



Sula's Story

By Dean Harrison

Sula, a lioness, was born to a Texas breeder who takes good care of his animals. She was shipped to us when she was only a couple months old. Bouncy and playful, she was full of life — a perfect friend for Malaika, who was born here at the park just two days before Sula. They “hit it off” and became close friends. They are always together playing with toys or whatever they find.

When they were about a year old, “Lion King” was being promoted. This was March of 1994. Sula and Malaika were contracted to sell the Lion King/Nestle Products campaign to all the major supermarkets in Arizona. We went to 13 corporate headquarters with Sula and Malaika to “close the deal.” All thirteen agreed to participate.

You should have seen the two young lionesses up on the boardroom conference tables! During this time, Sula, Malaika, and I became very close and the lions enjoyed each outing. The final promotion for Disney was at the Harkins Theater at 24th Street and Camelback for the grand opening matinee of “Lion King.” We walked right inside the theater and sat down in the front row. Many photographers took pictures, but we didn't stay for the movie.

Back at the park, both lionesses were working their way into Solomon's pride, which at the time consisted only of Solomon, an African lion, and his best friend Calvin, a Bengal tiger. Calvin accepted both ladies the first time he saw them. They played without incident. However, Solomon did not do so well and treated them harshly. Solomon himself was young, about three and a half years old, so he was at a time in his life when he needed to prove himself. It took eight months for Solomon to accept Sula and Malaika, but he finally gave his approval and we were all relieved. They could be together safely.

Over the months that followed, Sula and Malaika matured and came into season. They both married Solomon, which is the lion way. Sula became pregnant. On August 3, 1995, her water broke at 7:15 a.m., but no baby came. It wasn't until 5:00 p.m. that the first cub finally appeared, but he was dead. He had become stuck and couldn't be expelled in time. An hour later her water broke again, this time for the second cub, but as it approached where it could be seen, it had ruptured the birth sack and died too.

Our park veterinarian arrived on the scene and removed the dead infant cub. He attempted to remove a third cub, but that baby was also stuck. Prayeri had to put her arm, clear to the elbow, inside the sedated Sula. But the baby was too large to pass. Because Sula had now been through so much, the decision to do a caesarean section was made but could not be performed until the next morning. Dr. Ingram arrived early, Sula was opened, and the third dead baby, who weighed three pounds, 13 ounces, twice the normal size, was extracted dead. A fourth baby was quickly found, and miraculously it had a faint heartbeat.

Sharon Noble, Dr. Ingram's nurse, began resuscitation procedures — mouth-to-mouth, oxygen, stimulants, and lots of rubbing by hand. Finally, after thirty minutes, the little lion cub coughed. Again he

coughed, and after a few more minutes he breathed his first breath. Prayeri named him Lazarus, because he came from among the dead. He weighed almost three pounds, his eyes were closed and he was covered with large black spots — his camouflage markings. All four youngsters were males and abnormally large. This is why Sula had so much trouble. If this had happened in the wild, Sula and all the cubs would have died. At that time, Sula, although sedated, still had colostrum and perhaps some milk, but it soon dried up. We bottle fed Lazarus *Espilac*, then converted to another formula.

During the next 18 days, Sula underwent another three operations, for a total of five. The third and fourth were because her incisions opened and even her small intestines began to come out. In order to tackle this problem we called Dr. Bill McCabe, a general family practitioner, who brought in Dr. Chuck Wermuth, a general surgeon. Along with Dr. Irv Ingram, the team performed an extensive closure to secure the area. Support wraps were placed around Sula and she was hydrated again. By that time Sula had eaten almost nothing for 17 days and was very weak.

It looked like we were on our way to recovery, but two days later she had a fever — a bacterium was growing. She quickly became depressed and would not eat. Her hydration level dropped still further. We changed antibiotics in an effort to bring down the fever, but it seemed to have little effect. Then on Sunday afternoon, August 27, 1995, as we were looking at her, she miraculously sat up and began moving in an alert manner. Her eyes brightened and she had the behavior of a normal, healthy lioness.

In the next few minutes, she began to eat and drink and within a couple hours was even playing some. Sula played with Lazarus, pulling on him, licking his face and back, rolling him from side to side and even cleaning his bottom. What a change. Our prayers were answered. Sula was back among the living! Now she just had to eat, drink and rest and, of course, not pull out her stitches.

To all of you who participated in Sula's recovery, we at Out of Africa Wildlife Park thank you. You have helped save the life of a precious lion. Sula's life is now a testimony to the love found in all of us, put there by the One who made us.