



THE EROSION OF OUR LIBERTIES

By John Burkitt, Educational Director

The America of today is subject to two dynamics; one seeks to improve the country through laws, the other through conscience. America got its start from people who fled inflexible standards and close supervision to take responsibility for their own successes and failures. America worked best when it derived its strength from that wellspring of self reliance. Now special interest groups and litigation have gained the upper hand and pushed the United States close to the tight reins and watchful eyes that drove men into the Atlantic. Those who value freedom above safety can no longer flee westward. They must push back or be driven into the Pacific.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the spate of laws and rules ostensibly to protect us from scraped knees and bruised elbows. Packets of salted peanuts warn us, *contains nuts* and dandruff shampoo is *for external use only*. To the exasperation of motorists, a caravan of school busses must each stop in turn at a gated crossing to spend several moments with the door open listening for a train that is not there. McDonalds coffee states, *contents may be hot*.

Forgotten is the notion that a government with the power to bestow happiness also has the power to withhold it. Laws instigated by special interest groups have severely eroded the rights of animal caretakers. Beyond requiring humane treatment, many seek to hasten and finalize man's divorce from nature. Whether the presumption is that Nature is not a safe place, or that Man is not a safe species, the end result is the same. We have banished ourselves from Eden, and in doing so hurt not only ourselves but also the endangered species that need our help.

Keeping wildlife in the wild is fine so long as there *is* a suitable wild. At Tiger Touch we acknowledge the possibility that many species will only survive in viable numbers through captive breeding. Some animal rights advocates claim any life in captivity, however fine, is not worth living. Such people are piling many of Earth's most splendid large carnivores on the scrap heap of history. We agree that some forms of captivity do not respect the needs and dignity of animals, and are developing best management practices that help animals survive and thrive and ultimately reach their potential.

Regarding human safety, we require training, experience and careful procedures to minimize risk. Staff members understand and accept the inherent risk of working with large carnivores.

We respectfully ask the government not try to “save us from ourselves,” legalizing bungee jumping while criminalizing physical contact with exotic cats. We ask for minimal interference in the protection of biodiversity in private reserves.

Those who feel they can live disconnected from nature should have the right to try. Those who feel otherwise should also have the full enjoyment of their rights. Anything else is a departure—spiritual, legal and cultural—from the values that made America great.
