

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

August 25, 2017

Dear Friend,

I spend a lot of time thinking about the Zoo and our role in the world. I often wonder whether our mission is primarily about people or animals. Over time, we have come to believe deeply it is about both. Each is so intertwined they are inextricably linked. The Gordian knot symbolizes this for us; it was featured on the front of our campaign information booklet. The legend of the knot is tied to Alexander the Great. It is used as a metaphor to describe a knot that can never be untangled and would need to be cut to be untied.

Our mission is to make the world a better place for both people and animals. When we make life better for our animals, they make life better for people.

My daughter Milly worked for the Zoo this summer in our guest service department. She has grown up in the Zoo environment and understands our “We Believe” statements found in the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo Strategic Plan because she has seen me and other Zoo staff live them her entire life. So it did not surprise me when I received this email from a guest.

The email came with the name Camille in the subject line. My Milly has grown into a smart young woman who now goes by her formal name, Camille. She told the mother who wrote the email that if she put Camille in the subject line I would read it. She also told the mom I would love to hear this story and she was right. Milly leaves for college later this month and this letter is a tribute to her and every other employee for helping make the world a better place.

The mom begins by telling me that she met Camille at the carousel one morning at 9 am. She and her daughters were the first ones at the ride that day and had the place to themselves.

Her four-year-old daughter Grace has SPD – sensory processing disorder, in addition to speech apraxia. SPD basically means her brain is in a traffic jam and she cannot filter out unnecessary stimuli – sounds, touches, internal functions, etc. It is very similar to autism, but she is a social child and craves connection. The apraxia is a failure of the nerves to integrate with the muscles (jaw and tongue) needed for speech, which prevents Grace from ‘planning’ the movement needed to talk easily. The diagnosis has necessitated therapy for Grace since she was a toddler. But Grace has an amazing knowledge of and connection with animals ... particularly horses and zoo animals.

Her mom says, “Now we are military, so we move a lot – a hard thing for a normal child, let alone Grace. We first got a yearly family membership for the Kansas City Zoo last year. The zoo is where Grace is the most 'normal.' She was speaking two words at 3 years old when we got to Kansas, and after all the therapy and zoo trips, she is speaking in sentences. So it seemed natural to get a family membership here while we live at Fort Carson.

“Grace is in love with this zoo! She feeds giraffes as she has no fear of any animals. She learns the names of the animals (not just tiger, she knows 'chewy the tiger'). She is beyond calm, which is huge for a sensory deprived child. She seeks knowledge, and she retains all she learns. She is at home at the zoo – and for a child whose life always changes, this is huge. Her daddy deploys this week, and this will be a first for her and the second time for my daughter Addison. I'm sure we will be living at the zoo!

“I wanted to provide a spot of hope for all those days when things go wrong, or when people are underappreciated. Your daughter loved on my little Grace without knowing all of her issues. She cheered her on as she overcame her fear of riding the horse on the carousel.”

I was so struck by the fact that this mother, with all that was going on in her life, took the time to reach out to me. She was living our belief that people want to make a positive difference in the world. The thing is, she is right. When you have 780,000 visitors and 750 animals there are bound to be tough days. This story illustrates several of our “We Believe” statements and I think they are worth sharing with you. I would encourage you to read them because I am certain as a friend and supporter of the Zoo, you will recognize yourself in these statements. Thank you for all you do.

Warmly,

Bob Chastain
President & CEO

We Believe Statements

1. We believe we can make the world a better place, and the work we do and the way we treat people matters.
2. We believe our animals deserve the best home we can provide. We will not stop until every exhibit is built in such a way as to maximize the impact each animal has on our guests and their attitude toward the environment.
3. We believe people are the key to the future of wildlife and wild places. Engaging their hearts and minds with experiences is essential to the success of our conservation education messages. EVERY experience from gate to gate is crucial to our success.
4. We believe animals and their homes make the world and people better. We believe they are crucial to the health and happiness of our community and the Zoo is uniquely positioned to be a catalyst for a green, healthy, and vibrant community where people care for each other and the environment.
5. We believe in the value of families spending time together.
6. We believe in the power of an individual to effect change by connecting others with a compelling idea.
7. We believe we can foster a community that looks beyond itself and embraces things like philanthropy, the common good, and other ideas we believe are self-evident if people share a common vision for what the community should be.
8. We believe by sharing our passion for wildlife and wild places, our enthusiasm will be contagious.
9. We believe we can create a feeling of family by treating each guest, Zoo family member, and donor with respect, as if they personally possess a key to our desired future and we can unlock their potential.
10. We believe in a workplace where we live the behaviors we wish to see, creating our own reality one small decision at a time.