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ALLEN TEEN WITH AN ENTRE-PURR-NEURIAL SPIRIT




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ALLEN TEEN WITH AN
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BY PEGGY HELMICK-RICHARDSON

QUESTION:
WHEN IS A FAUX PAW
NOT A FAUX PAS?

ANSWER:
WHEN IT RAISES THOUSANDS
OF DOLLARS TO PROTECT
DEFENSELESS ANIMALS

... Zoe was determined that her designs would be dedicated to serve animals, and several animal advocacy organizations have benefited from her decision.

In the summer of 2006, Zoe Albert created a pair of flip-flops adorned with fake tiger fur on the straps. When friends spotted them, they wanted their own pair. Word spread about the fashionable flip-flops and orders grew. Faux Paws was born and quickly began to leave its footprint on the world.

This Allen 14-year-old estimates that over \$10,000 profit has been earned from the sale of her Faux Paws, but not a cent of this has gone into her pockets. From the onset, Zoe was determined that her designs would be dedicated to serve animals, and several animal advocacy organizations have benefited from her decision.

Groups that receive support from the sale of these animal-themed flip-flops are East Lake Pet Orphanage (ELPO) in northeast Dallas, DFW Tzus and More Rescue, Center for Animal Research and Education (CARE) in Bridgeport, Help for Helpless Animals serving the Metroplex, and Campaign for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI). All are well considered choices from a teen who aspires to a career in veterinary medicine.

With a growing fan base, Faux Paws have been mailed across the country, as far away as Hawaii. Being a skillful salesperson, as well as artful shoe designer, Zoe points out that orders for her sandals are placed year-round because they can be worn as slippers in the winter and make wonderful holiday gifts.

In addition to buying them directly from Zoe or off her website, fashionistas can purchase Faux Paws through some of the supported organizations, via their web sites or at special events such as pet adoption events or festival booths. Safari Kids, a high-end children's clothing and gift boutique,

also carries a line of Faux Paws, giving all profits back to the animal organizations on Zoe's list.

Safari Kids owner Tessa Barnhouse explains, "Zoe walked in with them on and asked if I wanted to carry them, and I said, 'Absolutely!'" She estimates that in the approximately two years that her store has carried Faux Paws, the store has sold between 100 and 150 pairs of these furry sandals. "Zoe is phenomenal," Tessa continues. "I couldn't believe a child her age would be doing this for charity and, on top of that, they are really cute flip-flops."

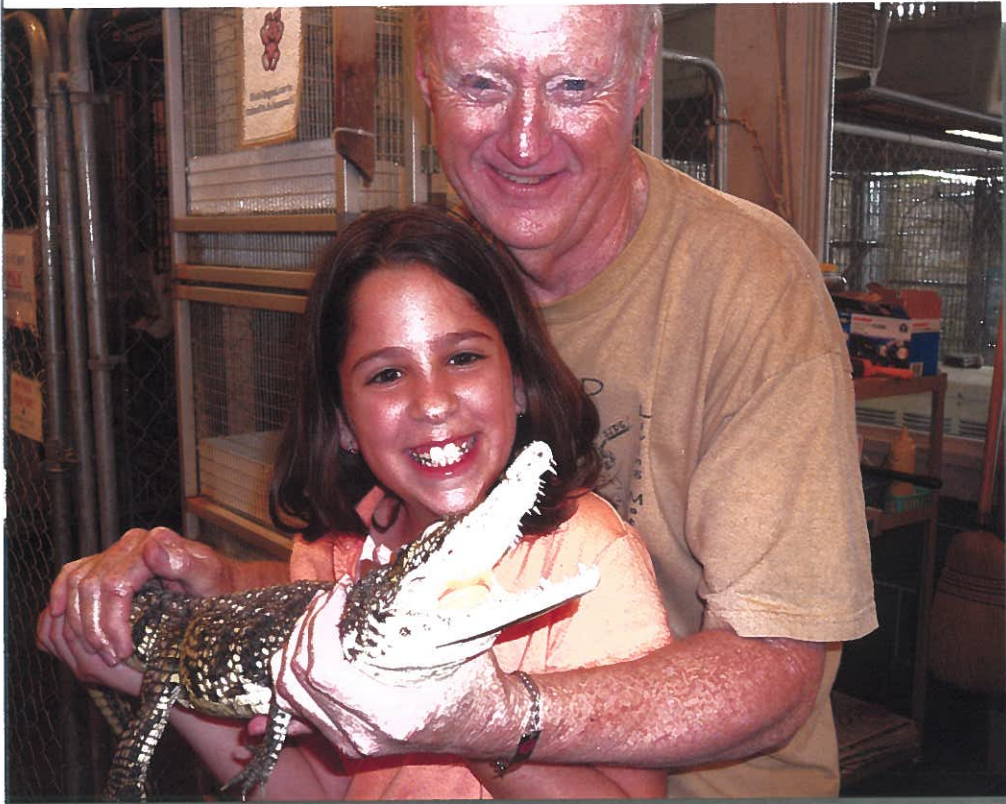
The idea of establishing Faux Paws as a fundraising product originated as Zoe's Bat Mitzvah project. In

preparation for a Bar (for boys) or Bat (for girls) in the Jewish tradition, children usually begin Sunday school in first grade and formal Hebrew training in third grade. Then approximately one year before the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the youth train with a tutor to learn their Torah and Haftarah portions as well as the Trope, the system for chanting the Torah.

