

Op Ed: Zoo is responsible for protecting animals and visitors

Posted by [Jacqui Atkielski](#) On 06/03/2016

Photo credit to CNN

CINCINNATI, OH -- That was a rough baptism for the young boy who fell in the gorilla enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo.

Ideally, the gorilla Harambe wouldn't have had to die. The zoo would have proper security measures in place to protect the people and animal attractions. The boy wouldn't have fallen in, and the mother wouldn't have gotten distracted. Going to the zoo should be a safe adventure to learn about the world around us.

We're all human. We're at the top of the food chain, and we still make mistakes. Accidents occur because we do not live in a perfect world.

I believe that the zoo made the right call when they decided to pull the trigger on the 17 year old, 450-pound wild animal because the zoo was going to lose money either way. By choosing to save the child and sacrifice the gorilla, they can keep their doors open for the rest of the animal attractions and visitors.

Better measures should have been in place to ensure that the child didn't fall in to begin with. I understand that children can be gone in the blink of an eye, but the zoo should have thought of every liability, including falling into an enclosure. Maybe the zoo should be shut down if they can't protect their customers and their attractions.

From what I saw on the video, the gorilla toyed with the boy, yanking him around like a rag doll.

While we only saw a flash of a moment in this gorilla's life in the video footage, I wouldn't hesitate to save a child if it meant sacrificing the gorilla. Thane Maynard, the zoo's director, is standing behind the decision to kill the gorilla, citing that it is a tragedy to lose the endangered creature. He also said that those who second-guess the call don't understand the animal.

"That child's life was in danger. People who question that don't understand you can't take a risk with a silverback gorilla. This is a dangerous animal," he said. "Looking back, we'd make the same decision. The child is safe."

The animal had the child by the ankle, and people want to press criminal charges on the mother! If it was your child who fell in the enclosure, who would you rather die, the animal or the child? If you want to be upset about this, be mad that the boy made it through to the enclosure. This is the zoo's fault, for not protecting the boy from falling in there and for pulling the trigger on the gorilla.

Children are a handful, especially stubborn ones who won't listen to their parents. According to the [CNN article](#), a woman who witnessed the incident said the boy told his mother he was going to get into the moat. The mother told her son to behave before she became distracted by other children with her, she said.

"The little boy himself had already been talking about wanting to go in, go in, get in the water and his mother is like, 'No you're not, no you're not,' " she said. "Her attention was drawn away for seconds, maybe a minute, and then he was up and in before you knew it."

While the incident may have lasted only 10 minutes, this story will be on the public's mind and weigh on their hearts for the rest of the summer. I'm fairly certain that the zoo would have faced a massive lawsuit if they didn't save the boy.

Some suggested the boy's parents should be held criminally responsible. An online petition seeking "Justice for Harambe" earned more than 100,000 signatures in less than 48 hours. I don't think this is the right course of action, and the people who created and signed this kind of petition clearly don't understand that children can escape even under the most watchful eye.

"This beautiful gorilla lost his life because the boy's parents did not keep a closer watch on the child," the petition states.

This is not the same as bringing criminal charges to a pet owner who won't take care of their dog or cat. That woman and her son did not go to the zoo with the intention of killing the gorilla. She was distracted, like many other parents when they are shepherding children anywhere.

Jane Goodall, famed primatologist, sent an email in response to the killing, highlighting the conflicted nature of the decision to kill the animal.

"I feel so sorry for you, having to try to defend something which you may well disapprove of," Goodall wrote in an email to Maynard. She said it was a devastating loss to the zoo, and to the gorillas.

Because of the incident, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums has announced they will be investigating, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture said it will determine whether the facility was in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act, a federal law that monitors the treatment of animals in research and exhibition.

It was discovered that over the last three years, the zoo was out of compliance nine times. Two involving veterinary care were directly tied to the health or wellness of the animals, and seven dealt with other issues. None involved the gorilla enclosure. All were resolved, according to USDA reports.

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