

P-22: The Life and Death of an L.A. Cougar

with Miguel Ordeñana and Beth Pratt

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's your neighbor who exercises in denim, Alie Ward, back with an episode of *Ologies* that was very challenging to make, both technically and emotionally, but it's here and I'm so glad we finished it. So, this past Saturday, the king of Los Angeles, the animal of our eye, bid farewell and left his niche empty. You maybe saw a headline about a mountain lion in LA, or you wondered why P-22 was trending on Twitter. So, we here at *Ologies* scrambled to put together this week's urgent and really heartfelt celebration of the story of his life and the specific events that led to his death.

So, P-22 was a puma, those are also called mountain lions, cougars, ghost cats... great name. And since his discovery in 2012, he has been in news headlines as, like, an LA and a national treasure. But recently he'd been showing some unusual behavior including attacks on dogs and local residents, (we will get into it later) and this week, he died. So, we'll discuss exactly what went down with two experts who have known and loved him for years. But first, I wanted to talk to some non-experts, just regular folks the day after his death.

Aside: So, it's Sunday, December 18, 2022, it's 49°, which in LA is almost a state of emergency. It's a cold, inky night, there's no moon, and it's one of the longest and darkest days of the year, and we are a city in mourning. I wanted to hear how other Angelinos were handling the death of America's favorite wildcat, so I went to the Silver Lake area of LA where P-22 spent some of his last days. And I just stood in front of a grocery store, kind of like one of those people with clipboards, but instead I just had a hot mic and a lot of social anxiety.

Alie: Hi, can I ask you a question? It's for a science podcast.

Speaker 1: I literally have dinner, I'm sorry, or I totally would.

Alie: Don't even worry about it. No, it was about P-22, just wondering how people are feeling.

Speaker 1: So sad.

Alie: Right?!

Speaker 1: Yes, really sad.

Alie: Can I ask you a question for a science podcast?

Speaker 2: Um, no.

Alie: Can I ask you guys a question for a science podcast? It's pretty quick.

Speaker 3: Sorry, we don't have time.

Alie: That's cool... [*to self*] Ouch. I think I've got to talk to drunk people.

Aside: So, I headed to Franklin Avenue, this strip of sidewalk that's usually bustling with improv comedians, and couples on Bumble dates, and scientologists. So, as you can imagine, these folks tend to be more extroverted.

Alie: So, P-22 did mean something to you?

Speaker 4: It certainly did. My name is Casey Shaw, Casey James Shaw, Instagram @CaseyJamesShaw_Acts.

Alie: Thank you.

Speaker 4: Or just Casey James Shaw on Facebook.

Alie: I appreciate that.

Speaker 4: However, Casey Shaw, the man you're listening to at this moment, has been a huge hiker in Griffith Park for the last 4 years. And it's always been a huge legend that P-22 was out there, the one mountain lion that's out there. Knowing that he is dead sucks because you know, it's a death of a legend. A legend died and I, for one, am grieving. Rest in peace to the beautiful mountain lion. I used to call him Petey because I think that's better than P-22. I miss him already.

Aside: Just a side note. So, a few years ago, a local public radio station ran a poll to rename this cougar, offering alternatives such as Felix, Pounce de Lion, and Puma Thurman. And the name that won in a landslide? ... P-22. Because no one needs to rename C-3PO to Jeremy or anything. P-22 is great.

Alie: [*to self*] Definitely it's easier with drunk people.

Speaker 5: End of an era. I'm sad, bittersweet maybe.

Alie: I was just asking locals how they feel about P-22.

Speaker 6: Heartbroken.

Alie: Heartbroken?

Speaker 6: Yeah, it's interesting, I saw him not too long ago, maybe... I saw him walking out of the driveway, I was walking my dog at maybe 2 in the morning, [*Alie gasps*] a long time ago. So, I saw him coming out of the driveway and he was so beautiful, but it was really scary. I had to pick up my dog and leave but... it's just heartbreaking.

Alie: Just sad.

Speaker 6: It's really sad.

Aside: One guy I talked to on Sunday had just moved from Manhattan and recollected first hearing about P-22.

Speaker 7: I think I was impressed.

Alie: Yeah?!

Speaker 7: Yeah, I was like, "Cool." When I see a coyote, I'm like [*gasps excitedly*]. I get really excited, and the fact that I might see a mountain lion is exciting to me.

Alie: It is, it is. I do have some bad news. He did pass away yesterday.

Speaker 7: Fuck.

Alie: I know! I was like, "I don't want to tell him."

Speaker 8: Went on a whole roller coaster.

Speaker 7: I didn't know he existed and then... [*laughs*]

Alie: I know. I'm really sorry that I had to break that news to you.

Speaker 7: It's okay, we'll take it. I mean, he didn't even know... You broke...

Speaker 8: I'm going to go look him up.

Alie: Go look him up... Did P-22 affect how you saw wildlife in LA?

Speaker 9: Yeah, I mean when I saw P-22, it was from that Natural History Museum exhibit and I was like, "Oh my god that's so cool that they can get information," and the fact that he was around for so long and they were able to get all this data... Yeah, it's really cool.

