

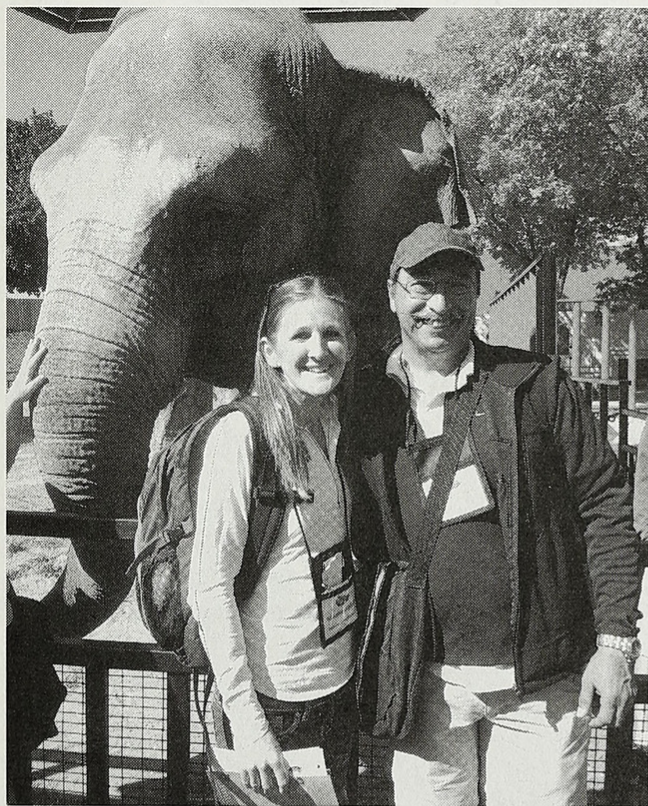
AAZK Conferences, Fostering the Wonder Within

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Once a year I pack my bag and head to what I know will be an amazing week of learning, educating, networking, and inspiring. I travel to the AAZK conference.

For those of you whom have been lucky enough to attend conference that is enough said, for once you have lived and breathed a conference, you will never forget it. For those of you whom have not yet attended, well what are you waiting for? This paper in no way is meant to be a sales pitch; I gain no monetary value from you attending. However, I would gain new peer relationships, knowledge and potentially lifelong friends.

I have been attending conferences since Galveston hosted in 2007. As a newcomer I felt a little overwhelmed and intimidated. I didn't quite know what to expect. I arrived and was quickly surrounded by about 200 of my peers. For some it was their first time and for others it was a reunion of friends. Throughout the week I attended paper sessions and workshops and gained a wealth of knowledge. This was what I expected a conference to be, an education. What I didn't expect was the newfound motivation and passion I had for my profession.



AAZK Professional Development Committee Chair Melaina Wallace and AAZK National President Bob Cisneros enjoying Zoo Day at Rosamund Gifford Zoo in Syracuse, NY during the 2012 AAZK National Conference.

I have wanted to be a zoo keeper since third grade, so I set my goal, I finished my college education and became an intern. I worked my way up into a full time position and along the way my passion for the animals and for this great profession never died, so I was surprised to find the conference bringing me even more motivation to grow. I was in a room with 200 other zoo keepers and we all had one goal, to provide animals with the best care possible.

During the day we listened to paper presentations and learned of new and inventive ways to train, enrich and care for our animals. At night we were able to network and have casual discussions about ourselves, our animals, our frustrations, our hopes, and our dreams.

AAZK conferences are evolving and more hands-on workshops are being provided. This year alone 20 workshops were provided including animal husbandry, conservation, training, leadership skills and conflict management, practical applications of darting, quarantine protocols, and zoonotic diseases just to name a few. You can't come to a conference and not learn, it's amazing. I love furthering my



Curby Simerson, Associate Curator at San Diego Zoo and Carolin Novosel Jung, Animal Keeper at Brookfield Zoo, participating in the Hoof Trim Workshop at the 2011 AAZK National Conference in San Diego, CA.

knowledge and knowing that I can always grow as a zoo keeper.

