

# 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?

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## He Said WHAT?

The continuing saga of Illinois' embattled governor just keeps getting more and more interesting. As his impeachment trial opened yesterday, Rod Blagojevich took to the tv airwaves to defend (?) himself. I saw clips of a few of his tv appearances, and that's why I included the little question mark above. It didn't seem to me that he was doing a good job of defending himself. In fact, the ladies on The View noticed the same thing, with them noting, "Seems like you're doing yourself more harm than good." The View ladies then hilariously chided the governor, asking him to say "I'm not a

crook" – Richard Nixon-style. Blago refused.

And of course by now you've heard about the Oprah for Senator announcement he made on Good Morning America – Blago has admitted that he actually considered Oprah Winfrey to fill Obama's old Senate seat. I'm not even going to go there – there were too many other gems that came out of Blago's mouth yesterday. Among them:

On his Larry King Live appearance, Blagojevich launched into a bizarre analogy involving cowboys and steer to describe his situation... I'm not going to go into detail; it was quite lengthy, but it's worth looking up on youtube or somewhere if you're so inclined. WHAT was he TALKING about?!?

Back to Oprah for a minute. According to Blagojevich, Oprah has more influence than all 100 United States senators combined. She does have lots of dough; as well as an uncanny ability to get women to diet and save money. But she doesn't have the power to declare war or pass legislation that changes lives... so no, Blago, not even close on that one.

Also on Larry King Live, Blago was shown clips of Saturday Night Live where they make fun of him, namely his thick mane of hair. "He looks like one of those Fisher Price toy people with its hair on backwards!" Too funny! But Blago didn't think so. "What show was that?" he asked. But a few sentences later, he talked about how they can make fun of him during skits or whatever and that he didn't care. But if he had never heard of Saturday Night Live as he acted, how would he know it was a show comprised of skits? He was just trying to insult Saturday Night Live by acting as though he had never heard of it!

And throughout the governor's press junket yesterday, he kept repeating – "The fix is in" referring to the "fact" that the Illinois House is impeaching him because they're out to get him – not because he did anything wrong. I agree with Blago

on one aspect – his impeachment is inevitable. In the meantime, I have to admit how fun it is to watch this guy in action and marvel at the fact that he was ever elected to such a major public office. I think he might be certifiably nuts!

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## Another Miracle

Tonight while watching the first snow of the season continue to fall, I checked the tv listings and discovered two movies that piqued my interest: *Santa Claus The Movie* and the 1973 made-for-television version of *Miracle on 34th Street*. Since I have seen Santa Claus (the rather disappointing movie made by Alexander Salkind, producer of the Christopher Reeve Superman films), I decided to check out one of at least 2 remakes of the 1947 classic. It is a virtual who's who of 1970s television stars. [Sabastian Cabot](#) (Mr. French from Family Affair), Tom Bosley (Mr. C from Happy Days), [David Hartman](#) (whom I remember as the co-host of Good Morning America back in the day... can't say much for his acting ability), Jim Backus (Thurston Howell III and Mr. Magoo, himself), [Roddy McDowell](#), and David Doyle (Bosley from the Charlie's Angels tv series) were just a few of the actors that made the whole thing seem like a bad Love Boat/Fantasy Island episode. I think the best thing about watching remakes is the fun in which one can have discussing the merits of the different versions. I must correct myself; there are actually a total of 4 remakes. Three television versions (1955, 1959, and 1973) as well as the 1994 theatrical version.

One tidbit I learned from [imdb.com](#), Mr. Cabot had to shave the trademark beard from his role on Family Affair and wear an "official" Kris Kringle beard. Another tidbit... upon the release of the [1994 version](#), 20th Century Fox offered a

complete refund for anyone who did not enjoy the film. Over 1500 tickets were refunded. Not sure how many were legitimate refunds or if they just had a bunch of Scrooges. One thing is clear... one should not mess with an original.

