be a great way to unwind after a stressful day!

Gorilla – Humans have much in common with these intelligent primates. It’d be incredible to get to know one on a personal basis.

Sea Horse – Well, these guys mate for life, so I’d like a pair of seahorses, which would then turn into hundreds ☐ But many of their behaviors are truly fascinating to watch!



Sea Lion – Like an aquatic dog, sea lions are intelligent, trainable, and beautiful swimmers. And so cute!

Goat – I’ve always loved goats; now that we live nearby many farms, this might be a possibility some day!

Huge Dog – Dogs are the greatest, and sometimes it seems like the larger the dog, the friendlier. So for a dog-lover without limitations on house size, wouldn’t it be great to have a beautiful 150lb+ lap dog? I was thinking St. Bernard,

Great Dane or Mastiff type dogs.

Octopus – A somewhat mysterious animal, though to be intelligent based in part upon its ability to manipulate items like jars and toys for food rewards.

Alligator – Huge reptiles with a bad rap; I would love the time to hand-raise and train a gator.

Tortoise – I really like tortoises, and it'd be really neat to create an exhibit to house one of those super-huge tortoises.

Honorable mention:

Marmoset – a cute furry little primate. Cute as he is, smaller primates are known for being temperamental, so this guy is a runner-up.



So there you have it. My husband commented on my list's lack of felines. True, I always blog about how much I would like a cat, but in the real world, all that's stopping me from getting a cat or two or ten is my cat allergy, so that's not really the point of the list – it's more about forbidden animals. Big cats would be too scary to play with – I had a little cat who passed away, but after watching how suddenly and completely her moods could change, I gained a whole new respect for big cats, so no thanks!