

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?

Second Wind

Being sick for three days threw off my already crummy sleep schedule. I was up way too late last night, and I got tired way too early this evening (5:30ish). I ate some dinner and got a second wind. I sure hope it lasts until a decent hour to go to bed, but not too late that I will need a second wind to get through tomorrow. Does that even make sense? Or are these the ramblings of an exhausted individual?

Someday I would love to get on a semi-normal sleep pattern. This stay up late, get up early, get to sleep earlier, get up even earlier pattern is not very good. Any hints that don't

involve some sort of medication would be appreciated.

Wow

A week ago (sadly, my most recent blog post) I blogged about a school district monitoring their students by remotely turning on the webcams of their school-issued laptops. This story has really ballooned. On one site I have been following a thread about it and many links have been posted. Here are a few—click the titles for the full articles:

[Lower Pervian School District vs. Mike and Ikes](#)

...AP reports the FBI is investigating the school district's webcam program, and district spokesman Doug Young suggests without claiming that Harriton High School student Blake J. Robbins' webcam was activated only because the laptop had been reported stolen – in accordance with an established policy. The boy was charged with an undisclosed infraction based on an image the school picked up from his webcam. District superintendent Christopher W. McGinley, in an orotund statement, defends the program while canceling it. And just to make clear that we're still in high school, Master Robbins appears to have gotten in trouble when he was photographed eating Mike and Ikes...

Federal judge orders Pa. schools to stop laptop spying

...Yesterday, U.S. District Court Judge Jan DuBois issued a consent order that prevents Lower Merion School District of Ardmore, Pa., from “remotely activating any and all web cams embedded in lap top [sic] computers issued to students ... or from remotely taking screenshots of such computers.”

Lower Merion spokesman Doug Young said today that the district would fully cooperate with the court order...

The Spy at Harriton High (and more)

...The truly amazing part of this story is what’s coming out from comments from the students themselves. Some of the interesting points:

- *Possession of a monitored Macbook was required for classes*
- *Possession of an unmonitored personal computer was forbidden and would be confiscated*
- *Disabling the camera was impossible*
- *Jailbreaking a school laptop in order to secure it or monitor it against intrusion was an offense which merited expulsion*

When I spoke at MIT about the wealth of electronic evidence I came across regarding Chinese gymnasts, I used the phrase “compulsory transparency”. I never thought I would be using the phrase to describe America, especially so soon, but that appears to be exactly the case...

Software maker blasts 'vigilantism' in Pa. school spying case

The company selling the software used by a Pennsylvania school district to allegedly spy on its students blasted what it called laptop theft-recovery "vigilantism" today.

Absolute Software said it dissuades users of theft-recovery software from acting on their own. "We discourage any customer from taking theft recovery into their own hands," said Stephen Midgley, the company's head of marketing, in an interview Monday. "That's best left in the hands of professionals."...

There is now a [Wikipedia page](#) about the ongoing investigation of this lawsuit, though the blogs and articles (full of even more links for your perusal by the way) are more interesting IMHO.

Next up, something about my own unexciting life. Hopefully. ☐

Give Me What I Want And I'll Go Away

If memory serves, Stephen King's [Storm of the Century](#) was a mini-series in the late 90s. It definitely was not a theatrical release since I watched the 2hr15min first part tonight. I have seen many of King's other movies and this one definitely ranks VERY high. Maybe it's because Mr. King actually had a hand in the production or perhaps it's because

everything about the movie is so compelling. For a televised production, I thought the editing was very well done. It is usually much easier to pick out where commercials would be inserted but it just flowed.

I caught the blink or you miss cameo by the writer and a reference to at least one of his other works. I caught the Superman homage and chuckled when Tim Daly uttered it. For those of you who don't know, Daly was the voice of the animated Man of Steel from 1996-2000. But Colm Feore who plays the creepy, enigmatic, brilliant baddie, Andre Linoge made me think of another equally brilliant villain: Dr. Hannibal Lechter. But tell me, what was it he was whispering throughout especially when the sound of the storm was raging? I don't think it was "I'm a Little Teapot."

I can't wait to watch part 2 to find out just what exactly Linoge is. Signs are given throughout that he might be a leftover from *'Salem's Lot* but I think he maybe something even more sinister.

Random thoughts for today

I was strolling around the internet (I don't surf, that just goes too fast), and I found a few interesting things.

