

## VOICE OF THE PEOPLE (LETTER)

Take responsibility and find Nicholas a home

Deborah Robinson

Published January 12, 2007

West Hartford, Conn. -- Jeff Long's story about Nicholas and Gypsy ("Giving away an elephant is as tough as it seems," Page 1, Jan. 5), elephants left with the Hawthorn Corp. for nearly a year now after their companions were confiscated, is emblematic of the problems of captive elephants in this country. Coming at a time when the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is ferociously defending its position that elephants belong in zoos and that they should be bred as much as possible, the zoos of this country are unwilling to provide a home for Nicholas because he is a bull.

The tuberculosis exposure should not be a real issue at this point, assuming that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been properly supervising the quarantine and testing. These elephants have been in quarantine for significantly more than the required year. Mike Keele, the Oregon zoo director, speaking on behalf of the AZA on other occasions, has acknowledged that the real impediment to finding Nicholas a home is that he is a bull.

What of all the other bull elephants being born under the AZA's vigorous breeding program? In the wild, they would stay with their herds until their teens, and then find other bachelor groups to move in and out of, returning to the matriarchal herds frequently. In zoos they are taken away from their mothers at about age 5, usually well before the possibility that they will become "unpredictable and aggressive"--and where will they go? Will they be left to languish, chained, in cold barns or perhaps sold off to foreign circuses or zoos, as is being threatened here?

It is more than time for the AZA to step up to the plate for Nicholas and to take some responsibility for the other elephants that are already here, instead of continuing to urge its member zoos to breed more that they will be unable to find homes for.

Gypsy has a fantastic home all ready for her at the Elephant Sanctuary. If Pat Derby is willing to provide sanctuary for Nicholas, and maybe for the other bulls who will be needing it in the not-too-distant future, then we all need to get behind that effort, and there should be significant financial assistance from the AZA.

The AZA and the USDA, which determined years ago that Hawthorn was not able to humanely care for its elephants, need to create a safe and comfortable home for Nicholas. These two organizations, one of which is charged by federal law to oversee the well-being of elephants in this country, have to stop waiting for Hawthorn to get around to taking care of this problem or for elephant advocates to take care of yet another crisis that the captive elephant industry has created.