

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE PRESIDENT

October 31, 2016

Dear Friend,

I like to watch Ted Talks. They inspire me. I enjoyed a talk the other day about Billy Graham, who I've always been fascinated with. Graham has consistently appeared on Gallup Poll's Most Admired list every year since his debut on the list in 1955, more than any other individual in the world.

Although his experience with animal training is limited to behavior training of his long succession of family pets, Billy Graham fundamentally understands the method of training Cheyenne Mountain Zoo uses with its animals: Keep commands simple and change behavior one small approximation at a time.

Mr. Graham is not a faith healer, yet when I think about the power of healing by the laying on of hands, I think of him. I also think about Dr. Kim (her first name), a sports medicine veterinarian based in Utah who spends time in Alaska taking care of the dogs on the Iditarod – an amazing event involving hundreds of dogs and mushers traveling 1000 miles through the wild back country of this rugged state.

Dr. Liza (her first name), our head vet and now vice president of mission and programs, has a skill for finding the right people when our animals are in need of specialized help. For several years we have treated Lucky, our 36-year-old African elephant, for joint stiffness and mobility problems. Despite daily yoga and at times intense physical therapy, Lucky has fallen back into walking with a stiff or peg leg. In fact, during a recent observation we noted she was bending her leg only about 15 percent of the time.

And so it happened that Dr. Liza found Dr. Kim, who sometimes utilizes myofascial treatment for Alaskan mushing dogs. Myofascial release is an alternative therapy that treats skeletal muscle immobility and pain by relaxing contracted muscles, improving blood and lymphatic circulation, and stimulating the stretch reflex.

Dr. Liza invited Dr. Kim for a visit after they met at a Ferrier conference in Las Vegas where Dr. Liza was presenting on some of our great work on giraffe hoof care. After an initial observation period, Dr. Kim determined Lucky could benefit from a massage. Okay, I get that it's technically a myofascial treatment, but... it looked an awful lot like a massage; or more so it looked like the laying on of hands and healing that makes me think of Billy Graham. Only we weren't at a big tent revival, we were in the elephant barn.

As we distracted Lucky with food and treats, the faith healer/vet moved Lucky's thick, dry skin around with just her hands, breaking up the adhesions that had formed between the one-inch-thick skin and the muscle underneath. The whole thing took less than five minutes. I wasn't convinced.

Our dedicated staff, however, is up for just about anything that will help their animals. We have monthly EMC (Elephant Management and Care) meetings where detailed discussions are had about the physical and emotional well-being of each elephant. The amount of care and attention each elephant receives is remarkable. At the meeting immediately following Lucky's myofascial treatment we heard reports that Lucky was bending her knee more. Soon after that she was walking normally almost 100 percent of the time! Crazy!

One further story illustrates how far Dr. Liza is willing to go to care for our family. During the same “faith healing” treatment for Lucky, we tried one other crazy idea. Dr. Liza, who again is a magician when it comes to finding partners, got together with the amazing folks at CSU – in particular a researcher named Dr. Valerie (her first name). Dr. Valerie runs a lab where they grow stem cells. Together, they devised a plan to harvest stem cells from the blood of an elephant and inject them into Lucky’s knee area. To our knowledge this is the first time ever that this has been done on an elephant. We will never really know which of these two treatments made the most difference; both have so much promise.

I am always amazed at what our staff is able to accomplish at this small zoo in Colorado Springs. I am further amazed that we do it all without tax support.

The staff and the Board’s desire to be financially responsible, and the willingness of our donors to step up and support us with ongoing construction projects of new homes for our animals is astounding. Together we have completed over \$30 million of capital improvements in the last 10 years. In the next five years we should complete \$15 million more. There will be a new conservation area and a new EdVenture education space. New ADA restrooms and a brand new exhibit complex – complete with a new home for hippos and penguins. It’s a chance to have a baby hippo and baby penguins; a chance for the first time in over 20 years to see penguins in an outside exhibit.

There are many new, exciting things yet to come and your support makes it possible. Your support now is more critical than ever due to the competitive construction environment and the rapid evolution of people falling in love with these amazing animals. If you have ideas about how you can help, I’d welcome the conversation.

Warmly,

Bob

P.S. Remind me to share with you the training we are doing in preparation of an eye exam on another one of our elephants.