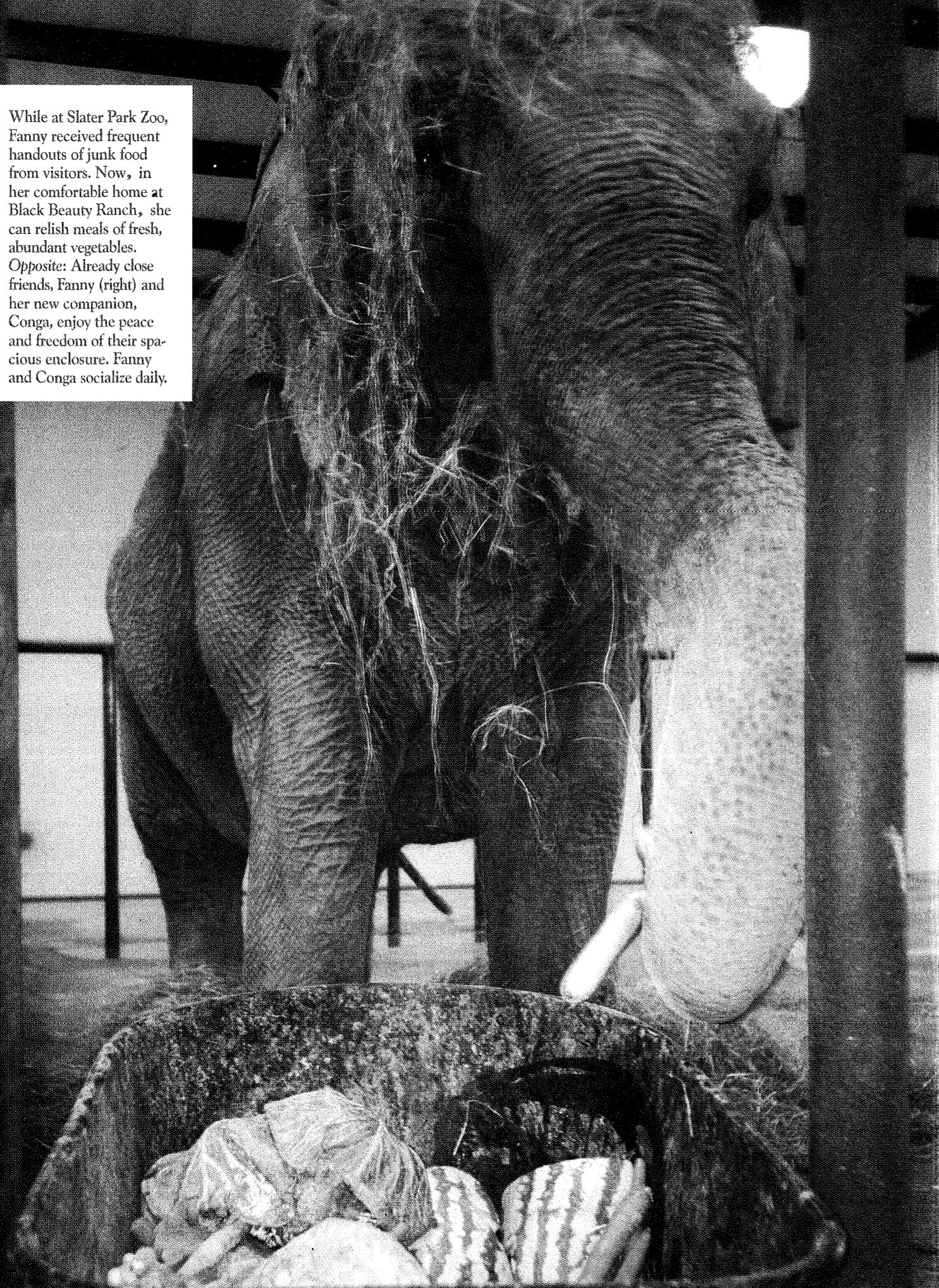


While at Slater Park Zoo, Fanny received frequent handouts of junk food from visitors. Now, in her comfortable home at Black Beauty Ranch, she can relish meals of fresh, abundant vegetables.

Opposite: Already close friends, Fanny (right) and her new companion, Conga, enjoy the peace and freedom of their spacious enclosure. Fanny and Conga socialize daily.



