

Bill Rea ? Not sold on moving elephants

I have always been an animal lover.

A lot of people would have watched the Tarzan TV series of the 1960s to see the action from a Lord of the Jungle who spoke like a doctoral candidate from Harvard. I watched it to see all the interesting animals from Africa.

As a kid, and even into my youth, I used to enjoy watching The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau, and even Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom for much the same reason (I was able to put up with the whiney voice of Marlin Perkins, describing all the dangerous things his colleagues were doing with the animals).

Many of us chose what, if anything, appears on the desktop screens of our computers. The screen of my computer at work contains a picture of a rhinoceros. The picture was taken by me from the driver's seat of my car almost exactly nine years ago (it was the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, 2004) during my first and (so far) only trip to African Lion Safari.

There are other examples. I fully approve of people fishing. I used to do it a lot as a kid. I haven't done so in more than 20 years, and I'm not likely to ever start again. I have come to a personal realization that I cannot in good conscience make sport out of forcing a fellow creature to fight for its life, no matter what that creature might be. Call me a ?wuss? if you want to. I've been called much worse.

All that being said, I'm having a hard time understanding why there was such a big fuss last week when it came to moving a couple of elephants from the zoo in Toronto to some establishment in California. Although it is a fact that this whole issue has been beyond me from the get-go.

As near as I can tell, much of this move has been inspired and supported by Bob Barker. Granted the man has been highly successful as a game show host (it's a pretty safe bet he made more an hour than I do), but I'm not aware of his professional qualifications regarding the well-being of elephants.

It's also pretty clear to me that the bulk of this issue is being driven by politics ? municipal politics. Since we're talking about an issue in Toronto, we're making a very serious mistake if we're trying to make sense of it all.

I spent five-and-a-half years of the one life God is going to grant me editing newspapers in that Megacity that Mike Harris created (against the will of the people living there, I might add). I spent many hours in the media gallery in various council chambers, watching the idiocy that went on in the political field. And I learned the idiocy was contagious. The jokers I saw in the gallery weren't much better.

There are people who have criticized me over the years for the size of the papers I have worked for in my life. They charge the fact I have never worked for a major daily is a sign of my competence, or lack thereof. I consider it a sign of my luck, or abundance thereof.

If it happens in Toronto, there's going to be a certain amount of nonsense attached to it. Think of how many times and in what fashion the name of Rob Ford ends up in the news these days.

It seems it was a gang of municipal politicians who got the idea of getting the elephants out of town. And I have been listening to a lot of talk radio over the last couple of days. There have been plenty of suggestions (granted, somewhat light when it comes to authentication) that the input of veterinarians and people with some zoological experience has been stricken from certain political agendas.

I have to wonder if the people calling the shots on this issue care a fig about the welfare of these elephants, or are just using them as political pawns (very large political pawns, to be sure).

And someone is going to have to explain to me exactly what the problem is with having elephants in the Toronto zoo.

Granted, this is not their natural environment. As well, I agree that captivity is not the greatest situation for any being.

On the other hand there is a certain amount of safety involved here. I have never heard of a poacher going into a zoo and killing an elephant for the ivory in its tusks. And are not our pets kept in a form of captivity? My wife and I share our home with a cat. We adopted Sidney nine years ago from the municipal pound in the city in which we were living at the time. Not all the animals in such a pound get adopted, and I sometimes wonder what happens to the cats that are not. And while we're on the subject of captivity, Sidney has never made any attempt to get out of our house. Since we're pretty sure she was mistreated before she landed in our lives, we're of the opinion that Sidney currently has the best deal she's ever had.

When it comes to captivity, Sidney is owed no apologies from us.

And to my mind, there is nothing shameful about a zoo. If the facility is run well, the animals within are safe, secure and treated with consideration. They also offer the chance to see animals up close that people would normally only be able to see on TV.

The zoo in Toronto opened not long after I started high school. Yet I was well into my 30s before I went there for the first time.

Some friends had organized a trip, and it turned out one woman in the group who I didn't know very well had found a connection with one of the movers and shakers at the zoo. The result was we got in for free and enjoyed a few other breaks. It was a long day, and several in our group dropped out and went home. Thus, by the end, our group had been reduced to the point that the aforementioned connection could take us on a back-scenes tour of the zoo.

I got to pet some of the elephants, including probably critters that are heading for California as I write this. I also got to feed carrots and apples to a hippopotamus ? it even spat up in my hand (I defy anyone reading this to look me in the eye and tell me they have had a hippo goober on them).

It was a wonderful day, and the elephants were a part of it.

Would someone please explain to me how shipping these beautiful creatures to California is advantageou

