

Cage of innocence

Zookeepers are passionate about education and conservation

BY KATY DAVIDSON

don't really like zoos.

As a staunch vegetarian and an advocate for a wild and free earth, I have boycotted the Oregon Zoo for the five years I have lived in Portland. Even as a girl growing up in the desert near Phoenix, I seldom entered the city zoo's gates, preferring instead to commune with the array of weird creatures found right outside my front door.

However, two weeks ago, I swallowed my reluctance and set off to the Oregon Zoo to meet two lesbian zookeepers and visit the newly erected Steller Cove, a cutting-edge exhibit that simulates a Northwest coastal habitat. Steller Cove is unique because most exhibits like it are built on the coast, not as far inland as Portland.

The habitat, which cost a cool \$12 million to create, is named for the two large Steller sea lions that now frolic in gallons upon gallons of fake ocean water. (In a large filtration room, machines recycle water, then mix the fresh water with a product called "Instant Ocean" and run it back in to the animals' tanks.)

Because of the tremendous amount of money and effort required to bring the project to life, some zookeepers originally resisted Steller Cove. However, as construction began, they decided if the structure was to go ahead, they might as well have some say in its design. Pushing aside my views on captivity, I found the exhibit to be fairly fascinating.

Zoo visitors are able to watch as the two enormous sea lions, Stella and Julius, glide gracefully through their tank. From the viewing area above, the animals look like slick brown bowling pins. From behind the huge window in

So that's how JoEllen Marshall (left) and Melissa Arnold bring the ocean to Portland

an underwater grotto, I'm able to catch a more personal glimpse of the sea lions; they look like wise, stoic, oversized dogs with flippers.

"I moved to Oregon because of the sea lions," says JoEllen Marshall, one of the current overseers of Steller Cove.

Marshall didn't set out to become a zookeeper right away. She got her undergraduate degree in Asian studies, then became a high school teacher. From there, she began teaching sign language to a group of 40 chimpanzees, then went back to school to study zoology.

Although Steller Cove only has been around for a month and a half, Marshall already looks at home in the facility. As I follow her through the behind-the-scenes area, she shows me the kitchen, where a daily delivery of fresh herring, mackerel, squid and clams is stored for the sea lions. She holds up a self-

explanatory "fish-cicle," one of the sea lions' favorite treats.

Next, we enter the quarantine area, a humid room with several aquariums full of sea life. Marshall explains that all the newly arrived creatures must live in this room before entering the permanent tanks, ensuring diseases don't spread among the animals on display.

"My favorite are the Grunts," Marshall explains, fondly pointing out a tank full of small, lopsided creatures. "They're all head and no body."

After leaving the quarantine room, these smaller animals move to either a simulated tide pool or a kelp forest.

To me, the most surprising element of Steller Cove is the extensiveness of its educational display, where visitors may examine laboratory information, interact with a CD-ROM and learn more about the endangerment of the sea lions.

Later, I meet with zookeeper Melissa Arnold, who defends the zoo's position as a tool in society. "Zoos don't go out and catch animals in the wild—they're bred in captivity," she says. "The zoo's position is education."

I listen carefully. She highlights the zoo's extensive conservation efforts and says people can visit animals in the zoo, learn about their endan-

germent in the wild, then take steps to preserve them. "These animals are the ambassadors to their wild cousins," she says.

Unlike Marshall, Arnold knew she wanted to work with animals since she was a child growing up on a farm in New Hampshire. She graduated with a zoology degree and first was turned on to sea life—namely penguins—when she worked at Sea World in San Diego.

Arnold, who moved to Portland 10 years ago, now is a roving zookeeper specializing in carnivores such as polar bears, leopards and wolves.

One particular carnivore recently reminded her how strong the bond between humans and animals can be. Arnold, who admits she is drawn to unique animals, spent the past several years cultivating a friendly relationship with a Siberian tiger named Czar.

She used to schmooze with him by telling him to "get his log"—to scratch it. She thinks he reacted positively to her presence because he originally was raised by a woman and was soothed by a softer voice and touch.

Last fall, Czar was diagnosed with cancer, a disease most wild tigers don't get because they don't live as long as those in captivity. He underwent four chemotherapy treatments for pain management at a local hospital, but he began to eat less and less because of a tumor on the roof of his mouth.

As Czar's conditioned worsened, he eventually only allowed two zookeepers to feed him: Arnold and Diana Bratton. "He chose who he wanted to have working with him," she says.