Now if I could just locate a copy of that FINE classically bad classic [Santa Claus Conquers the Martians](#). I've seen bits of this what I am sure is a totally misunderstood gem but have never seen it in its entirety.

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## Monkey-ing Around

This morning before going to work, I caught a few moments of Good Morning America. One of the segments featured a pair of monkeys employed as waiters at a tavern in Japan called Kayabukiya. I'm not entirely sure what all goes on in the tavern except that the pair passes out hot towels to the customers as they order their first drink. No word on their rate of pay but they are tipped generously in boiled soya-beans. According to the report on GMA, many people have complimented the simians and noted that they are better than some human servers they have had previously. The names of the pair are Fuku-chan and Yat-chan. But check out the [link](#) to see the monkeys in action. I wonder if the owners of Kayabukiya are breaking any animal labor laws... cruelty to animals and such. Not sure if PETA operates worldwide.

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# Small Town Makes Good

It seems that the county fair just to our south will be getting some national attention. Chris Cuomo, who is the news anchor for ABC's morning program "[Good Morning America](#)," will be making an appearance at the Defiance County fair on Thursday August 21. While there, he will be taping a segment presumably on the Tractor Pulls or maybe it is to report on the sister cities Hicksville, OH and Hicksville, N. Y. But, here is the full article for your enjoyment.



HICKSVILLE – The ABC News morning news program, "Good Morning America," and anchor Chris Cuomo will arrive at the Defiance County Fairgrounds on Thursday to tape a news segment to be seen on GMA.

The program segment is expected to feature highlights of the fair, including Cuomo's participation in an exhibition tractor or truck pull, to be held at the grandstand between 2 and 5 p.m. before the Kids Day bicycle raffle.

A fair board spokesman believed the segment will air next month, and "Good Morning America" officials could not be reached for confirmation.

Fair board president Pat Slattery said he believes the show is filming in Hicksville due to the National Tractor Pullers Association. "The pullers like our track," he says. "We could probably hold a national pull with our track.

"I think it's great the show is coming here. It may even help to bring in funds faster for our (new) grandstand (construction project)."

As Hicksville is the sister city to Hicksville, N.Y., the fair board looks forward to showing the town to the GMA crew.

“When Mr. Cuomo comes here, he’ll be ... right back in the country,” Slattey said.

While Cuomo is scheduled to be on the grounds only between 2 and 5 p.m., GMA camera crews will be seen throughout the fair, taping Thursday evening’s sanctioned tractor and truck pulls as well as conversations with attendees to be shown during the show.

According to the county fair board office, the National Tractor Pullers Association set up the opportunity months ago, but the board could not alert the media until everything was confirmed this week.

Those wishing to see the sanctioned truck and tractor pulls may purchase tickets (infield, \$8; grandstand, \$7) from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. daily in the fair board secretary’s office.

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## **I Never Thought About the Crate Being Square and the Turnstile Being Round...**

In case you’ve missed my previous posts about animals and Jack Hanna, let me explain that Jack Hanna is my favorite celebrity and how much I really enjoy following his adventures through zoo life. In case you don’t know who Jack is, he is the man who gave Columbus, Ohio a zoo. They did have one before, even though many residents weren’t even aware of it, but with Jack’s brilliance in zoo management and marketing, the [Columbus Zoo](#) has become one of the most renowned zoos in the world today. These days, Jack spends his time filming tv shows of his own, and also bringing animals around the country



for appearances in theaters and on other tv shows, such as David Letterman, Maury Povich, and Good Morning America in order to educate people about respecting animals. Whenever animals are involved, situations can easily become unpredictable. Throw Jack into the mix, and these situations now become hilariously entertaining *and* unpredictable. Things seem to happen to Jack, and if you'd like an example of what I mean, check out the following article detailing an animal mishap Jack encountered at the airport last September:

**COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)** – Animal expert Jack Hanna and an 11-month-old flamingo became trapped while trying to squeeze through an airport security turnstile. It took firefighters to finally get the flamingo out. Animal expert Jack Hanna had a close encounter with a flamingo Sunday. Hanna, the director emeritus of the Columbus Zoo and a frequent guest on nationally televised talk shows, was returning from a zoo fundraiser with a mongoose, a small leopard and the flamingo. Three other people were with them. The entourage arrived at the Ohio State University Airport just after midnight Sunday to find the terminal closed. The only way to leave the tarmac was through a 10-foot-tall metal turnstile with several horizontal bars – not the easiest exit to squeeze through when you're traveling with boxed-up animals, Hanna said. **"I never thought about the crate being square and the turnstile being round,"** he said. Hanna, 60, pushed the flamingo's 2-foot-by-3-foot compartment into the turnstile, then continued pushing while straddling the crate. "I was stuck like a worm. My eyes were as big as grapefruits," he said. "I can't describe the feeling in my stomach. I can't move up or down. The bars are on your face." Hanna said he eventually squirmed free, leaving the flamingo still wedged inside and everyone else trapped on the tarmac. He then walked to a nearby fire station for help. It took three firefighters to hoist the flamingo's crate up and out of the turnstile, he said. Columbus fire department logs show the firefighters arrived at the airport at 12:30 a.m. for a "flamingo rescue," spokeswoman

*Kelly McGuire said. Hanna joked that the next time he flies through the airport, the biggest animal he'll bring is a gerbil.*

If you were entertained by the preceding article, I highly recommend Jack's book [Monkeys on the Interstate](#) which details his life before and during his days at the Columbus Zoo – it's a VERY entertaining and funny read, especially for animal lovers and zoo enthusiasts. I really hope I can schedule some time to catch Jack at one of his appearances soon, but until then, I will keep checking for him on Letterman and will probably check out the book for a fourth time!

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## **An Afgan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky**

I just finished reading a really interesting book about a girl named Farah Ahmedi. She grew up in Afghanistan, and when she was only 7 years old, she stepped on a land mine and was almost killed. She was one of the wounded children chosen to get medical care in Germany, so she had good medical care for 2 years, but it came with the price of loneliness because her family had to stay behind in Afghanistan, she didn't speak German, and no one at the hospital spoke her language. Her leg was amputated, and her other leg was rebuilt without a knee, leaving her unable to bend it. When she returned to Afghanistan as a 9-year-old, the Taliban was starting to take over, and a rocket hit her house, killing her father and two sisters. Her brothers were forced to try to flee to Pakistan in fear of being drafted or executed by the Taliban, and she hasn't heard from them since. Since she and her mother were the only members of her family left, they were forced to flee

the Taliban also – we've all heard about how the Taliban don't treat women very well, and women couldn't even go out in public without men. This was difficult for Farah and her mother since they didn't have any men left in their family. They spent 4 years as refugees in Pakistan until they were finally granted approval into the World Relief's American Refugee program. After the long process of applying and finally getting approved, they were waiting to leave for America when September 11, 2001 happened, and their trip was cancelled as no foreigners were being allowed into the country. Within 6 months however, the program was reinstated, and they came to America.

The book chronicles all the adventures, trials, and tribulations it took for Farah to become the successful American citizen she is today. It was a VERY interesting read; from the details of life in Afghanistan under the Taliban to the struggles of an Afgan widow and her daughter getting used to the American way of life. In fact, they had been through so much, that when they got to America, they were certain that their American hosts were actually slave owners who were trying to imprison them. It's a wonderful story about the triumph of the human spirit, and I recommend the book to anyone who likes learning about different parts of the world, other cultures, or just likes reading a good non-fiction life story. In fact, her book was published when she entered a Good Morning America contest and became a finalist. I heard about it because Farah attended the rival high school to the one where I went, so for me, it was interesting to read about the area I grew up in as seen through the eyes of someone who had been through as much as Farah and was seeing the area for the first time as an immigrant. [Check it out!](#)