



Susan Fitzgerald

"Don't you want to help Nigel find a wife and have a family?" asked Dr. Elwyn Simons.

I was ten years old and Nigel, the only Coquerel's sifaka at the Duke Primate Center, was right in front of me. I was filled with joy at being so close to such a beautiful animal, but also sad that he was the only lemur of his species at the Center. It was 1980 and I was on my first trip to the Duke Lemur Center, then the Duke Primate Center. The Director of the Center, Dr. Simons was giving my family a tour, as we were getting ready to move to Madagascar where my father was preparing to serve as the U.S. Ambassador.



Over the following years, a relationship was renewed between Madagascar and the United States that allowed Duke to bring lemurs from the wild to the Lemur Center. A mate was found for Nigel, and so began a very successful captive breeding program for Coquerel's sifakas. I also became even more enchanted with lemurs.

Many years later I moved to Durham for a job that had nothing to do with lemurs. But what my employer did not know was that my desire to be closer to the Duke Lemur Center was a major part of my decision to move to the area. Within weeks of arriving in Durham I became a volunteer tour guide at the Center. Through my volunteer work here over the years, I have seen firsthand how special the Duke Lemur Center is. Yes, I still love to see the Coquerel's sifakas, which always make me think of Nigel. But I also think about how the Center's mission is unique in the way that it combines research, education, and conservation. I have tremendous respect for the Center's work and the people who do it. The deep knowledge of lemurs created by the Center's research and care of the animals is possible because of the Center's tight focus on prosimians.

I feel privileged to volunteer at the Lemur Center and to be able to showcase the Center's research, education, and conservation efforts to visitors every week. It is also priceless for me to share my love of lemurs with my husband and two daughters, who have now fallen in love with lemurs through their frequent visits. As a family we regularly make financial donations to the Center, which recently included the adoption of a fat-tailed dwarf lemur, Raven. We love receiving the reports on "our" lemur, whose picture hangs in our family room for all to enjoy. Every time we look at Raven, we are reminded of the uniqueness of lemurs, and this makes us happy to be contributing to their welfare. I hope you will join my family and me and help support the Duke Lemur Center in whatever way you can.