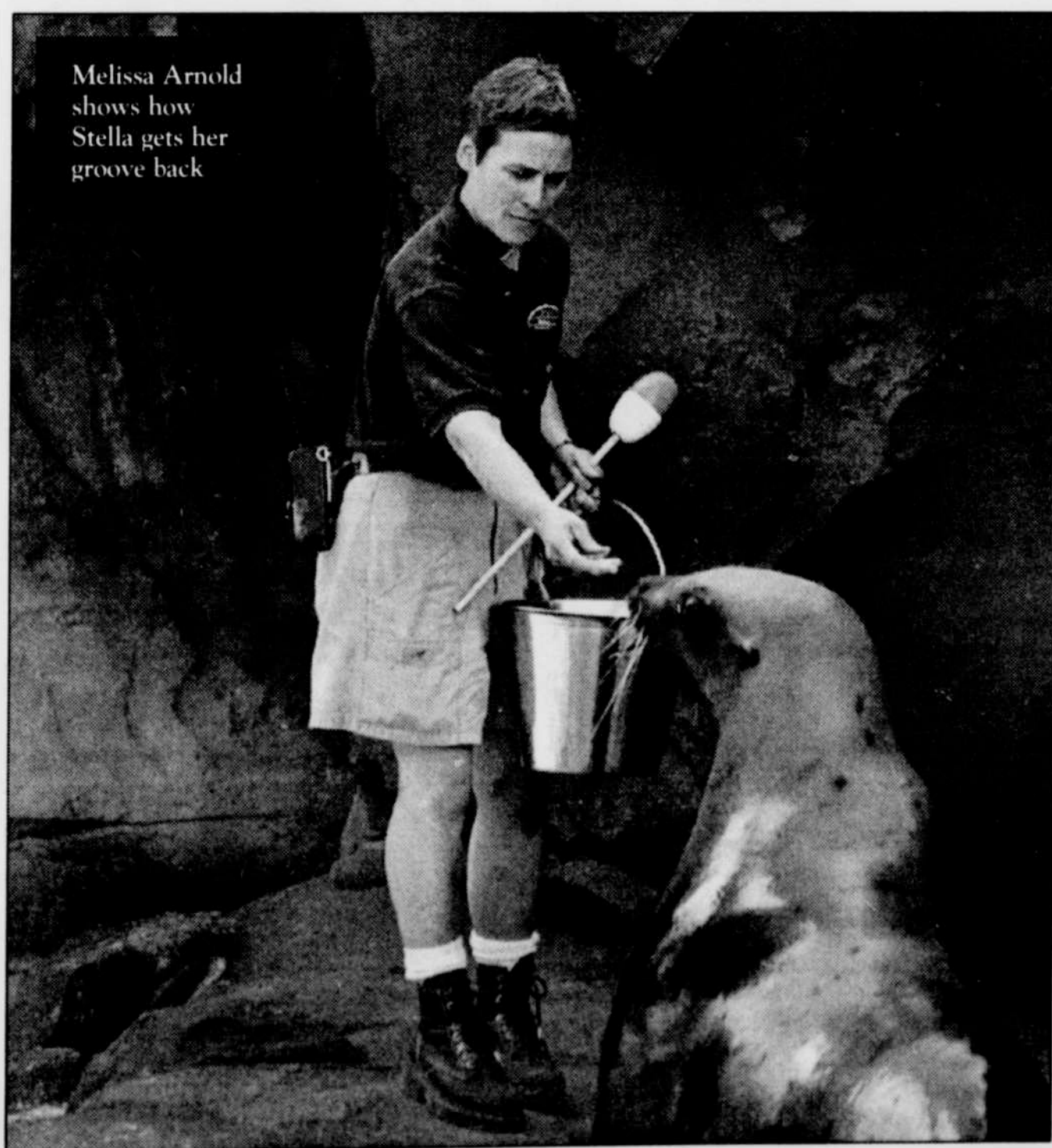
Czar was euthanized in early August. Almost a month later, Arnold still gets choked up when she mentions him. She shows me the viewing area where zoo visitors have written special notes to Czar on slips of paper and attached them to tree branches.

Arnold's note is the only one that hangs inside the cage. It reads, "Get your log... Good boy! Thanks for all the schmoozin'." □

Animal Instincts



Melissa Arnold shows how Stella gets her groove back



Creature comforts

Longtime activist resents the oppression of animals

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Don't tell a 69-year-old gay man he doesn't know about oppression.

Roger Troen, as usual, is on a mission to do the world some greater good, and it's not necessarily for the sake of his fellow gays—it's for animals.

Troen, who started out as a gay activist in Portland during the 1970s, now publishes a quarterly political newsletter called *The PDX Animal Advocate*. The most recent edition includes information about the mistreatment of captive elephants, several arguments against meat- and dairy-based diets, updates on protest whereabouts and a hopeful poem titled "The Captive's Dream."

To Troen, the link between the oppression

of gays and the oppression of animals is obvious. That's why he also is trying to make some changes at the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland.

Troen attends the church regularly and always has been inspired by its philosophy of openness. "The words they speak at that church are so wonderful and inclusive," he says, "but they don't include animals."

Every Sunday, for example, the congregation lights a wellness and liberation candle for people who have overcome struggle in their lives, then the Rev. Roy Cole invites everyone to say some words on the subject. When Troen gets the

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