

January 27, 2009

To the Mayor and City Council of Los Angeles:

On Wednesday 21st January 2009, I traveled to Los Angeles to speak out for Billy, the solitary elephant in the Los Angeles Zoo. Together with Councilman Cardenas, actress and campaigner Lily Tomlin, Gary Kaskel (on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States' 10 million supporters) and a number of dedicated activists, we briefed members of the press about the possible futures in store for Billy.

Option one is for him to spend his remaining years in a \$42 million white elephant, the 3.5 acre Pachyderm Forest that zoo authorities hope will turn around their abysmal record on keeping elephants.

Option 2 would see Billy removed from the LA Zoo and delivered safely to the PAWS Elephant Sanctuary in San Andreas, California. There he can enjoy the rest of his life in a 20 acre environment, associating with other elephants in a facility that, along with The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, sets the gold standard for the care of captive elephants already in the USA.

Having observed elephants in the wild for 25 years, protected elephants, relocated elephants, transported elephants – even released elephants - there is no doubt in my mind which option best serves Billy's needs. Without question Born Free USA believes he should join the dedicated and expert team at PAWS.

There is also no doubt in my mind that, in the long-term, such a move is best for the people of Los Angeles. They will no longer have to witness the dreadful elephant house that blights their zoo. Nor will they have to observe the painfully repetitive behavior that is the outward manifestation of Billy's inner torment. Nor, indeed, will they see the old deeply inadequate elephant facility replaced by a new *and still inadequate* elephant facility – disingenuously described as the Pachyderm Forest but, in reality, just another, expensive, gilded cage.

Finally, I do not doubt that moving Billy to PAWS will be good for the L A Zoo itself. Such a move will demonstrate that the mental chains that have bound the zoo to concepts from the past may, at last, be breaking. Freedom of thought, the ability to see clearly what is best is a wonderful liberation. The zoo can then redirect the huge resources at its disposal (twice the annual budget that the Kenya Wildlife Service spends on conserving and protecting 6,000,000 acres of Parks and Reserves - and 33,000 wild elephants - found in that East African nation) towards redesigning and improving enclosures – such as the jaguar's – that, frankly, would be deemed shameful in many a developing country zoo.

Our new President told us that we will have to 'do things differently'. We can cling to the old ways or we can embrace the new. I urge the Los Angeles City Council to make that change not just because it's right for Billy or for the City or for the Zoo but because it is fundamentally the right thing to do.

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