Aside: So, let's talk with two of the folks that have worked with P-22 the longest. So, Miguel is the wildlife biologist and the Community Science Manager at the Natural History Museum of LA County, and he is an expert on camera traps and urban wildlife, and is directly responsible for the discovery of this beloved cougar. And we'll hear all about his personal experiences as well as what led to the cat's death this week.

Beth Pratt is the Regional Executive Director for California at the National Wildlife Federation and also leads the nonprofit SaveLACougars.org, which campaigns to help save this population of mountain lions from extinction. And she wrote a book called *When Mountain Lions Are Neighbors: People and Wildlife Working It Out in California*. And she gave a TED Talk about P-22 called, "How a Lonely Cougar in Los Angeles Inspired the World." And I called her up on Sunday about 24 hours after he died and we just chatted on the phone, she was in a parking lot. And given the circumstances and the rush, the audio isn't usual *Ologies* audio on either of the interviews, but it's plenty fine and the content is well worth it.

So, stretch out in the sun and get ready for data, discoveries, wilderness, freeways, legacies, and more, to celebrate the life and understand the death of the wild cougar that captivated the world, P-22.

Beth: Yeah, it's Beth Pratt and she/her.

Alie: I absolutely hate that I'm talking to you under these circumstances but I'm glad I'm getting a chance to chat.

Beth: Yeah, it's been a tough... Well, it's been a tough few weeks, but especially the last couple days. And it's also been hard... I have had animals my whole life, I've had to put way too many down, as we all know who have animals, a big grieving process with that. But this is so difficult because I'm trying to grieve this animal I've loved for a decade, he's my longest serious relationship. But I also have to be this public spokesperson for him, so it's been really tough having to do my job in some respects but also grieve and, you know, but that entails crying on CNN, but that's okay. That's the way to honor him so thanks for having me. *[laughs]*

Alie: There's people across the world who are feeling that pain and feeling this loss too, and I think there might be some people who don't live in LA who are like, "Why am I seeing... What is P-22? Is this a new Xbox game?" *[Beth laughs]* And I thought maybe we could go back a little bit and learn a little bit more about his history. For you, when did you happen to P-22's journey?

Beth: It's a good question. And I agree, I mean, part of what's helped with the grieving process, I think, is often when you have to put down a pet, you're grieving that, the world isn't grieving with you, and that's been wonderful. I mean, I got back from a full day yesterday and there's P-22 trending on Twitter. I think it's the first time in history a mountain lion has trended on Twitter. Part of me thinks he would really like that.

But I came into the P-22 story almost at the beginning. He was discovered by Miguel Ordeñana, who is a good friend now. I think P-22 has brought so many of us together that we're kind of family who have been working for his protection. But he was discovered in February of 2012 by remote camera; these are ghost cats, they're really good at staying hidden so the

technologies like cameras and more recently Ring cameras, really help us discover not just mountain lions but what wildlife is out there. And on that camera was what we called the famous puma butt photo where that was actually P-22 made his entrance into the world a little, not perhaps the most graceful way, which was a photo of his butt. [*Alie laughs*]

But for Miguel, they were doing a study with Friends of Griffith Park just to see what wildlife was in Griffith Park and get some data on it, and what was just wonderful about that was, of course, nobody expected to see a mountain lion.

Aside: So, let's meet Miguel. He was gracious enough to get on the phone from his desk at the Natural History Museum of LA County on a Sunday, the day after P-22's death.

Miguel: My name is Miguel Ordeñana and he/him.

Alie: I was introduced to you by friends in the Nerd Brigade and you were like a legend like, "That's the P-22 guy." [*both laugh*] So, I was introduced to you from across the museum. You have been studying this animal for years. How long has P-22 been in your life?

Miguel: He's been in my life since I discovered the first images of him in 2012 and it's just... even saying that is still hard even a day later after his passing. Yeah, he's been such a big part of my life, and because even after that discovery of his image, and me sharing that with a lot of people, and then that famous photo getting out there of him in front of the Hollywood sign, getting out to the world and just capturing everybody's imagination. I've been photographing him since then, consistently in Griffith Park for the past decade. And the motivation for that is just... I love... I mean, that's kind of the tool of my trade is camera traps for research on carnivores, but it's also a hobby as well; it's just a lot of fun.

But in this case, I was very committed to it because of him and because I felt like there was this need to get continuous visuals of him, which has hopefully filled in some gaps here and there about how he's doing that his GPS collar, which gets his locations, isn't always getting. And so, I hope a lot of people as well valued just getting photos of him regularly and seeing him through these beautiful images. He's just a really charismatic subject as far as something to photograph, he's just a beautiful animal, and even people who studied mountain lions and are always looking at mountain lion images acknowledge that he's just a really handsome cat.

Aside: It's no joke. After this discovery, the media dubbed him "The Brad Pitt of Pumas" and I get it. I mean, this mountain lion was just blessed; golden fur, amber eyes, and symmetrical features, typically only available through TikTok filters, or surgery. So, imagine if a native tiger crossed the Hudson River to live in Central Park, but also happened to be weirdly gorgeous. So, when images went around of this cat, papped on a ridge above this twinkling cityscape of LA, people took notice [*"I'm literally obsessed with you."*] and not just the nature nerds... everyone.