In recent years, another component was added to this process—a Mitzvah project. "Which I think is probably one of the most significant parts of the process," notes Zoe's mother Nancy. "Essentially, becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is a public declaration to the community that the child is now an adult, ready to be responsible for their own moral and ethical life. I think it is great that the kids are being asked, 'Who are you and what do you stand for?'"

Raised in a home where volunteering is emphasized, Zoe already had experience with coordinating fundraising projects. She gave time to the Allen Animal Shelter and led an effort to collect needed supplies for the facility. In the fifth grade at Story





Elementary School, she spearheaded a coin drive to raise money to purchase voice-activated computers for a man who had been paralyzed in an accident. Zoe had learned of this man's need from her brother Zach, who had donated his time to help the man with his physical therapy when insurance ran out. Even at an early age, Zoe went along with Nancy on gleanings to pick fresh fruits and vegetables for shelters and food pantries.

Zoe's Bat Mitzvah was held in June of 2007, the same month she also received a \$200 grant from Youth Together in Plano to keep her project going. "We bought \$200 worth of flip-flops and fabric and sold them for \$1,000," Zoe beams.

When it comes to a love of animals, Zoe also puts her mouth where her money is. She has been a vegetarian since November of 2005, eschewing all red meat and poultry and only

occasionally eating fish. Nancy laughs about having to learn how to cook new foods like tofu to be assured her daughter gets the proper nutrition, but also admits, "Zoe is probably the healthiest of all of us!"

"I really love to make things and I really wanted to do something to help animals because I've always loved them," Zoe declares. "I needed to do a Bat Mitzvah project and the two worked together!"

She also confesses that in the beginning there was another impetus to create Faux Paws—it kept her mind off of missing her brother Zach. That spring he had graduated from Allen High School, and before leaving to attend Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, in the fall, he decided to spend six weeks in Israel. "I really missed him," she sighs.

The name Faux Paws came about via a brainstorming session with her mother. "I didn't know what the name meant in French and my mom explained it to me," Zoe shares. In addition to the appeal of the clever play on words, Zoe thought the name was perfect because "I think it is a faux pas for people to wear animal fur!"

The first thing Zoe did was to create a prototype for her Faux Paws and wear them around town. "People came up to me and said, 'I would like a pair.' We didn't have inventory at the beginning. We would make them whenever orders came in."



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The earliest creations sold for \$5, eventually going up to \$10 a pair to cover rising expenses. Nancy laughs about the time she found bins of flip-flops deeply discounted and packed her car with all they had, which allowed Zoe to keep her prices low for the first year. Eventually, all these early Faux Paws were sold and Zoe now has to purchase flip-flops at the best prices she can find when they are available at area craft stores.

Nancy explains that buying these sandals wholesale is not an option. What they have encountered is that Zoe would either have to buy quantities too large to store in their home or take whatever sizes the wholesaler chooses to send.

Faux Paws come in children's sizes up to adult women's size 9-10. The sandal bases come in either black or white and fur choices are zebra or leopard.

To create a pair of Faux Paws, Zoe must cut the fake fur fabric to the specific size and then one strip must be hand-sewn on each strap. She estimates that each pair takes 20 minutes to make. To ease the process, she cuts a number of fur strips at the same time and then does all the sewing. She laughs that the process seemed fairly efficient until the evening she received an order for 18 pair of sandals—to be delivered the next morning. These were intended to be party favors for a Cheetah Girl-themed birthday party.

Anyone can do the math and figure out that that filling this order would require about six hours of cutting and sewing, but then homework



and band had to be added in as well. Zoe admits that she stayed up until early the next morning to make the deadline, but the shoes were delivered and she had another happy customer. Zoe then shudders and points out that she was grateful that she didn't have to make more than these, and that was because the birthday girl's mother had already purchased every available pair in stock at Safari Kids before calling Zoe to complete the needed total.

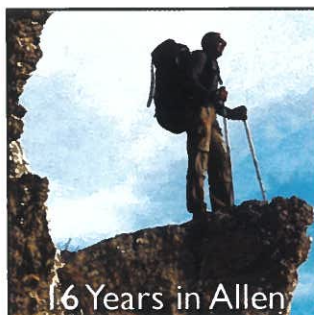
Although overnight orders are not the norm, Zoe still must occasionally contend with lost sleep to keep up with demand as well as school

requirements. This Lowery Freshman Center student maintains an all-A grade point average and all but one of her classes is Pre-Advanced Placement. Playing clarinet for the Allen Eagle Band is another time-consuming passion for her. To keep up with all these obligations means being up at 5:30 a.m. and rarely in bed before midnight on school days.

