



It's a Wild Life: How My Life Became a Zoo

By Bud DeYoung

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It's a Wild Life: How My Life Became a Zoo By Bud DeYoung

Pursuing your passion includes a whole lot of crap. For Bud DeYoung, that's about two hundred pounds a day!

Since childhood, Bud had a passion for animals. As an adult, that passion led to the rescue of a bear who lived in his family's house, then more animals crowding for space, until Bud eventually built an entire private zoo around his home in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Along the way, a regular visitor named Carrie joined her passion for animals with Bud's. Together they now educate the public about animal conservation, battle the harsh winters and blazing summers, and daily dole out love to the hundreds of rescued animals in their care. Meanwhile, they teach by example how to make the world a better place while pursuing their passion.

Welcome to the fascinating, heartwarming journey of one man, one woman, and an amazing cast of critters, whose stories will warm your soul. Welcome to the wild life of the DeYoung Family Zoo.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This is a must-read, inspirational account for any animal lover. I hope there is a second edition in a couple of years so that we can catch up with the characters introduced in this book and understand the ongoing fortunes of this very special zoo.”

~ LibraryThing Reviews

“I couldn’t put DeYoung’s book down and was even a bit sad when I turned the last page. I will definitely be telling all my friends to read *It's a Wild Life: How My Life Became a Zoo*.”

~D. Bettenson, DBettenson New Book Reviews

“Thank you, Bud DeYoung, for letting me into your fascinating . . . life. Your downhome-style account touchingly covers how and why your life became a zoo and will tug at the heart of every animal lover.”

~ Jennifer Keats Curtis, award-winning children's author of the Animal Helpers series, speaker, and founder of MY-Say

“. . . a beautiful story full of inspiration and love.”

—Open Book Society

About the Author

Bud DeYoung Since childhood, Bud DeYoung had a passion for animals. At the young age of eight, he brought kids home from school to see his little zoo. When Bud was fifteen, he traded the family beagle for a monkey. This was the beginning.

Today on his own property in Michican’s Upper Peninsula, Bud runs a zoo that has been open to the public since 1988 and is featured in a television series called *My Life Is a Zoo* on Nat Geo WILD and the 2012 independent film *Zooman*. Along with “Big Cat” Carrie, Bud cares for over two hundred happy critters, from Bengal tigers to arctic wolves to a very hungry hippo named Wallace. Together Bud and Carrie educate the public about animal conservation, battle harsh winters and blazing summers, and daily dole out love to the hundreds of animals in their care. Through Bud and Carrie’s daily sacrifice, animals find rescue, people are inspired, and Bud DeYoung and Carrie Cramer know the fulfillment of living and building upon their dreams.

You can visit Bud and Carrie at the DeYoung Family Zoo in Wallace, Michigan, and online at TheDeYoungFamilyZoo.com.

Cindy Martinusen Coloma is a best-selling author and has written 12 novels including *Beautiful* (2010 Christy Award Finalist and 2011 Revolve Book of the Year), *The Salt Garden* (Library Journal's Best Books

2004) Orchid House (2008 ECPA bestseller) and Winter Passing (2001 Christy Award Finalist), as well as several non-fiction books and over 100 published articles.

Cindy lives in Redding, California with her husband and four children.

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Chapter One

Early Rising

I wake to animals.

This morning, it's a chimp crawling on my head.

I've never been one to linger in bed, but two-year-old orphan Louie makes slow waking impossible. He's an insistent alarm clock, entering from his primate area attached to the house. He stretches out my ears, tugs the bit of short-cropped hair I have left, and if I wait much longer, he'll dump everything from the dressers onto the floor.

I can't remember a time when a baby hyena, wolf, bear cub, monkey, or other exotic creature didn't share my bed. My fiancée, Carrie, and I have had eight years of animal housemates. Before that, my years can be marked by my children growing up and by the myriad of animals passing through the doors of the house and the habitats stretching all over my land.

It's still before dawn.