In June Slater Park Zoo—a five-acre menagerie in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, originally opened in 1937—permanently closed. The Pawtucket City Council had voted to close the zoo largely to save the city \$330,000 a year, but the pressure that led to this decision had come primarily from those concerned about the quality of housing and care provided to the zoo's animals.

In 1990 local residents, animal-rights/protection groups, and environmental groups began complaining to the Pawtucket City Council of the zoo's conditions—with little success. In April 1991 Save the Park, a local environmental group, contacted The HSUS for assistance. This request coincided with complaints to us from HSUS members and visitors to the zoo. In response, we wrote to the city council requesting that they investigate the situation and begin discussions with critics of the zoo to determine how their concerns could best be addressed.

Over the next few weeks, HSUS New England Regional Director Arnold Baer, HSUS New England Regional Investigator Frank Ribaudo, and I visited the zoo several times. Although Slater Park Zoo had recently passed inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), our visits confirmed the reports we had received from local residents. The exhibit areas were antiquated and in need of repair; they offered the animals no retreat from the public for privacy. There were few informative descriptions or signs; most of the animals were not even identified by species. Clearly the zoo had no established plan for education or conservation. In most zoo areas, visitors had easy access to the animals, who were getting frequent handouts of candy, popcorn, and other inappropriate food.

The condition of three Himalayan bears, one male and two females, attested to their being fed a steady stream of junk food by visitors, in addition to their zoo diet of dog food. Whereas free-living Himalayan bears normally weigh 100–250 pounds, these bears were grossly overweight. Later each was found to weigh nearly 500 pounds. Also, the bears were kept in one barren cage on a cement slab; their small ce-

ment pond was often left dry.

Perhaps most disturbing was the situation of the zoo's star attraction, an Asian elephant named Fanny. As indicated by city records and files at Circus World Mu-

sive, intelligent, and social individuals; Fanny surely suffered from her confinement and isolation.

In response to HSUS pressure, local political figures and media representatives toured the zoo with Mr. Ribaudo in May 1991 and asked zoo and city officials many pointed questions. This tour resulted in extensive press coverage of problems at the zoo and helped prioritize finding solutions.

The next month, The HSUS submitted a formal report to the Pawtucket Recreation Department describing the deficiencies we had found at Slater Park Zoo and suggesting several options for improvement available to the city. The first was to bring the zoo up to the standards that must be satisfied for accreditation by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria (AAZPA). This would involve a major overhaul of the facilities and the hiring of professional curators. The second was to convert the zoo into a nature center or children's zoo with no exotic animals. The final option, preferred by The HSUS, was to convert the zoo into a recreational facility involving no animals, such as a community center, historical site, or playground. In an independent evaluation conducted for the city, Dr. Donald Bruning, a curator at the New York Zoological Society, reached similar conclusions, as had Tony Vecchio, director of the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island, when he conducted an evaluation in 1990.

It was clear that the city lacked the financial resources to upgrade the zoo or hire the kind of professional staff recommended by The HSUS and other consultants. Any other option would require finding new homes for the zoo's animals, including Fanny and the Himalayan bears.

While the political debate on the zoo's fate continued within the city council and mayor's office, conditions at the zoo worsened. In July 1991 a rhea (an ostrich-like bird) was gored to death by an aoudad (a wild sheep). Four days later, six fallow deer escaped from an exhibit in which newborn deer had previously died due to inadequate care.

That August Mr. Ribaudo expressed HSUS concerns and provided sugges-

LIFE AFTER SLATER PARK

A Zoo's Closing

Brings Welcome Change

For Its Animals



seum, Fanny had been captured in the wild in 1953; Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus had given her to Slater Park Zoo when she was five. For more than thirty-five years, she had lived at the zoo with only rare, brief periods of elephant companionship. She had spent much of that time chained inside a small building. Although her small outdoor area included a depression in the ground intended to serve as a pool, Mr. Ribaudo recalls: "In my dozens of visits to Slater Park Zoo over two and a half years, I never saw water in Fanny's pool." Elephants are highly sensi-

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HSUS/RIBAUDO

tions to the Pawtucket City Council. During the next several months, the council reviewed various reports and recommendations. The difficulty of finding a new home for Fanny, and officials' reluctance to lose her as an attraction, delayed definitive action. Meanwhile we began searching for new homes for Fanny and the bears.

In June 1992 John W. Grandy, Ph.D., HSUS vice president, Wildlife and Habitat Protection, wrote to the city council. He repeated HSUS objections to conditions at Slater Park Zoo and conveyed our offer to pay for Fanny's relocation to a suitable sanctuary. In July Mr. Ribaldo reiterated the offer to Pawtucket mayor Robert Metivier and expressed our willingness to assist in finding suitable new homes for the other animals as well.

