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While volunteering at a small petting zoo, my husband and I were asked to foster a baby tiger. We thought it would be a wonderful experience, so we jumped at the chance. Soon a little three-day-old tiger by the name of Shiva was released to our care.

We did our best to provide the essential care that Shiva's mother would have. There were daily and nightly feedings, constant supervision and many other tasks as he grew. Shiva did not have a companion animal at this facility so we tried to fill that void as much as possible. We watched him open his eyes and take his first steps. He often crawled on our laps, wrapping his paws around our necks to lick our face with his sandpaper tongue. We were impressed with his intelligence and ability to learn. He charmed every one he met with his antics.

However, we were unaware that Shiva was actually a victim of the wild animal pet trade. We started to see abusive treatment and realized that we were becoming reluctant participants. But our love for Shiva compelled us to continue our relationship with Shiva to protect him as best we could.

Before long the petting zoo owner informed us that Shiva would soon have to go to make room for more cubs. When asked where he would go, he assured us he would go to a good home. However, the zoo's policy was that foster parents were not allowed to find out

where animals were sent. This left us feeling uneasy about Shiva's future, so with the owner's permission we started searching for a good home ourselves.

We first contacted a reputable zoo in the United States. Unfortunately, the zoo director advised us "they were unable to help and that we could expect the same result from any credible facility." We were told that Shiva's future was grim because there were already thousands of wild animal pets in North America that their owners want to relocate. One director of a sanctuary association told us "he knew of no facility that would accept Shiva." We also contacted many Canadian zoos, but no one would take Shiva.

Unwilling to give up, we corresponded with wild cat sanctuaries in several US states. We found out from the US Department of Fish and Wildlife that no tiger from Canada would be allowed into the country. They said there they already had thousands of unwanted tigers and they didn't want any more.

We started researching the wild animal pet trade and were horrified by what we learned. Wild cats in particular are over-bred. Disreputable zoos and private breeders produce young cubs every year for display and sale. When zoo display cubs outgrow their usefulness (meaning they are no longer cute), they are discarded.



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Shiva's Story. The tragedy of the wild animal pet trade.

We found out the wild animal pet trade is a multi-million industry in North America and that there may be up to 15,000 pet tigers, most of them hybrids, in the hands of private individuals. In fact, tigers are so numerous that they are sometimes killed for their pelts, meat, bones, teeth and claws, as their parts can fetch thousands of dollars, much more than the living tiger can.

Knowing more about the wild animal pet trade, we decided to purchase Shiva for three thousand dollars and then to continue searching for a good home. He quickly became more than we could handle and we were desperate to move him. With no other options, we decided to place him at a private zoo.

The zoo owner promised that Shiva would receive proper care, food, water and shelter. However it was not long after that we realized there were serious problems at this facility. The quality and quantity of his food were inadequate and inappropriate. His water was dirty and his cage was filthy. We were heartbroken.

Shiva was in trouble. He was deteriorating physically and mentally. He no longer had the desire to play. We watched our once enthusiastic, energetic Shiva become a sad, frustrated creature that paced relentlessly back and forth. The spark in his eyes was now diminished to a dull vacant stare.

We thought Shiva's situation could not get much worse. We were then informed that Shiva was going to be moved into another enclosure that was totally inadequate in size and height. We couldn't leave Shiva to languish in such grossly substandard conditions for the rest of his life.

Leaving Shiva after every visit became increasingly difficult. In fact, it was one of the hardest things we ever had to do. We finally had had enough of the broken promises. Unwilling to turn our backs on Shiva's suffering, we removed Shiva and euthanized him. This had become the only humane end to a nightmare. Shiva died painlessly and was then taken home and lovingly buried.

There are tens of thousands of wild animals in the pet trade in Canada. Shiva's story is just one of many. The wild animal pet trade is a brutal, destructive industry that must be stopped. I hope Shiva's story will inspire others to act to end the suffering.



Zoocheck Canada Inc.
2646 St. Clair Avenue East
Toronto, Ontario, M4B 3M1
phone: 416.285.1744, web: www.zoocheck.com