[On this site](#), I found two t-shirts I liked. The first was with Bela Lugosi as Dracula holding the head of a more recent movie vampire (yes, just the head). The saying was "Dracula never sparkled." Struck my sense of humor today. The other shirt on the same site was "Meat is Murder. Quick eat the evidence." So today, I guess my humor is heading toward the violent stage. "Here's Johnny." ☐

Ok, I knew somebody had the list of what emoticons actually works here. [Ok, I found them, thanks again Derek!!](#) Why can't all of the various chat area, blog sites, bulletin boards, social networks, ect. use the same symbols. Why do they work sometimes and not others. Even being a technical person by trade, I get sick of technology... ☐

[Are we headed for a new form of the WWW?](#) Kind of discussed this last night with a friend or few. Mostly about if Facebook would start charging for use. Currently that is just a malicious rumor floating around, but as was said in the conversation, Facebook and other sites like that need some cash to exist. Now this article is more about premium content, but I wonder what premium content is. I already pay for my web access, about as much as I would pay for Cable/Satellite TV, Cell Phone usage ect., so I wonder how much more this would eventually cost. Like most people in the middle class, my budget is strained from all angles. I don't have pay TV for a number of reason, but one is I really don't want to pay for TV.

If it ever comes to the point that I have to pay for TV, I'll stop watching. I've said before there isn't much I want to watch, so it doesn't make any difference to me. I have internet access to keep up with friends, family, work and news of the day. I pay for that access to offset other areas I no longer use or pay for. If the outlets I use start charging me, on top of my access charge, I may stop using them. Unless I become independently wealthy. I can always go to the library to pick up newspapers and magazines. My taxes go to keep those organizations functioning, so I will use them. I can use other means to contact friends and family. But then as I said earlier, sometimes the technology bugs me...

[In what may be a good use for Ebooks, I found this article.](#)

Textbooks that can be modified or commented on by the professors/teachers. Cool stuff. I remember in school carting around a lot of books. And then in college pay tons of money for lots of books. Of course the teachers would always comment or add to the material present in the book. This forced the student to carry even more. I like the idea of getting this all on an E-book level and allow the students to carry around less material. Save trees and backaches. Now if they would only come up with a way to make that stupid textbook cheaper.

One final note. I went to the oriental restaurant on Sunday with my daughter. My taste buds were so messed up, I left the fortune cookies in the truck. Since my taste returned today I ate the cookies. The first fortune I had was "Everything will now come your way." The lucky numbers on this fortune just happened to be the birthdays (day of the month) of my four daughters, myself and my late wife. That is six numbers. The estimated jackpot for the Mega Millions jackpot is now 83 million for tonight's drawing. I met my late wife in 1983... Is that a sign? I'm not sure I believe in stuff like that, but I bought the ticket anyway. I used my late wife's birthday as the powerball and put the rest of the days in the regular numbers. One final little note: that combination of numbers

never won the jackpot....

The Return Of Captain EO

This one is for fellow Disney fanatics – I just read an article about the return to Disneyland of the 17-minute Michael Jackson 3D video, [Captain EO](#). I never got to see Captain EO; my first time to Disney World was in 1992, and the attraction was either broken down during that visit or we just weren't interested in seeing it; I don't remember. By the time I grew up, started my family and began our traditional Disney World vacations, Captain EO was long gone and replaced by the 3D interactive attraction Honey, I Shrunk the Audience.

Captain EO replaced Honey, I Shrunk the Audience at Disneyland in Anaheim, California and opened today. The futuristic short film stars Michael Jackson and Anjelica Huston; it cost about \$30 million to make and also boasts the creative team of director Francis Ford Copolla and executive producer George Lucas. When it was shown at the Disney theme parks in the 80's and 90's, it was the most expensive film ever made (costing \$1.76 million **per minute!**). As of its opening today at 10am, there were many fans lined up to see it. No word on whether Captain EO will return to Epcot in Disney World, Orlando Florida, but if it does, I might like to check it out, despite how much I will miss the always fun Honey, I Shrunk the Audience.

[poll id="16"]

Oh Lord, It's Hard To Be Humble

Not really, because I am so **NOT PERFECT** in any (rather long every) way. I see by the old stat count that I have reached a total of 666 posts (I'll get off that with this one). The title... a friend recently posed an interesting question. Does acting make you more humble when it comes to things concerning the human condition: like ego? I like to think that I'm not a very ego-centered person, but does that in itself make me egocentric.

In my humble opinion to be successful in any role, you must first know who the character is beyond what you are given in the script. Where does he come from? What makes the person who he is? What was his life like before he takes his first step onto the stage? This is ultimately as important for the person who has a one-line (or no-line) cameo as it is for the actor playing the 300+ line lead role.

Of course, understanding does not always mean you must empathize with the character. That would be totally insane! I could never be a mean, curmudgeonly miser but I sure had a ball playing one on stage. And as much as I humbly hate to admit it, I could never be a sexist, Liswathistani visitor covering for news new owner America country.