Miguel: So, it's just really great for that reason as well, including people of my own family that never considered wildlife as something important, or something even living amongst them, or in the city. It's just changed peoples' lives and peoples' perspectives, and it's just been an amazing journey. And just to see the floods of emotions and responses after the announcement was made that he was compassionately euthanized has just been overwhelming. It's partially sad, just to be constantly getting reminded every second of the day for the past two days by texts, and social media posts, and phone calls. And I've had friends and family that, to be honest, I haven't heard from them in years, and all of a sudden, I get these texts and messages. Just to know that this is just a very unifying moment.

Aside: So, let's celebrate how rare his story was.

Alie: There is a puma, a *lion*, in the middle of Los Angeles, is not something to be at all understated.

Beth: Right. You can think of it as Central Park. Because I think the comparison with Central Park is it is centrally located in the city as Central Park. So, you know this is not the outskirts of LA, this is smack dab in the middle of LA. The Griffith Observatory's there, the Hollywood sign is there, it's freeways on three sides, and Hollywood Boulevard on the south side. So yeah, this is a mountain lion taking up residence in a very, very urban area.

But it is bigger than Central Park. It is, I think, the largest urban park with wilderness. So, even though you have all those things, and you have Brad Pitt and other movie stars like Alan Ruck, who had a P-22 sighting, which I love. I used in the eulogy because he emailed me saying, "I was on my deck and saw P-22 and said, 'Hey, P-22!'" like you would to a celebrity. It is a really urban park but having said that, it had enough wildness in it where he could retreat and where there were enough deer that he could survive there, even amongst all these people.

Aside: So, this lion was discovered via Miguel's camera trap images.

Beth: So yeah, the first story goes up, it was kind of like he was a local hero. At that point, the headline didn't even say P-22, it was, "Mountain Lion Makes a Home in Griffith Park." I read about it, I didn't believe it, called up Jeff Sikich, who was mentioned in the article, he was the National Park Service biologist who studies and who collared P-22. I even expressed my disbelief on the phone like, "Are you sure?" [*laughs*] But he was so gracious, he's now a very good friend and took me out for the day. We're walking around Griffith Park and I'm like, "What the hell? Are you serious? There's a mountain lion here? There's people on their bikes, and playing golf, and there's the Hollywood sign."

But it really was a life-changing moment for me who had spent most of my career in places like Yellowstone and Yosemite. I live outside Yosemite and worked there for a decade. It really made me question myself, the initial resistance to, "Well, this cat shouldn't be here." But at the end of the day, I was like, "Of course he should." I mean, this is his only way of surviving.

Aside: Cut to 10 years later and Beth leads SaveLACougars.org, which has been working this whole time to help fund and build a wildlife crossing over this massive stretch of freeway to help all kinds of critters, including pumas.

Beth: So, that's how I came to P-22. He had me at hello. Just standing in that park and looking at a freeway that surrounded it and just realizing that this cat had... that he was doing everything he could to survive in the most challenging of circumstances and we needed to do something to help him and his relatives.

Alie: And how long do they think pumas have been living in southern California? This is their natural habitat, but how long have they been roaming around eating deer, and bunnies, and such?

Beth: They've been hanging on since the last Ice Age and even outlasted saber-toothed cats, which they coexisted with. For me, it's a testament to their survival skills, that they *have* hung on despite all these freeways we've put in, despite all this development encroaching in their habitat, despite every challenge you throw at them, they're still there.

Aside: Okay, so if you live in LA, every few months you might get a relative from another state sending you a link to a national news story about P-22. Like, the time in 2016 when circumstantial evidence pointed to this mountain lion leaping over a 9-foot razor wire fence at the nearby LA Zoo and eating an elderly koala named Killarney. Now, typically, this would be a crime punishable by death, but the LA Zoo, situated within Griffith Park, essentially said, "Well, it's P-22. Mountain lions will mountain lion," and he was fully acquitted, got away with it.

And another year, my dad sent me an early morning text that P-22 was stationed at a crawlspace under some house and even a tennis ball gun and a bean bag launcher wouldn't spook him away. And LA is giant, but my dad wanted to know if this was close to where I lived. And I had to tell him, "Um, yeah, actually Dad, that lion is like 4 blocks away." It was just up the street, it literally was, which was so thrilling for me. But yes, even the media and the tabloids were kind to P-22.

[clip from news report:]

Should residents be concerned that there's a mountain lion loose in their neighborhood? Fish and Wildlife says no. They say that P-22 is loose in this neighborhood all the time and that they've never had a report of any humans having issues with P-22. Reporting from Los Feliz tonight, Elex Michaelson, ABC7.

Alie: What is typically the range of this species of puma? How far from their birthplace do they typically wander and why was it so staggering to see that first image of him, realizing that he was walking among the hills of the Hollywood sign and strolling down Sunset Boulevard and inhabiting Griffith Park?

