

# GUNSMOKE'S "MISS KITTY:"

## Cheetah-Breeding Pioneer!



1

By independent guest writer,  
Cee-Cee Deslaurier-Tate

In later years, the actress turned to wildlife conservation, dedicating significant time and effort toward saving the endangered species of the world. With numerous trips to the eastern regions of Africa under her belt, Ms. Blake focused on preserving African wildlife, with species' populations dwindling at an alarming rate at the hands of poachers. One particular species facing extinction caught the actress's attention: the cheetah. Alongside her then-husband Frank Gilbert, the two were among the first private owners to successfully breed cheetahs in human care, sharing their knowledge within the zoological world. The Gilberts became renowned for saving these big cats from extinction. According to Becky Burgoyne, author of Ms. Blake's biography: "... The Gilberts' research and knowledge forever left a legacy for the survival of the endangered cheetah."

Amanda Blake stated, regarding her cheetah-breeding success, "'The cheetahs are a scientific project and we are attempting to do this in order to see that the species survives.'"



2

Donating both knowledge and cubs to zoos around the country, the Gilberts graciously assisted the Phoenix Zoo in launching their own cheetah-breeding program. The Zoo

received cubs from the Gilberts' in 1978. Long-time ladies' Auxiliary member and former President Jan Patten remarked, "We wanted to have cheetahs, and through [Amanda's] husband and herself...they were able to help us. They brought us cubs; I think there [were] three of them...they were wonderful. It was such a treat to have them here. And I know she [Amanda] was very proud...to have some in the Zoo here."

In addition to her conservation role, Ms. Blake served for many years as a ladies' Auxiliary

member, capitalizing upon her world-wide celebrity as "Miss Kitty" to lend a hand in numerous fundraising efforts.

I am honored to have interviewed key staff members and volunteers at the Phoenix Zoo, and to further spread awareness of Ms. Blake's achievements within the animal world, I have raised funds to install a paving brick in the Zoo's Predator Passage area, memorializing the Gilberts' work as cheetah-breeding pioneers. The Auxiliary, in honor of Amanda's membership within their

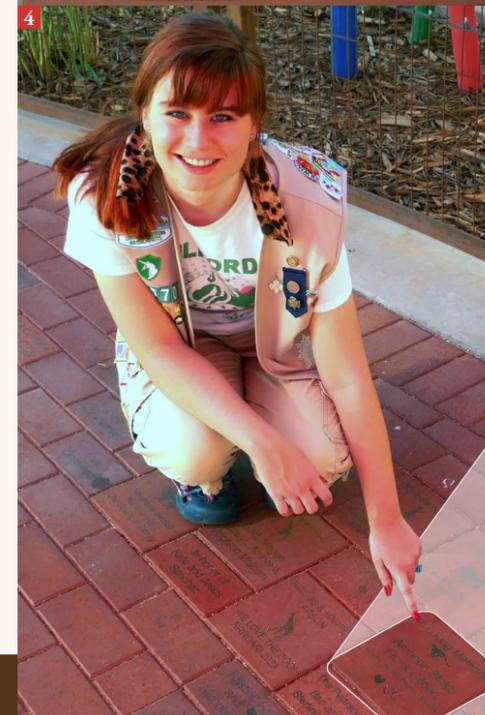
group, has graciously added her name to the Auxiliary Memorial Ramada. When visiting the Zoo, head to Predator Passage and the Auxiliary Ramada to view the physical tributes dedicated in memory of Ms. Blake!

1 Amanda Blake plaque at Zoo Auxiliary Ramada.

2 1974, Courtesy of Jane Price, Perfectly Amanda

3 Circa. 1976, Courtesy of Jane Price, Perfectly Amanda

4 Cee-Cee's Girl Scout Gold Award project, a brick for Amanda Blake.



4



In Loving Memory  
Amanda Blake  
Frank Gilbert  
Cheetah Breeding Program Pioneers  
CC