I am now at the point at which I am ready to take on even more challenging parts. To be able to take on roles that really challenge me to step out of my zone and look at other elements of the human condition. Just as Abigail Breslin is now bringing her take of Helen Keller to the Broadway stage in [The Miracle Worker](#). Plus... still have fun doing it! The moment it is no longer fun is when I stop and I don't see that happening any too soon.

I think during my years as an amateur actor, I have come to see (not necessarily understand) more elements of the human condition than I had before. At least enough to want to continue to do so.

Head Games Before The Unknown Hits

I have heard all kinds of forecasts for the next day or so. I will let Nature take her course and live with what we are given. This afternoon, Megan and I had made plans to see *Shutter Island*. The first I had come into knowledge of the movie was the trailer during the Super Bowl. I thought it looked awesome... even if Leonardo DiCaprio was the star. I think the movie about the boat sinking turned me off of his acting talent.

I will give only the vaguest of outlines for those of you wishing to see the psychological thriller. Leo plays Teddy Daniels, a veteran U.S. Marshall, who along with his young partner, investigate the escape of a patient at a high security "mental institution for the criminally insane."

What follows is a great mind game... I really like those types of movies! We both thought it was very good. Although definitely not for the 6-8 young children who were with their adult companions. I am pleased to say that the only time I noticed them was one who started crying 5 minutes after the show began. Thankfully, one of the adults was quick to take the child out of the theatre. Of course after the 2.5 hour movie (didn't notice the length really), we were greeted by nacho and popcorn remains in our path.

On the return trip, snow had begun falling and when we arrived on Union Street, we found fire engines and a police car along the opposite side of the street. After dropping my companion at her place, I took another route home and was passed by 2 more emergency vehicles. Hopefully nothing serious.

Here is the trailer for *Shutter Island*:

I can't taste anything...

I've been under the weather the past few days with a cold that just wouldn't give up. My nose has finally stopped run 24 hours a day, and my throat is allowing me to talk with a normal voice again. No fever, no body ache, just headache, sore throat and a nose that wouldn't quit.

The worst part about all of this is that I lost my sense of taste. I realized with the stuffed nose, it would be cut down, but it is almost non-existent even today after my nose cleared up.

Went to a Oriental buffet today with my daughter and everything was bland. All the chicken dishes tasted the same. The lo mien was ok, but I think I liked the texture of the noodles. I couldn't taste spice, salt or other flavors. I wasn't sure if this was the restaurant or not. They had sushi bar, so I had some of that. Every piece I had tasted just like the one before. The ginger had little zip. The wasabi just cleared my sinuses more, but it had no flavor. Then I realized it wasn't the restaurant. If ginger slices and wasabi have no flavor, it has to be outside of the food. It has to be me.

For someone who likes to figure out all of the different flavors that go into making food taste good, this is almost worse than the being sick part. I never lost my appetite, but the food since last Wednesday evening has not had any appeal. If this goes on much longer, I think I will have no problem losing weight. Why eat when everything is missing its flavor?

Here are some funny things that are happening with my taste buds:

Cola tastes like lemon-lime drinks tastes like slightly

sweetened carbonated water.

Orange juice, cranberry juice, grape juice and sugar water all taste the same.

The only thing that made fish and chicken taste different was the texture.

Potato chips aren't as good if you can't taste the salt.

With no taste going on, mushrooms are nasty.

Noodles were ok, but I wasn't expecting a lot of flavor from them.

Tea tasted just like it should today, before today with no sense of smell, I was drinking hot water.

If this lasts too much longer, I will have quite a list.

Spotlight On... Montages

In attempts to keep the length down to a reasonable amount (showing clips of the 10 films nominated for best picture would seem like it would go on longer than the typical 3-4 hour event), there have been a few strategies put in place for the Academy Awards. First of all, the nominees for best song will not be performed live by the artists. Instead, audiences will be treated to (drumroll, please)... yet another in an array of **MONTAGES**. A short piece from each of each song will be presented throughout the evening with scenes from their respective movie. I don't even recall the nominations for best song nor score so, as a viewer, it may be for the best.

However, how about the songwriters of the nominated pieces?

Another attempt to limit the time is a change in the acceptance speeches. Each nominee is being asked to provide two speeches: one signifying what winning the award means to them. The second is the traditional laundry list of thank you notes which will be actually delivered back stage shown later via internet. I guess there will be no way that someone can forget to thank Fido plus cut down on the emotional impact that may not be as important to the average at home viewer (especially as the evening/early morning wears on).

So... what do you think about the two changes to the gala event?

Should the Best Original Song nominees be allowed their moment in the spotlight? Should the winners be given stipulations on when and what to say? Or is it just the show's producers way of getting all the Best Picture nominees in there? I'd add a poll but I think there are too many possible responses so I'll let the comments speak for themselves.