Miguel: Yeah, typically a male mountain lion, when it reaches adult age of about a year-and-a-half to two years old, the mom basically kicks him out. It's just too big of a kid to be feeding anymore, especially with limited resources around and in a place like the fragmented ecosystem like the Santa Monica mountains. They've got to find their own food and territory but also an area where they don't think a large male already occupies. And if they run into a male on that territory, they'll keep moving on. So, that journey can be long, it's called dispersal.

But what's unique about his journey is just kind of the context of it, right? He was born in the western Santa Monica Mountains and it's a situation where there's a lot of mountain lions fighting over space because they're basically surrounded on all sides by these really formidable barriers. On the north of the Santa Monicas, it's the 101 Freeway, to the south it's the Pacific Ocean. And to the east, which is where P-22 went, is the 405 Freeway as one of the first barriers.

And so, because of this kind of hyper territoriality, lack of space, and their solitary nature, they just don't want to be around each other, especially males. And more open spaces where there is a lot of space to go around, they will tolerate a few males. But in this case, they're so territorial that they're killing off not only females but they're also killing off their own offspring. It's natural to kill the offspring of other individuals and males to try and get females into estrous and things like that and remove competitors, but your own offspring? That's just another level there.

And then the other option, if you don't want to fight that large male that already occupies that territory is to leave, which is really a hard ask when you have to cross 10-lane freeways like P-22 did. And 2 other mountain lions tried to do that, and then one after that, or a couple after that, and the first two got killed immediately on the 405 Freeway. So, he did something, just by stepping foot and successfully crossing the 405, that was something that was unprecedented. And then the rest of his journey from there was kind of just writing the history books, every step he made. Crossing through Beverly Hills, Bel Air, all this little strip of greenspace that connected the 405 all the way to the 101 Freeway which is called the Cahuenga Pass. And then he crossed that freeway, the 101 Freeway, that separates the rest of the Santa Monica Mountains from Griffith Park, which is where he ended up.

Aside: Just a side note for anyone who lives on the part of Earth that's not LA. So, the 405 is the Voldemort of transportation. Just saying its name raises hackles, it'll curl your shoulders with dread. "It is the busiest and most congested freeway in the US," boasts its own Wikipedia page. The term "Carmageddon," was inspired by our 405, *the* 405.

Also, if you're wondering why southern Californians use the "the", I was curious also and I had to look this up. Apparently, freeways really got their start down here and they used to have this really whack numbering system that always changed so people would just say "The San Diego freeway," or "The Hollywood freeway," just for clarity. And when they cleaned up the naming system in the '70s, each highway finally got its own number, but the "the" was hard to shake, it stuck around, hence The 101, The 10.

And just a little fun trivia, so in LA, we're all fans of the Dodgers, but the Dodgers were known in the late 1800s as the Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers because New Yorkers had to dodge subway cars on their way to work just to make it there alive. People were dying all the time in Brooklyn from the trolley. But the team The Dodgers headed west in the late 1950s, but the name stuck and as it all comes around, P-22 was not just the city mascot, but a true Dodger in the literal sense.

Miguel: That journey itself already could have been legendary but then even scientists thought, "Hey, he's probably just going to be there a little while and probably try and move back, or move somewhere else, or get cornered and hit by a car, or try to cross the street and get hit by a car." And instead, what he did was he blew people's minds again by coexisting with people for years and keeping to himself, eating just the same things other mountain lions would eat in the more natural, larger open spaces, like deer primarily, then coyotes and raccoons. And so, he wasn't changing, he was showing that there is this opportunity to coexist with these animals if you give them just a little bit of connectivity and the resources that they need.

These mountain lions have been here and survived the Ice Age extinction. So, they have a long history here, they're the only big cat to survive the Ice Age extinction is because of their adaptability.

Aside: So, that was around 11,000 years ago during a period that led to the extinction of megafauna like giant ground sloths, and mastodons, and mammoths, and 400-pound beavers. But the mountain lion survived.

Miguel: They can live in all types of habitat types from wetlands to deserts, to mountainous areas, to some extent, urban areas. They eat a lot of different things and so, unlike those other big cats that went extinct like the saber-toothed cat.

And so, to see that we've kind of been selfish enough to finally be their kryptonite is heartbreaking and it's shameful for me. And the fact that knowing that he kind of sealed his fate as soon as he stepped foot on that 405, and that was our fault, is really hard to swallow. And when I had that conversation with my daughter to explain the situation to her about how he's probably not going to make it and that we kind of failed him and a lot of other mountain lions, a lot of other species that are not doing well. And he's a really prime example of that, which is sad for him.

But I think he left an incredible legacy like the wildlife crossing that just broke ground this past April, and also changing people's minds about human-wildlife coexistence and why it's okay and important to have animals like predators, even though they're sometimes controversial, in our ecosystems.

Alie: And you know, LA, we all know LA has millions of people. What's the population of mountain lions that we know of, or that we can estimate?