In January 1993 we mailed our Rhode Island members an Action Alert calling for the zoo's closing. Soon after, the Pawtucket City Council unanimously voted to close the zoo. In February the mayor formally accepted the council's decision and appointed a relocation committee, which included Mr. Ribaldo, to research options for relocating the zoo's animals.

In May the committee chose Black Beauty Ranch in Murchison, Texas—a 620-acre animal sanctuary run by the Fund for Animals—as the most suitable new home for Fanny. Black Beauty Ranch had a new elephant barn, and "Conga," a twenty-one-year-old female African elephant, was one of the ranch's residents. Animal-sanctuary personnel familiar with elephant behavior believed Conga and Fanny would be compatible.

On June 5 Slater Park celebrated "Fanny Fest" with a parade and tributes to Fanny. The next day the zoo permanently closed. Late that night Fanny was loaded onto a forty-five-foot truck by Ed Novack, an animal-transport expert with a history of many flawless elephant transfers. Fanny began her thirty-nine-hour journey to Black Beauty Ranch.

Upon arrival in her one-acre enclosure,

Fanny walked to a pond, drew water into her trunk, and sprayed herself. Later, in her corral in the elephant barn, she met



Two Himalayan bears from Slater Park Zoo settle in at their new home, Wildlife Images Rehabilitation and Education Center, a sanctuary noted for expertise in caring for bears. Fresh apples are spread before one of the bears. Although the bears now enjoy a healthy diet, it could be years before they are no longer overweight.

Conga. As related by Christopher Byrne, manager of Black Beauty Ranch, within minutes Fanny and Conga began sharing hay and intertwining their trunks.

Three weeks later Slater Park's Himalayan bears were removed for transport to Wildlife Images Rehabilitation and Education Center. Located in Grants Pass, Oregon, this animal sanctuary is noted for its expertise in caring for bears. With the assistance of two veterinarians, the bears were placed in separate ventilated cages for the cross-country journey. Tragically, just five hours' distance from Wildlife Images, the male bear was found dead in his cage. The apparent cause of death, as later determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Forensic Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, was acute failure of the pancreas induced by poor diet, obesity, and the stress of transport. The two female bears reached Wildlife Images safely.

Mr. Ribaldo and Gulf States Regional Director James Noe visited Fanny in July and found her doing well. On a healthier diet, she has already lost some excess weight. She and Conga socialize daily. Dave Siddon, director of Wildlife Images, reports that the female Himalayan bears are also doing well. Like Fanny, they are adjusting to a healthier diet.

The Slater Park relocation committee has found new homes for the zoo's sheep, goats, horses, cows, and lone ox. Soon it

will be relocating the zoo's three spider monkeys to Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Center in San Antonio, Texas—a facility inspected and approved by Messrs. Noe and Ribaldo. The Pawtucket City Council has not yet determined the new function of the zoo's site, but there is strong support for recreating a farm that occupied the site in the late seventeenth century. This facility would have a few domestic animals, at most, as part of the historical farm setting.

The process of closing Slater Park Zoo and relocating its animals has been arduous. "I have never before been involved with an issue so time-consuming, so intense, so draining, and so rewarding," Mr. Ribaldo comments.

"Today few cities are getting into the zoo business," says Richard Farinato, HSUS director of captive wildlife, "and many of them will be looking to get out—for the same reasons that existed at Slater Park. A zoo is a luxury item in the budget." He points out, however, that many "Slater Parks" remain. Of the 1,600 animal exhibitors licensed by the USDA, only 160 are AAZPA-accredited zoos; of the remaining 1,440 exhibitors, nearly 200 are municipally owned zoos.

Ultimately, public zoos are the responsibility of their respective communities, which determine whether or not a zoo will close and where any displaced animals will go. Even so, the Slater Park Zoo experience shows that, working together, animal advocates can convince communities to change, even halt, "business as usual" at facilities that exhibit animals. Most of the zoo's animals have now been moved to facilities better-equipped to meet their physical and psychological needs. Fanny and all the other animals relocated from Slater Park have the chance for a better life. We hope that other municipal zoos will stop to reassess how *they* care for animals. ■

Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., HSUS vice president, Educational Initiatives, formerly oversaw the activities of all regional offices.