

Trish Khan



As a kid, Trish Khan loved to “horse around.” At age 13, she’d get up at 6:00 every morning and walk over a mile to care for her horse, Snoopy, and other horses at a nearby stable. Like many animals throughout her life, Snoopy almost felt like family to her.

Trish’s love of animals inspired her to earn a bachelor’s degree in biology, which led her to a job at a small zoo in Nevada. She developed a passion for primates when she fed and nurtured a macaque whose mother wouldn’t care for it. In 1993, she joined the Milwaukee County Zoo as a zookeeper. Today, she’s the Curator of Primates and Small Mammals. She manages the health, breeding, and living conditions of apes, monkeys, and other animals. She also guides the team that cares for these creatures.

Trish says she’s thankful that her older sister, Nancy, taught her about the Bahá’í Faith when she was a kid. Trish lives in Wisconsin and has two sons.

Q: What’s your favorite childhood memory?

A: There was a horse stable on the other side of the river . . . by the time I was eight, I was immersed in animals . . . I spent almost every available waking moment surrounded by horses and nature . . . I had such a wonderful childhood.

Q: What do you do in your job at the Milwaukee County Zoo?

A: I manage my animal collections . . . bringing in new animals, maybe sending out some of our animals that are recommended to breed at other zoos . . . I helped design the new otter exhibit and several of the other exhibits . . . Everything that is needed to keep our animals happy and healthy and the species thriving.



Left: At age 10, Trish loved horses and spent a lot of time at a local stable.



Right: In her teens, Trish’s closest friends were her Appaloosa/Quarter Horse, Snoopy, and her collie, Mazi.

Q: How has the Bahá’í Faith influenced your career?

A: Loving and working with animals, especially as a child, teaches you all these virtues. It teaches you patience and kindness and gentleness . . . commitment [and] sacrifice . . . As I started learning about the Bahá’í Faith . . . I realized how important it was for me to develop those [virtues] . . . I used to sing to my children that quote from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it . . .” [He] was teaching us that animals are a gift from God . . . They unite us and they teach us these great, profound things if we are just open [to] the sheer beauty and the joy.

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Trish shares her love of animals with her sons, Ejaz (left) and Siraj.

Q: What's one of your favorite experiences in your career?

A: Traveling to Indonesia, following wild orangutans . . . that cemented not only my love for orangutans, but it set my feet on a path to trying to do whatever I could to protect the species . . . Once I saw them in the wild . . . it totally changed my perspective and how I viewed orangutans in captivity.

Q: What's your advice for kids who want a career working with animals?

A: There are so many opportunities to volunteer—you could work at animal shelters . . . help walk dogs . . . sit for your neighbors' pets . . . volunteer at the zoo [and] learn how to take care of wild animals . . . [For a career,] you can go into animal medicine or animal research . . . The opportunities are vast . . . You could impact animals by the daily things you do in your life. Recycle . . . If you love an orangutan, find out what palm oil is and educate people* . . . Little changes will make such a big difference.



Trish brought baby orangutan Mahal to the Milwaukee County Zoo when he was less than a year old, and they formed a close bond.

Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* is about thankfulness. What can we do to develop the virtue of thankfulness?

A: Just be aware of all of the wonders and the mysteries in this world. How can you not automatically be thankful? . . . Spend five minutes looking up into a tree [at] the birds and the leaves. You just start recognizing how small you are in comparison and maybe how you fit in, but how grateful you are for all of these blessings . . . Kids are so involved in so many things and games and sports and school, and life just is so fast, but it's about taking the time to just breathe deep . . . meditate on it and pray . . . Times that I feel most connected to God are the times when I'm surrounded by nature.

Q: The Bahá'í writings say, "Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him." How do you think challenges are helpful?

A: They teach us . . . we have to rely on God, because many times in our lives we'll face challenges that just seem overwhelming . . . It's through our faith and love of God . . . that we overcome them. But without those challenges in my life, I wouldn't have developed as strong a relationship with God . . . It's helped guide me through my whole life . . . You pray and you meditate on it, you try to make the best decision, but in the end you put it in God's hand . . . Challenges give us those opportunities.

* Production of palm oil, used in numerous products, is a major threat to orangutan habitats. See https://kids.mongabay.com/elementary/palm_oil.html