A member of the National Junior Honor Society, Zoe served as vice-president of Ford Middle School's organization when she was in eighth grade. At last year's NJHS induction for members who would be going into eighth grade, Zoe saw an opportunity to promote her Faux Paws and support Ford's NJHS program as well.

She set up a table at the event, displaying 25 pairs of her distinctive flip-flops. The money from the sale of her creations was then given to the Ford organization. "I wanted to donate it to the incoming eighth graders so they could know that it is possible to do something like this," she explains. "It would give them some seed money for them to do a project in the community."

Running Faux Paws out of her



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home means that Zoe relies a great deal on assistance from her mother and father, David. "I've turned my office into a flip-flop factory," Nancy laughs. "I'm going on strike!" Zoe's father helps with the Faux Paws web site. As demand for her sandals grow, Zoe is hoping friends will donate volunteer hours to help her fill orders.

CARE was the first organization that benefited from Zoe's artistic and business acumen. A family friend took Zoe and Nancy to the facility that serves as a rehabilitation center and home for sick, injured and abused large cats such as tigers, lions, leopards and cougars. "I fell in love with the cats," Zoe grins. Shortly after that, Faux Paws were created and Zoe approached CARE with her product. They were delighted to receive this unique volunteer support.

Her association with the organization has offered her the rare opportunity to play with cubs and interact with some of the larger cats. Nancy cringes and notes, "I'm glad there is a fence!" One of Zoe's favorite pastimes at CARE is running with Cassie, a mountain lion. "Cassie will jump 16 feet in the air, from one platform to another," explains CARE founder and executive director Heidi Berry. "Zoe will run along the fence and make her jump and do her tricks."

Now in its twentieth year, CARE was established as a non-profit organization in 2003. Currently the

facility cares for 52 large cats, including a variety of tigers, lions, leopards and cougars. Heidi laments that demand for services such as hers are growing and insufficient funding often means having to turn down cats in dire need of assistance.

Heidi points out that in 2008, CARE earned more than \$2,000 from the sale of Zoe's Faux Paws. Money from this is earmarked for the cats' direct care, such as food and medication. "She is an amazing girl!" Heidi declares. "I wish I had three more of her."

Because of Zoe's efforts to support CARE's cats, she was named a 2008 Kids CARE Hero.

It was through her Faux Paws donation to East Lake Pet Orphanage that Zoe came to know veterinarian Karen Fling. The owner of East Lake Animal Veterinary Hospital, as well as president of ELPO, Dr. Fling first met Zoe when she approached her about

donating sandals to the pet adoption facility. Impressed with Zoe's maturity and interest in veterinary medicine, Dr. Fling invited Zoe to follow her behind the scenes at the hospital.

"Zoe was an easy asset to have with me," Dr. Fling notes, "and we had some pretty long days together." She was particularly impressed with Zoe's ability to attend surgeries. "She gloved up and suited up and observed, and was really brave," Dr. Fling continues. "You don't know if surgery is going to be a breaking point or something you can handle. She did a great job and I was really impressed with how well she did in the situation."

Dr. Fling explains that she provides this experience to promising youth considering a career in veterinary medicine because a mentor offered her the same opportunity when she was a teenager. She also notes that Zoe is younger than most of the volunteers she works with. "She worked her way into a role with us that probably wouldn't have happened if she hadn't worked for it and proved her initiative, creativity and maturity. She may be a young person, but the impact she has created is more than a lot of adults."

"Eight out of every 10 dogs and cats picked up off the streets in Dallas are euthanized," Dr. Fling continues. "Most of these are domestic pets that need a second chance. People don't talk enough about it and that's why we need people like Zoe."

Zoe has worked hard to give animals that second chance, and those folks who support her effort also buy a chance for cuter feet. ❖

Peggy Helmick-Richardson is a freelance writer.

To order Faux Paws, you may go directly to Zoe's website:
www.fauxpaws.biz

They may also be purchased at Safari Kids, 5960 W. Parker, in Plano. All money from the sale of these go to Zoe's designated organizations.

To learn more about the organizations Zoe supports:

East Lake Pet Orphanage—www.welovepets.net/elpo/
CARE (Center for Animal Research & Education)—www.bigcatcare.org
 (You may also order Faux Paws directly from their web site.)
CHAI (Concern for Helping Animals in Israel)—www.chai-online.org
Help for Helpless Animals—www.helpforhelplessanimals.net
DFW Tzus and More Rescue—www.dfwtzusandmorerescue.com