

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

April 6, 2015

Dear Friend,

Life is seldom like a dramatic novel. Mostly it's about going to work, reading the paper, talking with friends, going to the store... Someone I know once said good stories are about life with all the boring bits dropped out; what's left is then crystallized into a meaningful plot.

I have a friend who is a horrible story teller. If on his way home from work a tiger jumped out causing a car wreck and he saved a person's life, when asked if anything happened on the way home he would say, "Yeah, there was a wreck and I stopped to help. Sorry I'm late."

Perhaps we are not looking at life through the right lens. Another friend of mine can make going to the store sound like an adventure. I once heard him tell an account of a day we spent together and I hardly recognized it. While every bit was true, he focused on completely different things than I did. His account was crystallized into characters, obstacles, excitement and resolution.

But every story doesn't necessarily have a resolution.

I recently saw the movie *American Sniper*. It had a profound impact on me. What impacted me the most though was that the movie ended without resolution.

The following story is about hope, but not the immediate feel good type. The story of the *American Sniper* is like that. He survived the battle, he survived the war, he made peace with his life, but he did not survive the uncertainties of life itself.

About five years ago, we had a family group of seven Geoffroy's marmosets – Sumo and Fig and their five offspring. In December 2010 both Sumo and Fig died. This left two very young juveniles in the care of their three older siblings. One male in particular, Juan, stepped up and took great care of his younger brothers. In the meantime, relatives of Sumo and Fig had passed away at other zoos. It soon became apparent that our group's genetics were extremely important to the Geoffroy's marmoset population.

In October 2014 a female named Diadora was sent from St. Augustine Alligator Farm and Zoological Park to CMZ. At one pound, she was the most petite adult Geoffroy we had ever seen. She had giant owl-like eyes, and was friendly and fearless. Right after she arrived, Juan was moved to the quarantine barn to 'howdy' with her. Juan was so excited he stopped eating, so we altered our plan and introduced them right away. As soon as the door between them was opened Diadora ran to Juan's side of the room and jumped into the nest box with him. They did not come out for two days!

We calculated that Diadora was due to give birth in late February, and we were very excited when she started to gain weight and her belly became large. All seemed to be going exactly according to plan.

Then in late January, Diadora started showing weakness and stiffness in her back end. We were not too alarmed because the husbandry manual indicated lameness in late stages of pregnancy is fairly common. A local human obstetrics doctor was not alarmed either; it sounded like a pinched nerve. In early February the symptoms progressed until Diadora could only move by using her arms. X-rays showed two infants, and an ultrasound revealed two infant heartbeats. Twins are the norm for Geoffroy's marmosets. (If you want to see this amazing x-ray, email tgazibara@cmzoo.org.) The x-rays also provided some explanation for Diadora's lameness – there was severe bone loss in her spine. The most likely reasons for this were either cancer or a severe bone infection.

The treatment plan was in a category we call “heroics” and involved anesthesia twice per day to treat her. For her own safety, so she did not fall, we devised a two-chambered home for Diadora with an additional area for Juan to visit and sleep with her. Our goal was to keep Diadora alive long enough for the infants to be viable. We knew that she most likely would not be able to give birth, so plans were made to do a C-section. Even with the aggressive treatments, Diadora's bone loss was progressing at an alarming rate. And on February 9th the x-rays showed extremely bad news – Diadora's pelvis and leg had broken. The pelvis break was very close to the uterine artery so Diadora could have bled out at any time if the bone punctured the artery. The decision was made to have an OB/GYN specialist do a C-section that day.

The birth may have been the most amazing thing I have ever seen. The whole room gasped with an audible aaaah when the first tiny baby immersed from the membrane. Two separate teams stood by to take the mouse-sized primates. But the heartbreaking result was that the infants were not developed enough to survive and Diadora was euthanized after the C-section.

In the dark movie theater, you could have heard a pin drop as the movie ended with the death of Chris Kyle. I wondered why the story of the *American Sniper* was told. It seemed so unresolved. We are so conditioned for the happy ending, for the resolution part of the story. But so often life does not resolve itself – it just moves on.

Such is the case with Diadora's story. Our vets and staff often work with animals that are so rare we don't know much about them. With new knowledge and technology, perhaps next time we will enjoy the happily-ever-after that comes with the hard fought lessons of today. In the meantime, your support allows us to learn more about many of these rare creatures. We can't thank you enough for your commitment to Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and to the future of wildlife.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain