

Anniversary Editorial: 25 Years of Zoo Outreach Organisation & ZOOS' PRINT

Learning about Zoos the Greyhound Bus Way

Reading Susan Chan's very generous "Your Turn" feature in this issue, brought back many memories of my first years in Indian zoos, including a couple of unasked for "vacations" from India during which I toured the zoos of USA by Greyhound bus. For those of you not familiar with America, Greyhound bus is kind of a low class way to travel, although in those days plenty of respectable middle class folks used Greyhound.

I had no money to speak of that could buy air tickets as I was saving for another ticket to India, and flights didn't always go to the cities I wanted to go. My routes were determined entirely by zoos. If a city had a zoo and it was anything worth seeing (or sometimes not), I went there. That is 30 years ago when you could still get a 3 month pass of virtually unlimited travel for \$99.00. It really was unlimited ... you could go from New York to Los Angeles two dozen times if you wanted, as long as your three month pass was still valid.

There was another advantage of taking Greyhound. You didn't have to stay overnight at a hotel which cost more money than I had. You could spend the night riding the bus and sometimes you would arrive at your intended destination appropriately in the morning. Also, in those days, it was safe. Then you never heard of anyone getting kidnapped or killed on a Greyhound bus. You might get your wallet pinched if you weren't careful and once I saw a young boy vomit over his seat right onto a unsuspecting male passenger's head and shoulders. I think that man might have preferred death at that particular moment. We passengers though of death also (to the sick kid) because we had to ride for hours with that horrible sour smell. We survived and the boy and man also, a true testimony to the nobility and patience of the human spirit.

When I reached a city that had a zoo, I usually had a contact lined up who would come and get me. Often this was a zookeeper, a member of AAZK, the American Association of Zoo Keepers who was tasked with picking me up, feeding me, showing me the zoo and sometime keeping me overnight. A few directors took this on as well to their credit. Sometimes an AAZK chapter or the zoo director or curator was interested in putting me on a programme to give talk about Indian zoos and what I was doing over there. I enjoyed that and when I finished, there were usually lot of questions as the zoo scenario was very different across the black water.

I took many photos of all the zoos I visited include their holding facilities, squeeze cages, education department, surgical rooms, interactive exhibits, etc. which I used in India to show what the more progressive zoos were doing and to give the Indian zoo personnel some ideas. In fact there were a number

of things about Indian zoos that were better ... many were of a far greater size than many otherwise excellent American zoos, which gave some of the animals more space (sometimes) and fresh air. Often I managed to get a chapter of AAZK to adopt a zookeeper in India and make him a member of their Society. This was not ideal because most of the zookeepers could not read English or even their own native tongue, so we changed that to sponsoring a more senior person who didn't mind being a member of a zookeeper organisation.

The AAZK's Animal Keeper's Forum was a virtual treasure trove of practical articles on almost any topic. As you will learn when you read Susan Chan's article, the AAZK were totally generous with their materials and permitted me to reprint anything I wanted. I used these articles in ZOO ZEN to highlight a particular topic like safety, or certain species, enrichment, etc.

I crossed the North American continent on a Greyhound bus about four times in two trips to USA back then. My visits were not actually my choice but determined by the generosity or lack of it of the various visa authorities. If I got extensions of my India visa I could stay; if not, it was a trip to USA for me. Looking back, it was a good thing, because I learned so much about zoo management as all aspects during those visits, which I would never have undertaken unless forced. I covered at least 60 zoos and probably more during those two trips.

On these visits I met the people who ran the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group which later became one of ZOO's major undertakings, to host a CBSG India and then CBSG South Asia Network. I knew nothing about CBSG until I hit Minneapolis to see the zoo. I think Dr. Tom Foose met me at the bus station. He was a brilliant but wacky guy who truly appreciated someone (me) who visited zoos while "residing" on a Greyhound bus and carried a toy penguin. I carried this penguin to hold as an identifier when someone I didn't know came to meet me. I think Peter Karsten who was Director of Calgary Zoo then was the first to encounter this unique way of stepping up. He questioned it: 'why are you carrying that penguin?' I said 'who but the person you came to meet would hold a penguin in front of the Greyhound bus station?' He managed to tell everybody about this crazy lady and I remember well after that everyone who met me would come up to me laughing. Especially Tom Foose and maybe Nate Flessness. Nate was Head of ISIS and I wanted even in those primitive times (30 years ago) that Indian zoos should be members of ISIS.

