

Talking Pets with Tom

By Tom Blair

As the screen faded to black, a tear rolled down my cheek. The sincerity of her appeal, manifest in calm brown eyes, touched my heart.

What she said in American sign language was so simple, “Gorillas are endangered. This makes me sad. I need your help. Thanks, Koko.”

For the first time in history a member of an endangered species spoke directly to humans in a public service announcement. Koko is a lowland gorilla who has been taught human sign language by Dr. Penny Patterson. Penny and Koko have collaborated for more than three decades. Koko can understand more than 1,000 words of sign language and 2,000 words of spoken

English which has enabled her to voice her thoughts and feelings.

Catch a glimpse of Koko’s unique world when you visit www.koko.org.



From birthday parties to her first date, Koko’s family has captured her special moments on video.

Over the years, Koko and Penny have learned a lot, laughed a lot and shed a few tears. Koko shows us that love, long-

ing, happiness and sorrow are not just a part of the human experience but the legacy of all living creatures.

Tom Blair is an internationally syndicated columnist. His articles appear in publications throughout the US, Canada and Europe. Read his blog and listen to his radio show at www.ExploreTheMidwest.com.

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