Miguel: Well, I mean we can kind of estimate, at least within the Santa Monica Mountains and over the Simi Hills, it's like 10 to 15, and that includes kittens that usually don't survive a given year. There are some mountain lions that are collared, some that are uncollared that have yet to be discovered because they're such an elusive species. So, that's usually the estimate we throw around for the Santa Monica Mountains. And there's much more in the San Gabriel Mountains, nobody's ever studied mountain lions in the San Gabriels, so that's just a really, kind of, interesting mystery there.

But yeah, that's kind of important to note that, yes, 10 to 15. And then think about that, that really finite, small number and then throw in all these urban dangers like rat poison exposure, freeways, inbreeding depression, throwing all that into the mix really creates a recipe for extinction. And that's kind of what they're facing in the next 50 years if connectivity is not improved and if we don't do better about coexisting with them, and not putting rat poison out there, and being more tolerant of them in our open spaces.

Aside: Miguel says he's proud of the way that LA is tolerant of its wildlife and one way that we can give back to them is just letting them roam naturally and since scientists began tracking Santa Monica mountain lions in the last two decades, over a dozen have been killed crossing freeways. In Europe, in Canada, they have gotten hip to wildlife crossings, but LA is in need. And via Miguel, and state and federal agencies, and all of Beth's work with SaveLACougars.org, enough money was finally raised for the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing, in Agoura Hills, over the 101 Freeway. And they just broke ground a few months ago, while P-22 was still alive, and P-22 was a major factor in raising the \$90 million it's taking to build.

Alie: Those wildlife corridors are so huge and such a giant step, and it makes me wonder, how many miles of kilometers does a mountain lion this size typically walk a day in their range? And P-22, was he able to do that in Griffith Park?

Miguel: So yeah, usually the territory size for a large male is 200 square miles and they use all of it. They patrol their territory and, unfortunately, Griffith Park is big, it's one of the biggest city parks in the country, but it's only 8 to 9 square miles; 9 if we include the neighboring properties like the Forest Lawn Cemetery, the Warner Bros Studios that go right up against the park that also have open space. And within that is a bunch of disturbed habitat like the cemetery plots, and obviously the property of the Warner Bros has a lot of different use, and within Griffith Park itself there's golf courses, there's the Greek Theatre, there's public city buildings, all types of stuff, used to be pony rides and train rides. And now, there's this mountain lion trying to not only survive in the smallest territory ever recorded for a mountain lion but coexist with all of this disturbance. And so, I think it's just amazing, all these interior roads that have an MPH of 25 miles an hour, but people go 50, 60 miles an hour on these roads. So, it's just remarkable that he's able to survive despite all that and our kind of selfish use of the park, in my opinion, in a lot of ways.

Aside: So, just a sidenote here, Griffith Park is named after Colonel Griffith Jenkins Griffith, who is not actually a colonel at all, but a guy who got rich in the mining industry and he owned the land as an ostrich farm. But he would only visit during the day because of ghost stories involving cursed previous owners. So, in the 1890s he was like, "Los Angeles, I would like to give you a giant piece of wilderness," saying, "It must be made a place of rest and relaxation for the masses, a resort for the rank and file, for the plain people." LA was like, "Oh wow, thanks Griffith J. Griffith, we'll name it after you."

And a few years later, Griffith J Griffith shot his wife in the face, and she survived, and was thankfully granted a divorce. And Griffith J Griffith, he was sent to San Quentin, but he got out after two years and he was like, "LA, I'm back and I want to give you some more dollars. Let's build a Greek theater and observatory on this land," and LA was like, "Uh, we're good dude, no thank you. You shot your wife in the face, big yikes, and we are good with the haunted ostrich farm you gave us. Go ahead and keep your money." But Griffith J Griffith got the last laugh because he left his fortune to the city in his will, and now we have 4,300 acres of playgrounds, and trails, and a Greek theater, and an observatory, wilderness, and rattlesnakes, and coyotes, and lizards, and I love it.

Miguel: What I will say also is because it's so small he can get from one side to the other in a couple hours, or maybe even less than that, in search of deer and in search of refuge. And I think he could be at any place at any given time, which kind of adds to that wonder, right? When someone goes on a hike that next morning, he could literally be just feet away from you, just blending into the dry brush, taking a rest and trying to stay out of sight, or he could be on the totally opposite side of the park in the most rugged, remote canyon amongst a bunch of poison oak.

So, I think that's always something that will hopefully inspire people to think about this park differently, and it's definitely made me think about it differently. Especially as a kid that grew up right outside the park and went to it, that was my connection to nature, my Yosemite. That's where my mom taught me how to play catch and we had barbecues; we'd hike to the Hollywood sign when you still could do that and bring our *pollo loco*. And my same cousins, who just saw it as this place for recreation, hiking, and adventure, and exercise now see it totally differently because I would take them on hikes, I would talk to them about P-22. And the same park is just now this magical place.

Aside: So, Griffith Park is this important space in this giant city, but let's go back to the moment this all started and why Miguel is The P-22 Guy. I've always wanted to hear this story and now seems like the best time to celebrate this piece of history.

