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There is a hard truth among animal lovers. Animals generally do not live as long as humans do. It is an unpleasant fact. No matter how much we try, medical breakthroughs cannot stop the inevitable. In the zoo field, we put ourselves through the hardship of loss repeatedly. Even with time, these losses never get easy. Oftentimes I hear about how we spend more time with the people we work with than we do at home. For zoo staff, this is also true regarding the animals we care for. These animals are family to our staff.

Recently we all lost a zoo favorite, Daisy. Daisy was one of the spider monkey pair living under our care. Daisy was lucky to call Garden City her home for over three decades. When I moved to Garden City in 2009, Daisy was one of the animals under my care as an animal care staff member. Eventually, I shifted to the education division, but I still was able to see Daisy every day. I would whistle to her every time I passed, and she would call out to me and other zoo staff whenever she spotted one of us. Each year Daisy was getting older, and she was not a spring chicken (or monkey in this case) when I first arrived. Every year that passed, I would prepare myself, mentally knowing that the inevitable was always getting closer.

I remember clearly talking with the lead animal caretaker for Daisy's section. Daisy's appetite was decreasing and she was not as active as usual. The animal care staff, with the veterinarian, made the call to do a full physical, which would require sedating her. The examination confirmed our fear; she had an object in her abdomen. Daisy had something similar twice before. Both times the object, termed a bezoar, had to be removed surgically. As things were passing through Daisy's intestines, something became stuck. Once that was stuck, more material would stick creating a snowball effect. Each time she went through the surgery I remember being fearful of the risks that go with any procedure. This last time was no exception, but like the times before, surgery was the only option. I received positive reports from the animal care staff and was hopeful she would pull through one more time. Then another day passed by and unfortunately things took a turn for the worse. Daisy had lived a long and pleasant life; I know this for a fact. And like other animals that I worked with before that fell to the inevitable, I focus on that fact to ease the grief. We focus on the animals still in our care, and we push through. We learn what we can from the event and remember the animals in our own way.

There are a multitude of rituals that zoo staff use to help them through the grieving process. Some go out and acquire tattoos to commemorate the life that touched them, and some just curl up with a bucket of ice cream for a night or two. But the thing that is done by all zoo staff is continuing the push for conservation. If we don't continue to strive to save the rest of these wonderful animals, then enduring the pain is for nothing. So, for Daisy, I would like to discuss deforestation and how it affects spider monkeys.

Deforestation is just like it sounds; the destruction or removal of forest. Habitat loss such as deforestation is the number one cause of species extinction right now. Habitat destruction occurs for a multitude of reasons: new homes, roadways, mining resources, to create farmland, etc. Spider monkeys are arboreal (live in the branches of trees) and all of their adaptations help them up in the trees. When people cut down trees, it directly affects the monkey's ability to survive. There is less food and it becomes harder for them to avoid predators.

But how can we help? The primary reason these areas are being affected is to get resources to make a lot of the things we use every day. This is why it is so important that we use resources efficiently. Our culture has become too accustomed to disposable items in just a matter of decades. We now take for granted objects such as disposable cups and straws. We need to pull back from the mentality of "throw away and replace" that plastic created. Reducing the amount we use, reusing what we can, and recycling the products that can be recycled goes a long way to maintaining habitat. However, do not stop at just upholding the three R's when you can, use the power of the dollar and purchase items that are labeled as Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, or Shade Grown. These items are harvested with sustainable methods. This means that the forests can flourish alongside the farms, and while being harvested for resources. Daisy touched the lives of many here in Garden City, let us honor her memory.