Nate worked with me on this and at one time there were 30 member zoos in India but people got transferred and the next one wasn't interested. Now at least ISIS is established in a some of our better zoos thanks to the Central Zoo Authority.

Nate and Tom took me to meet Dr. U. S. Seal who was interested in India as he had taught capture methods there earlier. He asked me what I was doing and I launched into it all ... ZOOS' PRINT, ZOO ZEN, training, etc., till he said "whoa!". I think it was the first time someone managed to talk more in a conversation with Ulie Seal than he did himself. We became good friends however and I stay with Ulie and his wife Marialice then and later when I visited Minneapolis. I met a number of people in Minneapolis that remain dear friends, such as Fred Swengel who is the kind of friend that even if you don't talk for years, you just pick up right where you left off.

I also visited Bob Wagner who was the long time director of the American Zoo Association or then called the American Associations of Zoos and Parks and is now called The Zoo and Aquarium Association. I attended their conferences a few times but with my raggedey appearance and questionable status, found it kind of hard going. Next week I am to attend another conference of AZA and am wondering how to find appropriate clothing for this event.

Even in those days I was interested in the zoos in other countries in Asia (always Asian zoos, but not always Indian). I was worried about my visa situation ... those were the days of the "foreign hand" and people were really suspicious of Americans, even American zoo girls. I came up with a plan for a Zoo Outreach Organisation, International and even got it registered in my home state. I thought if I couldn't return to India I could perhaps help from a distance or get involved in other countries. That was one reason why I went to see Peter Karsten in Calgary Zoo, Canada. Peter was Chair of the IUDZG's International Zoo Liaison Committee. I thought he would be pleased and help out in some way. He and Bob were not at all pleased as they had their own plans and didn't relish a zoo NGO partner. I realised it was harder than I had imagined and dropped the idea. I could pick it up about 25 years later by starting SAZARC, which has been a pleasure (most of the time).

As Susan mentioned, after serving on Central Zoo Authority for some years, I turned all my attention to the other South Asian zoos. Now ZOO is working with those countries to pass legislation for regulation and control of their zoos.

ZOO gained a lot from foreign countries which I continued to visit and learn from. We have been helped out by too many to name but I have a soft spot for the zookeeper organisations throughout the world. And as for Greyhound busses, I haven't got on one since! **Sally Walker**

Insider Perspective Geetha*

Zoo Outreach Organisation has completed 25 years of service and celebrated its Silver Jubilee very recently. In the 25 years of ZOO's history, I am part of this ZOO family for 15 years and worked in two terms. I joined in this distinctive and prestigious organization in 1993 and worked up to 1995 in the first term. One of our colleagues Mr. Marimuthu introduced me to Madam Sally Walker, who was a close friend of my father during that time. Initially, I joined as Office Assistant and my jobs were looking after incoming/outgoing mail entries, data entry for Zoo's Print/Zoo Zen articles, photocopying, helping ZP/ZZ dispatch etc., Through this, I gained good communication skills and learned computer software such as PageMaker and others while working for ZP articles with the help of my colleague Latha.

In 1995, I had to quit ZOO for my personal reasons. But I was yearning for a chance to work again to our organization. As I expected, after 2 years in 1997, I had a good opportunity to rejoin, without any hesitation I joined again. Since then, for the last 13 years I have been working in my second term forever. In the second time, my nature of work has been changed exclusively and it is different from the previous period. Now, I am working full time under Latha in accounts and administration work and I learned accounts and all types of administration works from then. If you look at any other organizations, staff are allowed to do only the work assigned to them. But our organization is so different in this aspect, here we are allowed to work on different kinds of work related to projects and gained enormous amount of experience. So we could learn new things from time to time and have a confidence we can do any kind of work.

Our ZOO is like a small family and we are all working as a team. I have a high regard for Madam Sally Walker for her passion on wild animals, dedication, activeness and sincerity to the work she is involved. She is always very kind, caring and concerned about our ZOO staff welfare. I learned so many good things from her. I take this opportunity and personally thank our Madam Sally for giving me wonderful opportunity to work with ZOO for second time.

As well, I would like to thank my colleagues Sanjay, Latha, Radhika, Daniel, Marimuthu, Pravin, Manju, Ravi, Arul, Raveendran and Sarojamma who all helped me directly or indirectly for my career development. My special thanks goes to Latha, who taught me all the works whether it is account or administration and moulded me in a better way by developing my skills in this organization. My desire is I have to work with ZOO, when it celebrates Golden Jubilee.

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