Alie: That first photo that ushered in this era of P-22, I feel like... What was it like for you, that moment when you realized that you knew a secret that no one else in the world but you and this lion knew? *[laughs]*

Miguel: Yeah, I mean it was... it was life changing. And I can vividly, I have a bad memory to be honest, *[chuckles]* but that is something I vividly remember. I remember how hot it was in my apartment, I remember what my computer and my desk looked like and the fact that I had no shoes on, *[Alie giggles]* and all these types of things because that was just such an amazing moment to me. Obviously, the birth of my children, and getting married, and meeting my wife, and all those other things that are at the top of the list and are definitely there as well, but this was just one of those moments. And I mean, I'll describe it.

So, I was out in the field that day checking on cameras that I had set out as part of the Griffith Park Connectivity Study that was this grassroots project... That's another aspect of this story that just... So crazy this project almost didn't happen, that discovered P-22, and it was just this passion project of mine, and I was able to recruit two other biologists, and a Friends Group in Griffith Park was able to support. And then to say, "Hey, I'm Miguel, I'm a biologist, I'm really passionate about this park, it means a lot to me, and now that I have this training, I know that there's a lot that has been understudied in this park and taken for granted." And people listened.

We scraped up whatever we could. I would work on weekends, I had a full-time job with the Forest Service at the time, I would go after work. I rented an apartment right on the edge of Griffith Park and would do this in my free time and set up cameras. We came together as a team to design this study and put these cameras out on potential corridors and the edges of the park, in the hopes of proving that Griffith Park is not an island and there's this ecosystem that has hope and people should see as an urban wildlife oasis.

So, I put this camera out and we had started getting images of deer crossing over the freeway, using freeway overpasses, going through equestrian tunnels. And then going up to this favorite camera spot, it had a great view of the sky, right over the 101 Freeway, and right on top of the Ford Amphitheater, this ridgeline where, that if you live in LA, there's this big illuminated white cross that people see, it's right next to that cross, that's where the camera was. And I was going there just to get hopefully some bobcat photos, that's still a cool animal, the coolest animal that was living there, in my opinion, at the time, and scrambled back to my apartment.

I always immediately check the SD cards for images, as soon as I got home, a sweaty mess, and I start scrolling through image after image. At first it was as usual, a bunch of grass triggering my camera. [Alie laughs] And then a bunch of rabbits, and then deer, and coyotes, which are cool. I love coyotes, but it gets old after a while. And then all of a sudden, this massive puma butt comes across my screen. [Alie laughs] And I literally jumped out of my little rolling chair and wobbled a little bit, almost fell over. I don't tell people about that clumsy aspect usually [Alie laughs] but who cares, right? As soon as I got my balance, I was like, "What the hell?" basically.

I scrolled back to some other images just to refresh my eyes because I knew that someone was walking their Great Dane quite often in front of that camera and neighboring cameras and so I thought, "Maybe it's... I'm seeing things, it's been hot today, maybe it's a Great Dane butt right against my camera lens." [Alie laughs] And it definitely wasn't. When I got back to it, it was obviously a puma because of the tail, the paws, the size of the animal, the colors, all of it. It was obviously a puma. I just had this information that I immediately wanted to share with people.

And then I just started touching my pockets for my phone and realized that I left it in my car, and I was so upset at myself, and I just bolted. I ran out of my apartment, barefoot, two blocks. [Alie laughs] Two blocks away! I got lucky I didn't step on some glass bottles or anything, and went to my car, grabbed my phone, called my wife, she didn't pick up... then my fiancé. And then I called the other two biologists, both of them didn't pick up. [Alie laughs] I had this incredible Bigfoot sighting-like experience that I wanted to share with somebody because I knew it was so important and so impactful, just the fact that a puma made it there.

And the reason for that is because when we were starting the study people were like, "Why are you wasting your time and your resources?" in that Griffith Park is just too isolated, too fragmented. And to some degree, it is, it is really not suitable for a mountain lion. But people thought it was just this isolated place that a mountain lion would never reach. And all of a sudden there's this proof that not only is there connectivity for Griffith Park, but it's somehow connected enough for the most space-needy, urban-sensitive animal out here. A mountain lion made it here, and that was thought of as an impossibility, and so it's kind of the same as like how people think seeing Bigfoot or Chupacabra is an impossibility and people would send photos trying to keep those rumors floating around and it would be, "Hey, I found a mountain lion finally," and it's their cat, or their dog, a coyote. And finally, we got this proof.

I feel like this is just so gratifying for me as somebody who really saw a lot more in Griffith Park than the average person, from a personal standpoint and then also as a biologist. So, for me to

finally get that out there and get that message immediately... Finally, one of the biologists, Erin Boydston, called me back, made me send her the image so she could see it for her own eyes, then she passed it on to the National Park Service and the Park Service took it from there.

They came out to Griffith Park, a place they didn't really have any research in before because there's no mountain lions there. It was really far from where they worked and the rest of the Santa Monica Mountains, to the point where they needed advice on where to put a trap out for mountain lions. I knew, and my colleague Erin knew about some different properties in the park, and they found a place near the reservoir in the park, Hollywood Reservoir.

