

Small but heartfelt vigil held for tiger who attacked teen

Steve Rubenstein, Chronicle Staff Writer

Published 4:00 am, Wednesday, January 2, 2008



1

Chronicle / Michael Macor

tiger02_0145_mac.jpg Larry Luthi, Donna Fappiano, Jon Engdahl and Paul Fappiano remember the tiger with a fire on Ocean Beach near the zoo. Jon Engdahl organizer of a vigil to remember "Tatiana" the Siberian Tiger who was killed one week ago at the San Francisco Zoo after she attacked 3 people visiting the zoo on Christmas Day and killing one.

Photo by: Michael Macor / The Chronicle Taken on 1/1/08, in San Francisco, CA, USA MANDATORY CREDIT FOR PHOTOG AND SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE/NO SALES-MAGS OUT Photo: Michael Macor

They lighted a bonfire Tuesday on Ocean Beach for Tatiana the tiger, an animal who created one tragedy and whose death was another one. Four people showed up on the beach at dusk to hold candles, huddle by the fire and watch the first sunset of 2008. Turnout was modest but from the heart.

"It doesn't matter how many people there are, as long as there's someone," said [Jon Engdahl](#), a San Francisco handyman who decided to hold the vigil.

He put the word out through Internet chat rooms and brought a few logs and some lighter fluid down to the beach just across the Great Highway from the zoo where the tragedy occurred exactly one week earlier.

Maybe New Year's Day is too full of parades and football to hold a wake, but it was the least humans could do, Engdahl said.

"That animal got a raw deal at our hands," he said. "Tatiana was being a tiger. We humans are the ones that make the choices. The tigers don't."

For a while, Engdahl thought he and his dog, McCoy, would be the only ones at the vigil. Then [Larry Luthi](#), an antiques dealer from Daly City, showed up.

He said Tatiana, the escaped tiger who killed one visitor and injured two others on Christmas afternoon before being shot to death by police, was worth lighting a candle for.

"Her death was so wrong in so many ways," he said. "What a mess."

As the sun slipped into the sea, Donna and [Paul Fappiano](#) of San Francisco arrived with three small candles and lighted them, one by one. Their dog, Roxie, sat quietly and watched.

"We go to the zoo all the time," said Paul Fappiano. "I don't know how many times we've seen that tiger. She was so elegant and so beautiful."

He knelt and stirred the logs. Down the beach, surfers were riding waves, kids were flying kites, and lovebirds were sitting in the front seats of parked [cars](#), smooching.

"Now she's gone and she isn't coming back," Fappiano said.
"Humans have failed tigers."

"We annihilate their habitat, we take away their land, we bring them here, and then this is what happens to them."

His wife said she hoped people keep going to zoos. She's been a member of the [San Francisco Zoological Society](#) for 25 years and has seen a lot of tigers and eaten a lot of popcorn.

"Zoos aren't dangerous," she said. "They're less dangerous than walking down the street."

The waves washed up to within a foot of the bonfire and then, as if they sensed the solemnity, retreated.

Maybe New Year's is the wrong day for a wake, Engdahl said, but it seemed important to do something to mark the end of the most horrible week in the history of the San Francisco Zoo. He apologized several times to his fellow mourners for the low turnout, but everyone else seemed lost in their thoughts.

"Four people for a wake seems kind of pathetic," Engdahl said, as the bonfire flickered and began to give out. "But I felt I had to do something."