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Signal to Noise

Our giant pandas are a national treasure, and I'm bitter about it



My father texted me while they were at the National Zoo. I replied with the following message to pass along to my kids: "Be sure and yell 'OVERRATED!' at the giant pandas for me."

JOANNE S. LAWTON



By [Robert J. Terry](#) – Senior Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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My three children were treated to an end-of-summer hurrah this week, spending a few days with my parents. And that meant trips to several D.C. sightseeing stops.

My father texted me while they were at the National Zoo. I replied with the following message to pass along to my kids:

“Be sure and yell ‘OVERRATED!’ at the giant pandas for me.”

That’s right, I’m immune to the charms of these national treasures. I’d rather be strapped into a chair and made to watch the “Real Housewives of New Jersey” than watch the Panda Cam.

If I was his philanthropic adviser, I would have counseled Carlyle Group co-founder David Rubenstein to cut a check for the seals exhibit.

If you ask me, the giant pandas are the divas of Connecticut Avenue NW.

Sorry. But you’d be bitter too if, year after year after year, you were dragged to the zoo on school field trips or when relatives were in town and forced to linger at the panda habitat, waiting for a glimpse, something, of the vaunted Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing – only to have the black-and-white bears blithely nibble on bamboo, out of view.

For a kid like me growing up in Prince George’s County, the equivalent would have been trekking to RFK Stadium to see John Riggins and Joe Theismann take to the gridiron – only they didn’t just sit out the game, they never came to the sideline.

I’m well aware I’m in the minority here. Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing, gifts of the Chinese government, arrived in 1972 and attracted millions of visitors annually.

Mei Xiang and Tian Tian are the zoo's second power couple. This week, the Smithsonian said baby Bao Bao, who turns a year old Aug. 23, won its "Summer Showdown" online popularity contest, easily outpacing the Star-Spangled Banner flag. There was an outpouring of grief at red panda Shama's passing.

My children would have voted the same way in the Smithsonian's poll. "The baby panda was playing with her mother, putting on quite a show!" my dad informed me, and my daughter was able to get lots of great pictures.

Hmmm. Perhaps it's the pandas who are immune to my charms.

Robert J. Terry is managing editor of the Washington Business Journal. Contact him at 703-258-0821 or rterry@bizjournals.com.