

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

January 2018

Dear Friend,

A couple of months ago our EDventure team went to an assisted living facility to share a ZOOMobile program. The program was restarted in 2007 after years of being dormant thanks to a gift from Central Bancorp, which helped buy a van, supplies, and salaries for 2-3 years to get the program on its feet. In 2016-17, the team made 284 presentations and reached 37,118 people, averaging 23.5 programs per month. They trekked as far as La Junta, Sedalia, Alamosa and even Laramie, Wyoming – for a total of 8,600 miles in a single year.

Lauren runs the program, which takes animals out into the community. She and a small group of part-time employees and unpaid docent volunteers help make these outreach trips possible. Animal ambassadors range from Madagascar hissing cockroaches to North American porcupines. We've been working with Poe, our beautiful and intelligent black raven, to be part of the program. Poe spends most of her time in the Loft greeting people, showing off her thinking skills and glossy black beak, and making friends. Poe's first outing with the EDventure team to an assisted living facility could well have been her last. That's because when we opened her travel crate, she promptly flew out and right into a window. As you can imagine, it was a disaster from our point of view. Poe was safe, but here are a bunch of older folks expecting to see one of the smartest birds in North America, and instead they see black feathers flying everywhere along with distraught keepers trying to get her safely back in the crate. It must have been quite the memorable moment.

A few weeks later we again felt Poe was ready and took her with us to another assisted living home. When we shared with the facility manager how we expected the presentation to unfurl, we told her of the last disaster. Now, I don't want to sound insensitive here so I will relay her response as accurately as I can. I do understand this is a serious topic that affects many people we love, but sometimes we have to laugh at life or we might cry more than we do. After we told the whole story about our previous Poe adventure, the manager said, "Don't worry if it goes wrong, because no one will remember. This is the Alzheimer's group." And with that bit of encouragement, the demonstration went great and Poe was a star.

Most days I feel lucky and blessed. But even so, some days are more challenging than others.

At 7:30am on New Year's day I received a call from Jason, our elephant manager, and it was not good. Malika, one of our elephants, was down and she could not get up. Malika has a weak rear leg. And at 32, she is nearing the end of the average lifespan of a female African elephant. In people years she would be in her mid-80s. Malika rarely, if ever, lies down. (We once knew an elephant that did not lie down for 10 years.)

Our team jumped into action. She had fallen about 5:30am that morning so we had to move fast. Large animals can't lie down much longer than four hours without complications. The sheer weight of their bodies causes problems and difficulties with breathing, organs and the skin. Standing her up took about 15 people working in three groups. While the vets worked to understand what happened and what treatment she would need, a group of rope handlers concentrated on positioning hay bales under her hips to help her stand, secured ropes on her legs so that she could not chase the staff once she was standing, and positioned straps under her so that she could be lifted up from the overhead crane. We also needed to keep her calm.

I have to admit, when I first saw her it did not look good. However, the team pulled together and we got her on her feet just after 9am. It was a herculean effort involving a 15,000-pound life, a number of large pulleys, 10,000-pound ropes, and the largest tow strap you've ever seen. Once she was on her feet the elephant team brought her food and drink. She wanted pineapple juice and concentrated orange juice, along with sweet potatoes and apples. We gave her what she wanted and she quickly began to gain confidence and strength.

The bad news is when we lifted her we encountered a problem; the lift got stuck in the upper position. Immediately we began to brainstorm what to do if she was to lie down again that night since the lift would not be operational. I called my long-time friend Ted Collas, who is now the fire chief for Colorado Springs. He sent his Heavy Rescue Crew 17A over to help us think about the "what ifs." That crew is amazing. They are smart and professional, and one of them had even helped us a few years ago when our giraffe needed lifting. You know the old saying, "When you need a friend it is too late to make one." We now had a workable plan for the few days it would take the specialized crane repair company to fix our lift.

When we agreed to take on these older female elephants, we knew we'd need a specially-designed building to address these very challenges. Thanks to you, we have that facility. The exhibit you built has made the lives of our elephants better – and allows us to be prepared, professional and compassionate in all that we do.

With over 1,100 animals, including some that are very old, we know that behavior and health issues can be unpredictable despite the best training and care. And, of course, nothing will stop the end day when that time comes. But rest assured that with your

support and encouragement, our team will work together to solve every challenge in a way that will make you proud. Sharing only the stories about the easy stuff can make the animal world feel a lot like Disney. Sometimes a story turns out well and sometimes it doesn't. But the effort we give every day counts.

Warmly,

Bob

P.S.: The lift is fixed, we continue to train with Heavy Rescue 17, and Malika seems fine as of January 12. After viewing the overnight video footage it appears she literally fell asleep on her feet and fell over. Who knows why that happened, but our girls are getting older and I am sure there will be other close calls in the future. Today the story has a happy ending.