



Death a Coincidence?

It was sad to read about the long slow deterioration and death of Jake the orangutan in his Jungle Island pen (“[Cagey Business](#),” April 2018). As Francisco Alvarado and Erik Bojnansky reported, the powers that be may have deemed his death something to hush up, but they misjudge the public’s affection and sympathy for Jake and other animals held captive for display and profit.

Jake reportedly suffered from a respiratory infection, something to which great apes in captivity are especially prone, according to the expert in the article not affiliated with the park. So question: Did the park take steps to protect the animals from the ongoing construction dust? Look at the timing. Construction began last fall. Jake began to show symptoms last fall. Coincidence?

Also, why didn’t the staff call in orangutan specialists as Jake grew sicker by the week? None of the staff, and not even park veterinarian Jason Chatfield’s veterinarian sister (if one goes by her online research topics) appears to be orangutan experts. Yet there does exist the Orangutan Conservancy Veterinary Advisory Group with several U.S. locations. No mention of it having been notified and asked for counsel.

Allyson Ware
Tallahassee

HUD for Hippopotamus -- Of Course!

Excellent reporting by Francisco Alvarado and Erik Bojnansky in “Cagey Business.” Nice to learn something about the early days of Miami’s exotic animal displays. Pretty creepy.

These Barnums of the Beasts remind me of the [Karen Russell] novel *Swamplandia* a bit, though without the mysterious Everglades.

And there was even a suspicious deal with Jungle Island that would have made Donald Trump proud: How’d they manage to get a \$25 million loan from the Department of Housing and Urban Development? For housing animals? Get outta here.

Jonathan Talbott
Wynwood

Not So Captivated

Does anyone else notice the paradox of Jungle Island hanging onto most of its animals while rebranding itself as an “adventure” park jammed with mega trampolines, aerial rope courses, a skydiving wind tunnel, camp fireworks, and other jarring visual and noise “adventure byproducts” that may stress those animals?

Dr. Bernard Levine, who used to run an exotic animal breeding facility, says in the “Cagey Business” article that he understands the argument that wild animals fare better in the wild. Yet he justifies exotic animal enterprises with the argument that seeing the animals up close -- unlike on television or film -- triggers awareness and empathy for the creatures. He even suggests that if SeaWorld had existed a century ago, it could have ended whaling. Really?

Whaling was never about trophy hunting (except maybe in *Moby Dick*), and the zoo experience

hasn't brought an end to whale hunting or any other kind of hunting. In fact, don't some zoos and exotic breeders still sell their "surplus" to domestic "safari hunts" like those hunt lodges in Texas?

It was a pointed film, *Blackfish*, that actually put SeaWorld on notice. And other films' "Bambi effect" have brought awareness to everything from sport hunting to reduced meat consumption. Think *The Fox and the Hound* or *Babe* or *The Cove*.

It's simply nauseating to think about people like Bernard Levine -- and others who exploit animals for profit -- getting rich off these crude sideshows.

Richard Diaz-Cordoba
Miami

Slow Down and Listen

Brava to Blanca Mesa on encouraging all to participate in Earth Day by first developing some connection to Biscayne Bay and other water or land around us (" [Earth Day 2018: Artists Plant the Seeds of Action](#) ," April 2018).

I had only been in Miami a few years when Cristo wrapped our islands. I had never been in a helicopter, so I sprang for the aerial view. That was my "Oh my!" moment.

We all need to slow down, really listen, observe, learn, and engage through groups doing the heavy lifting to protect our Earth and attempt to reverse the damage we've already done.

Steve Hagen
Atlanta

No Non-Residents at Our Library, Please

John Ise must not have lived here long enough to remember what a nightmare it was when the Miami Shores library was available to the general public (“[Brockway Library and Beyond](#),” April 2018).

Dismissal time at Miami Shores Elementary School and St. Rose School resulted in free daycare for non-residents at the library. The number of children without adult supervision was a burden to the staff. The sheer numbers created a loud and unruly situation for residents who use the library in its limited building space.

The popular programs, especially for children, are well attended by residents, and we do not have space for non-residents.

Ise is right when he says it was by choice that we not affiliate with the public library system.

*Pamela Michels
Miami Shores*

No, Really, It'll Be Great

Mr. John Ise's Brockway Library article is spot on. I identified with the first paragraph. The article makes me want even more to visit Brockway Library, an excursion I've already planned with my granddaughter, one of Miami Shores's newest residents. She turns five months old this month.

The article touches on reciprocal borrowing, an idea whose time has come for Brockway, from what I gather in the article. As a 30-year employee of the Miami-Dade Public Library System, I can tell you that the benefits of joining the 50-plus branch system outweigh any possible negatives, that honestly I can't see.

The workload for the staff of ten at Brockway would not be unlike that of any of the MDPLS branches or regionals. A slight increase in workload might take place, and again, the benefits outweigh that.

Mickey Garrote
Miami Shores

Letters About Letters About Letters

In response to the letter from Fred Jonas (“[Letters About Letters](#),” April 2018), I would like to reference the following from the Electronic Frontier Foundation:

“Anonymous communications have an important place in our political and social discourse. The Supreme Court has ruled repeatedly that the right to anonymous free speech is protected by the First Amendment.”

It is my belief that agreeing to, as Mr. Jonas put it, “publish a letter without insisting the writer publicly identify himself” follows the principle and intention of the First Amendment.

Yes, many people may agree with the anonymous letter published by *Biscayne Times* (“In Miami, Cubans Are Exiles, but Other Immigrants Are Refugees,” March 2018), and there are probably as many who do not. The letter writer may have requested anonymity due to concern over backlash by some dissenters through social media or worse. Given the environment in which we live, I wholly understand the request to be published anonymously.

Perhaps I am wrong about the motive or intention of the writer's choice, but I respect the fact that he or she is entitled to privacy and free speech.

Keep up the great work, *Biscayne Times*, on covering our community.

Joan L. Dunn
Miami Shores

That Would Be One Colossal Yard Sign

John Ise in his article "[Tribalism Rears Its Ugly Head](#)" (March 2018) does not quite appear to unearth its roots.

Would he, to serve that purpose, be amenable (other than it being too long) to a sign that reads (or at least conveys the spirit of) the following:

"We are glad you're our neighbor because you stand up for gender equality, including equal rights for LGBT all over the world. You stand up for the right of children to a childhood that does not involve being molested, married off, having their genitals mutilated, or beliefs forced upon them. You stand up for freedom of speech, meaning all speech, especially speech you might not like. You are against the mistreatment of all animals, including human beings. You oppose discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, and religion. You reject and oppose any belief system that condones, promotes, justifies, excuses, or remains silent on, thereby tacitly condoning, such discrimination."

Irina Martinez
Miami

Milking the Public Cow

As described by David Villano (“[In Trees We Trust](#),” March 2018), Miami’s Quatisha Oguntoyinbo-Rashad, chief of the city’s Environmental Resources Division, apparently thinks she works for the City of Opa-Locka, not Miami.

Either that or she’s just another example of a bureaucratic wonk who believes her job is to follow policy, push paper, and milk the public cow until retirement, when she can cash in on that pension.

DC Copeland
Miami Shores