

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

February 1, 2013

Dear Friend,

### **How questionably bad acting changed my life**

In 1976, a movie came out that was never supposed to make it to the big screen. The film was written and directed by a relative unknown. It struggled to get funding, but due to the persistence of the writer/actor it was eventually given the green light under the guideline that it be made cheaply—for \$1 million, to be exact. This movie was filmed in just 28 days. (For comparison, Star Wars cost \$11 million and took three years to make.) If you haven't guessed yet, the movie was Rocky.

There was one scene in the movie that shows just how tight the budget was. In the film, the robe that Rocky wears to the fight is way too big. Since there was no time or money to change it, Sylvester Stallone added in a line where Rocky made fun of the too-big robe. For a no-name film on a tiny budget, it's pretty amazing that Rocky has gone on to make over \$222 million.

After Stallone's success with Rocky came another "great" series of movies based on a Vietnam veteran named John J. Rambo. In the first movie, called First Blood, John Rambo escapes from an evil sheriff after being placed in custody for vagrancy, even though he was a Medal of Honor recipient. While escaping the small town jail amidst an eye-dazzling display of Special Forces moves, the last thing he grabs on his way out is his survival knife. He goes on to use this knife for every imaginable survival and field trick in the book. Heck, he probably wrote the book, based on that knife. Although the acting in these movies could be considered questionable, Sylvester Stallone, his knife, and John J. Rambo have made a significant impact on my life.

For some reason, the knife used in Rambo sparked an interest in me and I decided to learn about survival. To this day I carry a knife, multi-tool, two flashlights, a pen, a whistle, a compass, and a fire starter in my wallet everywhere I go. I'm not making this up! About ten years after the original Rambo came out, I was working at a YMCA camp near Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was here that I met my wife, Antonia. I was teaching survival skills (thanks, Sylvester!) and she was teaching art and drama. Imagine that connection. Being from England, she was not used to the American frontier mentality and was first attracted to me because of the big knife I wore everywhere in camp. Again--not making this up! Those movies and that knife have led me to a life I would've never imagined. They sparked my interest in survival, which ignited my passion for wildlife and wild things. My work at the Zoo, helping to save endangered species, lets me live out this passion every day.

Ironically, just this week I was in New Orleans with 150 other zoo directors from around the country, when I heard that Sylvester Stallone was working out in the very gym that I had been to that morning. It got me thinking about the impact that he had on me, and what I might have said to him if I had met him that day.

Here's how I think it might've gone: after thanking him for making my wife fall in love with me, I would have told him about how his movies have, in a roundabout way, helped to make endangered species from all over the world safer. I would have talked about how, when we build new exhibits, we help people fall in love with endangered species, so they can begin to care about their wild counterparts.

Our new lion exhibit is a great example of this strategy. It might surprise you to know that lions are not doing too well in the wild. In 1996 there were 75,000 lions in Africa and now there are only about 32,000. Big animals like that need big land and there is often a pressure on big land. It might also surprise you to know that even captive lions were in trouble for a while. Most zoo animals are not brought in from the wild like they were in the old days; most of them have been born in a captive setting and are closely managed, like a pure-bred dog or cat. In fact, we keep records on everything to do with captive breeding. More than likely we know as much about our individual animals as your doctors know about you. But this wasn't always the case. The problem with lions started before record keeping was a best practice. The genetic tracking of lions became a confusing maze of animals that needed to be reset, in order to ensure strong genetic diversity. That is where our own Elson and Angie came in. They came to the US from African game preserves and their valuable genetics produced many cubs, which helped to build captive prides around the country.

Now that Elson has passed, and as Angie's life nears its end, there is a new generation of lions poised to make a difference for the species. Our new male, Abuto, has just arrived from Reid Park Zoo in Arizona. He has a Species Survival Plan breeding recommendation with two of our girls from Elson and Angie's last litter, meaning that it's likely they'll have cubs of their own. Lion introductions will begin early this spring, if everything goes well. Keep your fingers crossed.

The new exhibit will be finished soon and the lions will be out by the 4<sup>th</sup> of July...sort of an independence day for them. A chance at a new home and a chance at a new generation of lions for kids of all ages to see and fall in love with. Last year they impressed more than 600,000 Zoo guests and we can't wait to see how many will come to see them this year.

There's a good chance that most everyone who receives this letter helped make this dream come true for the community and for the lions. Without your support we could have never completed the Encounter Africa campaign. With your support, we were able to raise \$13.5 Million even in a tough economy. That is exactly why I love Colorado Springs. We are a strong and resilient group of people, who have a vision for what kind of future we want to make. I can assure you we are being recognized in the Zoo world as a strong and up-and-coming zoo. People from around the country and world are watching us to see what great things are yet to come from a town where soldiers like John J. Rambo are trained every day. Thank you for being a part of what we do.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain  
President & CEO