

Three Zoos

By Pete Clark

I grew up in the boondocks, away from such things like Museums of Natural History and zoos, before Performing Arts Centers were even conceptual ideas. During early 1964 my roots were extracted from the bunchgrass soil of the desert and reset in the Queen City of The Plains. After fifty-four years, I am still not comfortable living in the ever expanding metropolitan area known as Denver.

Small Town America can be very clannish, as can the large cities. Clannishness is difficult to identify in a city. People simply appear to be so hurried that they don't have time for strangers or those who cannot help them expand their influence. After a few years of interaction with the locals and observations of the area news, I noticed that many of the citizens of Denver had a great fear. They feared they were living in a place that was little more than a western cow town. This hideous fear was pushed aside by the people of Denver through the support of a professional football team which they hoped would eventually win a Super Bowl and put the city on the map for real. Tax money spent to enable professional athletics in the city has created a multitude of minimum wage jobs and many lucrative opportunities for those with the resources available for investment.

After settling in and getting to know the city, I fell in love with the Denver Museum of Natural History. I spent many afternoons there looking at Egyptian Mummies, dioramas of Australia's Red Center, the skeleton of a brontosaurus or a myriad of other exotic displays. With the passage of time, the museum began charging for admission and became the Museum of Nature and Science. I have not been there since the change. Refusing to pay to enter the museum is the only form of protest open to me, for who knows if some child, whose family cannot afford the price of admission to the museum, will fail to develop into the next Einstein, Darwin or Schweitzer because of a missed inspirational experience.

Our zoo is excellent. I have been to two widely famous zoos, the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, Colorado and the San Diego Zoo in California. The Denver Zoo is better than either one of these big names. My visit to the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo was memorable in some special ways. My visit to the San Diego Zoo was a gross disappointment. The habitats that have been created at the San Diego Zoo are large and beautiful, but during the three hours we spent there, the only animals we saw was a flamboyance of flamingos at the edge of a pond. A zoo employee retrieved a flamingo feather and gave it to Norma and in spite of the scarcity of animals, we enjoyed our visit to the zoo.