They had some moments where coyotes got to the bait and took it away and there's these... What would flash through my head was, "Oh my god, that was the opportunity that we just lost, and this mountain lion is never going to get captured, collared, we're not going to learn anything from it, it's just going to disappear or get killed on the freeway before we're going to learn anything from this incredible animal." But finally, it was captured about three weeks later, and collared, and his genetics connected him to the western Santa Monica Mountains, and 14 months later, that beautiful *National Geographic* image from Steve Winter went viral and his story started reaching the world.

Aside: And if you haven't seen them, look up Steve Winter's photos of P-22, it took him over a year of finagling nocturnal camera traps and working with animal experts to get this one iconic shot of a cougar foregrounded in this halo of light, with the Hollywood sign moonlit behind him. It won so many photojournalism prizes and it really put urban wildlife in the spotlight.

Miguel: And I mean, I remember when he was still being looked for and they were hoping to capture him, there were rumors floating around that because this is Griffith Park, because Griffith Park goes against the Hollywood Hills, that this was some exotic pet that escaped from some movie star's mansion, [*Alie gasps then laughs*] and that the genetics would prove that. So, I'm not going to name any names but some people that would be embarrassed were really saying that.

So, that was incredible to know where he came from, he didn't come from the San Gabriels, or the Verdugos, or some weird, inbred lion that someone had as a pet. It was from, yeah, the west Santa Monica Mountains confirming that he has this amazing journey. And then after that, we were like, "Okay now we can learn hopefully a little bit about him before he dies, how he uses this really urban landscape but it's too small. It's a tiny fraction of the size a male mountain lion uses, so he's going to leave, he's going to bolt and get killed, and whatever." But I was hoping... Like, every photo I would get, video I would get, I cherished every single one of those and now they probably count in the hundreds, because I never knew which one was my last. For me to have that feeling for the past 10 years was a gift [*voice starts to tremble*] that he gave me and a lot of people... Sorry,

Alie: No, no. I've been crying all day about it. [*both laugh softly*]

Miguel: And so, yeah, I'm just truly grateful and I hope I can honor that and honor the people that also worked hard to get his message out there and do so much with his story.

Aside: Miguel says that P-22's journey mirrored his own grandparents who immigrated from Nicaragua to LA to find a better life for themselves and for their family. And like so many souls who moved to Hollywood as total unknowns, P-22 became a living legend. So, in 2012, P-22 became the 22nd puma collared and studied by the National Park Service, and it turns out that when they ran the genetics, his father was none other than P-001. Hollywood loves a nepo baby.

Beth: They are now up to 103 cats that they have trapped, at 20 years.

Alie: Wow!

Beth: I know, it's amazing. Now, not all those cats are still alive, obviously, this is a 20-year study. But to me it's also phenomenal, it's not just P-22 in the greater Santa Monica Mountains but that they have studied 103 cats. So, that was February of 2012; it was pretty amazing. I read that headline in the *LA Times* and I didn't believe it, I thought it was fake news. [*Alie laughs*] I was like, "There's no way there's a mountain lion in Griffith Park!" Yeah! I mean, what?! [*laughs*]

Aside: So, it was big news. Oh, speaking of bigness...

Alie: And what about the size of a mountain lion? When we think of a lion, I think probably most of us think of an African lion, or maybe we've seen a lion at the zoo. How big do they get? How big did P-22 get? And what's their... I guess that's— I'm asking all my questions, [*speaks rapidly*] how old are they, and what do they like, and what sign are they, and how many babies do they have? [*laughs*] So many questions.

Beth: Yeah, I could do a rapid fire, sure. I think they're Aries. Actually no, they'd be Leo. Their sign is Leo, obviously.

Aside: Okay, so female pumas give birth anytime between May and October. But, just a few weeks ago, news broke that one puma, P-99, gave birth to four cubs in late July and folks, if it was between July 23rd and August 22nd, they *are* Leos. [*excited gasp*]

Alie: How big do they get and what's their typical diet? Do they prefer to take down a deer, do they tend to live in prides?

Beth: Yeah, so all good questions. I mean, first of all, yeah, I think their sign is Leo. Their prey of choice is deer, mule deer. They evolved to hunt mule deer. Having said that, they're cats and all of us who have cats know that they are opportunistic predators and will take down anything that moves if the opportunity presents itself. I have indoor cats and I'll tell you, a bug doesn't even make it that comes in the house. But P-22, for a decade, eats deer.

Aside: So, I had to know. How many calories a day do mountain lions need? Well, about 8 to 10 pounds of meat and they *just* eat meat. So, that translates to about 4,000 calories a day, and about 50 deer a year. I always thought that they were out just snacking on squirrels and stuff, but squirrels are only a pound each and catching a dozen squirrels a day would be exhausting.

Beth: Yeah, they're not big animals. You know, P-22, 120, 130 pounds. They are kind of the size of a big Rottweiler. They're not African lion-sized. In other areas, I have seen mountain lion weights get up to 180, but California, they tend to stay a little leaner mainly because we don't have elk and some of the other bigger ungulates, I think, but I'm just guessing on that.

