

LETTER FROM MARILYN FACKLER-GRAY, FORMER KEEPER AT LOS ANGELES ZOO FOR 25 YEARS, TO CITY COUNCIL

Dear Council Person,

I am a retired animal keeper from the L.A. Zoo. In my career I volunteered, working in the elephant barn for about eight years.

Many keepers and myself went to the press, television and even Nate Holden's office to try to improve conditions at the zoo. Most of these people did nothing.

I want to thank you for paying attention to all of the people who spoke to you from both sides.

While working at the zoo I was appalled at some of the things I witnessed and experienced. When first starting in the elephant barn I worked with someone who thought nothing of abusing the elephants, both physically and mentally. The use of cattle prods or "hot shots" as they are sometimes referred, was not limited to battery operated ones but included ones that were made by this person to plug into an electrical outlet in the barn. I was told that this was necessary to control and have dominance over them. When questioned about this – that person had me removed from the barn.

Foot work was not done on a regular basis, hence cracks were not taken care of and foot infections ensued. Bathing and scrubbing were also only occasionally done and skin infections ensued.

There have been many changes in the elephant barn, but two seem to remain the same:

#1 – Footwork – Billy has very bad cracks in his toenails that run from the bottom clear through the cuticles. This leads to foot infections, and if not taken care of, to bone infections. This is one of the things that led to the death of Gita, and leads to the deaths of many zoo elephants.

#2 – Bullhooks or the ankus. These are referred to by our zoo administration as "pointers." The bull hook is used to intimidate, show dominance and control. Some people use this as a weapon. The AZA in their guidelines approves the use of bull hooks for zoos all over this country. If all that is needed is a pointer, why not a finger?

Our zoo also plans to breed the elephants that they buy in the future. There is a very big problem with that – once we have all the elephants that are planned, we then will have a space problem again and perhaps fifty percent of the babies born will be males. How are we going to find homes for them? Most zoos don't want them. Will they be sent to another country where we tried to send two of our previous males – both died, I might add, in those attempted moves. Or will they be sold to private owners. Once they are removed from our facility there is no way we can know how they are treated. Our zoo has a history up to now of having animals born here for which they cannot find homes. Ruby, the African elephant that is now in the sanctuary in San Andreas, Calif. was on the surplus list for many years and she is a female.

Our zoo has accepted elephants with TB from a private owner. Both of whom are now dead. Zebras with equine herpesvirus, Markhor with malignant catarrhal fever and Drills with Simian AIDS. These diseases are communicable to other animals and the fact that we accepted them and now have them in our collection is, in my opinion, indicative of something wrong with some of the decisions being made by management. The zoo does not always tell you everything – and they do try to hide things.

Elephants are herd animals and it is cruel to keep them alone or in small areas as they roam over huge areas of land. Males do join up with female herds to breed and sometimes just to hang out.

We are cruel to remove them from their family groups to bring them to zoos to live in isolation. We sometimes “cull” the herds and kill the adult females while the babies scream and crawl over the bodies of their mothers, aunties and sisters. Then these babies are shipped off to zoos and circuses to live in artificial environments and to finally die painful deaths – TB, arthritis, bone infections. Always a shortened life span. Is it fair to keep them in zoos where we view them as they pace and rock for “comfort.”

You have a very important decision to make. A great opportunity really, that will be your legacy. Let it be you will be remembered as the council who did the right thing for one of the animals at the zoo, Billy the elephant.

Let’s move him to a sanctuary where he can live his life as it should be. Wandering freely on a big tract of land. Playing in a stream. Sleeping on soft ground. He deserves that, don’t you think?

Some of my old friends at the zoo ask me “why am I not on the zoo’s side?” I answer, “because I am on the side of the animals.”

There are many, many more things I could tell you about other areas of the zoo, but I wanted to relate to you a few things about elephants.

If you wish to call me, I would be glad to talk to each and every one of you. Feel free to call.

There are other former keepers who would be eager to talk to anyone who calls – I can give you their numbers.

**DO THE RIGHT THING.
SEND BILLY TO A SANCTUARY.**

Thank you,
Marilyn Fackler-Gray