Carrie's already gone, the bed cold on her side. Two horses came in late to her rescue ranch. They were in bad shape from malnutrition and abuse. She'll be tending to them day and night between everything else. Last year she saved two Clydesdales that, after being shot by their owner, were left for weeks in the field to rot and die. The calls for help come in daily, and neither of us knows how to manage it all or to say no.

Now that I think about it, I wonder if Carrie ever made it to bed at all.

The cost of feed tugs at my thoughts as much as Louie's strong fingers prying at my mouth. Kicking back the covers, Louie jumps, cheering. He climbs up my aching back onto my shoulders.

"Let's get you some breakfast," I say and give him a friendly rubbing on the arm.

Quite literally, my life is a zoo. For the past forty-some-odd years, I've built the DeYoung Family Zoo on first forty, now sixty acres surrounding this eight-hundred-square-foot house built in 1979.

In the past few years, Carrie launched her no-kill Piper's Rescue Ranch. It's located on leased land adjacent to mine that might soon be sold out from under her. The rescue grew out of the zoo, from people bringing pets they didn't want or couldn't care for any longer. We've taken in chickens, turtles, iguanas . . . You name it, we've probably had it.

After the coffee is set to brew, Louie pounds my shoulder as I make his bottle. I focus on the day ahead. I thank God it's busy this month. August has brought us more visitors. Those visitors get me out of the bed, bones creaking and an ache in my back. I love introducing people to animals of every kind. I want them to get close, learn something new, and leave with a fresh appreciation for the animal kingdom. That's why I started the zoo, or maybe the animals started it all.

The busy month is a bit of hope after a horrendous July, when a heat wave kept the visitors away. We dropped behind forty-four thousand dollars in one month. That's money to get us through the coming winter. Not only Carrie and me, but also four hundred hungry animals at the zoo and the ones Carrie's harboring over at the rescue—I reckon it's at least several hundred and growing.

I cradle Louie in my arms as he slurps down his bottle. I glance around at the other animals. The dogs are out, so Carrie was here. The babies in their pens will eat soon when our summer volunteer comes in for morning feeding. In the springtime, we have babies to feed every three hours and often with no help, but this time of year, we have good-hearted friends and neighbors who spend their mornings and sometimes all day helping around both places. We'll be losing the high school and college helpers soon as summer winds down. Before long, winter shuts us in and we're on our own again.

"Let's get moving," I say to the chimp when he sucks only air through the bottle. Louie stares up at me, studying my face. He looks to Carrie and me as surrogate parents. It won't be like this forever. Though it's incredibly similar to having a new baby and now a toddler in the house, chimpanzees aren't humans and they aren't pets. There'll come a time when Louie will move from the house to his own primate habitat with siblings and perhaps a mate. But I'm not thinking of that right now with too much looming ahead. I have morning feedings, a dead cow to pick up from a local farm, food for the big cats, hay and a few groceries to grab in town, a farm hand who volunteered but needs a ride, and a dozen other chores waiting before the zoo gates open at 10:00 a.m.

My phone buzzes with a text from Carrie.

Morning, Caveman. Belle and Chance have gained pounds already. I'm worried the donkey might have foundered, though. Vet at 8:00 a.m. Three new dogs coming in this afternoon. I'll get them after the Big Cat Show. See you at 1:00 p.m.

I tap at the keys worse than Louie can do. Technology and I don't much get along, but who can deny its convenience? I want to tell Carrie not to worry, but my tapping at the keys doesn't bring any good words. I'll call her later, I decide, and pour a cup of coffee to go. Louie finds his place on my shoulder.

The day beckons or, more accurately, the hundreds of animals waiting for their morning feed. The bears whine when they see me through the kitchen window, the tigers yawn, and the wolves sniff the morning air as they hear the door creak open, even from their habitats all over the sixty acres.

Once in a while, I wonder what it's like for other folks who have the luxury of waking up good and slow. Guess they'd never find it a luxury to hear the coffee brewing and smell its aroma from beneath the covers. As I head out, most people are still warm in their beds. I walk into a cool morning in the Upper Peninsula, with chickens clucking, a cow mooing, and a lion off in the distance letting out a roar.

Truth be told, I wouldn't have life any other way.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Adrian Kester:

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