

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

March 2012

Dear Friend,

I have been watching some of the popular “Man vs. Wild” survival shows lately. I’ve been fascinated with wilderness survival since I was young, even attending a world-class nature awareness and survival school run by a famous tracker named Tom Brown, Jr. It has been said that Tom could track a man through the forest while riding in a Jeep.

I have spent countless nights in the woods, jungles and back country, but must admit I have never eaten a mouse, or, for that matter, a spider, scorpion or insect of any type. I did recently find a beetle in my bowl of Raisin Bran, but that is another story. (I was torched, too, because it was late at night and the sweet taste of the milk and cereal was hitting the spot.) While eating strange things may make a great TV show, just the simple act of eating has led me down some interesting roads. Here is just a sample of recent meals that have led me to fascinating work on the Zoo’s behalf.

Last week, I was at the White House having lunch. Not that little white house down the road from me, but THE WHITE HOUSE. I have a friend there who was the Director of the National Zoo when we started the Panama Amphibian Rescue project. He was asked by President Obama to run the Office of Personnel Management. Today, he is in charge of the benefits for 2 million federal employees and I have been to Panama five times to rescue frogs. I think he got the short end of the stick.

As my friend and I had lunch, we talked about all the amazing things happening at the Zoo, and particularly our exciting conservation work. He was, of course, interested in what is happening with our Panama project, but I was also able to tell him about the recent 30th anniversary of the black-footed ferret project (this year we released 20 kits and one adult into the wild!), our success in breeding Panamanian golden frogs, and the incredible work we’re able to do through Quarters for Conservation, which raised more than \$100,000 for conservation projects in the last year alone. (There are now ten other zoos around the country hosting their own Quarters for Conservation programs, and ten more ready to start. This will equate to more than \$2 million per year in new conservation money.) We’re truly helping endangered species to survive—and in some cases, even thrive—around the world.

He didn’t say it, but I could tell he was proud and jealous all at once. I, on the other hand, wished I could eat lunch in the White House whenever I want as he does and meet in the famous “Situation Room” just once with the President.

That same day, I was at the National Zoo having wine and hors d’oeuvres for the world premiere of a documentary that will air on the Smithsonian Channel. Of course, if you know me, you know I don’t drink and I am normally not comfortable eating while I am supposed to be working. Don’t ask...it has something to do with that awkward time between saying hello and someone

letting you know that you have spinach in your teeth. This documentary was filmed as we made our way to an area of Panama that is noteworthy for at least three things that I know of. First, guerilla fighters who make a living kidnapping people like me occupy the area. Second, it is wild, beautiful and wonderful. Third, there is a species of frog there that lives nowhere else in the world.

Finally, while I have never eaten a mouse, I have eaten PB&J sandwiches everyday for the last six years. This generally happens between 9:30 and 10:00am in my office at the Zoo. I can't tell you how many jokes I have endured eating this "childlike" snack. It was this fascination with peanut butter that leads me to my next point. About two years ago, I was shopping at WalMart to prepare for an outdoor adventure and since I have already admitted that mouse was not on the menu, I was drawn to a single serving packet of peanut butter made by Justin's Nut Butters.

Since then, after an enormous amount of hard work by our Palm Oil team, Justin's has become the first company in the world to have the Zoo's Orangutan Friendly Palm Oil label on their products. This means they are members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and are working with us to help save wild orangutan habitats by limiting destructive slash and burn farming practices in Indonesia and other countries. If you don't know just how prolific palm oil is, pick up a few food or toiletry items around your house and look for ingredients like palm oil, palmitate A, or other variations. The Cheyenne Mountain Zoo is leading the nationwide zoo and public awareness campaign to improve the farming techniques used to make this product more sustainable. In an upcoming, second trip to Indonesia to work on this problem, we will be taking three other zoo leaders from around the country with us to increase our efforts across the nation.

My choice to have a mouse-free diet has led me to lunch at the White House, hors d'oeuvres at the National Zoo (or lack thereof), and a more sustainable peanut butter. Who knew!

Warmly,

Bob Chastain
President & CEO