The education I receive at a conference is invaluable, but the relationships built with my peers are also priceless. While at my first conference I met a man by the name of Bob Cisneros. He presented a paper called "Keeper Workshops and Commitment to Conservation: Helping to Transform a Job into a Profession." At the time Bob was a stranger to me, but I looked at him and said "that man is going places and I want to work alongside him." Bob is now the AAZK President and I have worked with him on the Professional Development Committee for the last 4 years. He has inspired me to grow in this profession to heights I didn't even know I could reach. This year Oliver (Ollie) Claffey presented a paper called "Thirty Eight Years of Crap: A Retrospective Look at Zoo Keeping Since 1974." Ollie began his talk by singing the song he wrote called Zoo Keeper Blues (YouTube it if you haven't had the pleasure of seeing Ollie live). Ollie talked about his 38 years in the profession and mentioned how, like many of us I'm sure, he at a point considered leaving the profession. Ollie didn't leave because he was "born to be a zoo keeper." As soon as he said it I knew exactly what he meant, zoo keeping is in my blood. By the end of his



The AAZK Professional Development Committee at the 2012 AAZK National Conference in Syracuse, NY.

presentation Ollie had many of us in tears. Several in the room spoke of Ollie being the first person they met at their first conference and how his warm inviting greeting made them feel at home.

That's what the AAZK conference is all about. We come together each year, we learn, we educate, we inspire and we get inspired. We all have our bad work days no matter where we work and we feel tired, defeated, underappreciated and run down, but we continue on for the animals we love. An AAZK conference is a rejuvenator. Each year I come home with a new sense of appreciation for this great profession. I am motivated and awe-inspired. I have reconnected with friends and meet new ones along the way, and with any luck I have inspired at least one person the way Bob and Ollie have inspired so many.

Bob posed the question on opening day this year "How many of you are at the conference for the first time?" and at least half the room raised their hand. I hope you will be one of them next year and if you are, please take the time to say hello. Bob ended his talk with "my name is Bob Cisneros and I make a profound impact on my profession" and he does. Thank you, Bob. I hope each of you can proudly say the same. My name is Melaina Wallace and I make a profound impact on my profession.

Acknowledgements

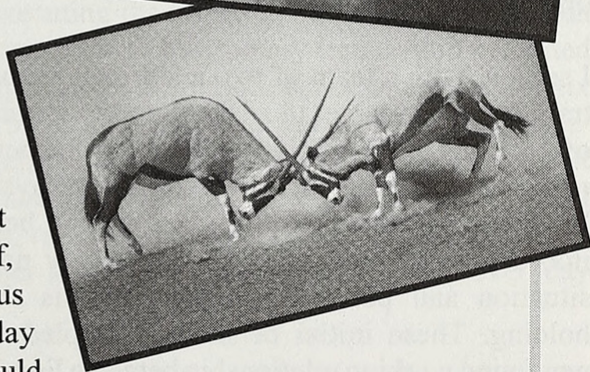
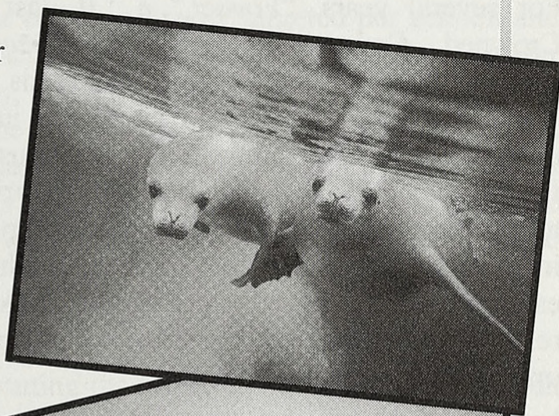
I want to thank Bob Cisneros for fostering the wonder within me and inspiring me to be a better zoo keeper. I am proud to have you as my peer and friend. Thank you to all of you who attend conferences. You are leading the way in this profession and each and every one of you have proven to be dedicated zoo keepers and that alone is inspiring. Thank you to the host Chapters. All of your hard work does not go unnoticed and because of you we are able to come together each year and be inspired. Finally, thank you to Katherine Leighty, Research Manager and Jill Mellen, Education and Science Director Disney's Animal Kingdom® for editing this paper.

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Subjects for the photos should revolve around animal husbandry, conservation, education/interpretation, professional development, significant achievements in the industry (births, exhibits, staff, etc.), and can also include some of the more humorous or unique situations that we all come across each day in our occupations. Captions for each photo should also be submitted.





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