Aside: And how long can a well-fed kitty live? Okay, well house cats; their lifespan is between 12 to 18 years. But the world record for domestic longevity belongs to a Texas kitty cat named Creme Puff, who lived to be 38 years old and ate broccoli, and eggs, and turkey bacon, and coffee with cream every day, and a sip of red wine every few days. She also had a catio and a feline gym, and a better life than me. Now, what about wild pumas?

Beth: I mean, P-22's great-grandpa, he was... You know, 12 years old is extremely old for a male mountain lion because usually they will get displaced by a male seeking territory. So, he was a pretty old cat. He was definitely beyond his golden years if you ask me.

Alie: And you know, you mentioned he was a great-grandpa but the great irony of that is he probably wasn't, right? Technically speaking.

Beth: Yeah, I know. What's most sad to me is here's this cat that was just remarkable on every measure. Wildlife are individuals. I have a biology field undergrad, and I consider myself a scientist even though it's not my day job, but I'm also, I have to say, an animal rights person in some respects. Animals are individuals, they have emotions and feelings, and I think what's great is science is catching up with proving that, what all of us who had dogs and cats our whole lives knew.

And P-22 is no exception, he is different than his counterparts in some respects; he has his own personality. Not every cat would have strolled down Sunset Boulevard, I don't care how desperate. Not every cat would have made that journey. In fact, most of his mountain lion relatives in the Santa Monica Mountains don't make it successfully. Not every cat would have stayed in Griffith Park and just coexisted so well for 10 years. And he's just got... you know, he does have a certain measure of, I like to call it gumption or *chutzpah*, and personal charm. He's a hard cat not to love.

But although we celebrate him and LA loves him and the world does – look at what's happening these last few days – but he wasn't actually a happy ending. Because yes, he is the poster cat, and why we use him as the poster cat for the Save LA Cougars campaign is this whole population that he is a part of, is inbreeding themselves out of extinction. These freeways are trapping them because they can't escape into new territory, and the new mountain lions outside of their family can't get to this population that is south of the 101.

So, any cat that lives south of the 101, the only dates they have are ones in their family. If they're going on Tinder, they are looking at swiping and it's their daughter and great-granddaughter. [*Alie squirms*] So yeah, icky right? Not one you want to pop up for you on tinder, but that's their only choice. So, they're inbreeding themselves out of existence to the point where they're showing birth defects which is the warning bell, and that's what the National Park Service research showed.

But P-22 is the ultimate example of that. He is the extreme example of how this impacts breeding; he can't even breed, he's never had a girlfriend. And you know, I think one of the reasons LA loves him so much is that if you are an LA person, you know that that 405 divide impacts your dating life. [*Alie laughs*] It does. If you meet somebody and they live on the other side of the 405, it ain't happening, too much work. [*Alie still laughing*]

Alie: Oh my god, I lived in Eagle Rock and had a boyfriend that lived in Venice, and I literally had to move downtown because the commute to see each other was like 2 hours and I was like, "Fine, I'll move downtown." But yeah, no, that's real. It's like, you might as well have a different passport. [*"Get on the 405 until you can't take it anymore."*] And you know, on that note, traffic is one of our biggest enemies and I imagine that the biggest threat is vehicular deaths, right?

Beth: Yeah, actually there's a few things that are there. I think what I would sort of classify as their biggest threat is just this human interface which breaks down into a few areas. One is, it's both death but also the isolation caused by the freeways. Where we're putting the Wallis-Annenberg Wildlife Crossing actually don't get a lot of roadkill because the barrier is so big, they don't even try. We know this from GPS points, they come up to a freeway, and they turn around because they're like, [*frustrated sigh*] No way, I am not trying that. I've stood on the 101 Freeway at 2 AM and I wouldn't even do it, it's that bad.

But yes, most male mountain lions past age 2 do not make it. The males are the ones that try to seek out new territory and most of them get hit by cars. P-22 made that journey, not just crossing those two freeways but he evaded cars successfully, obviously with some wits, for so

long. Yet it seems like now, it was really that vehicle strike, probably he wasn't in his right mind, he's in pain, that doomed him in the end. You know, it's really hard, it's really hard to know that. That here we are even trying to solve the problem, but we were too late for him, and I will forever feel terrible about that.

Aside: So, we'll hear the specifics about what exactly brought him down after the break.

But first, every episode we donate to a cause of the ologist's choosing, and this week it's going, of course, to SaveLACougars.org which is leading the charge to promote habitat connectivity and continuing P-22's legacy. So, learn more at SaveLACougars.org, and that donation was made possible by sponsors of the show.

[Ad Break]

So, let's get to the most recent era of his life and recent developments with this late and great cougar.

Alie: Did your research or your encounters with him change when technology started changing, when everyone started having a Ring doorbell camera?

Miguel: That's a good question. Definitely, it got very popular and affordable, I would argue, in the last 10 years. So, that's a really interesting overlap that I really didn't think about. I always knew the impact of security cameras in general, but that timing of the invention of that technology, or popularity of that technology, is an interesting thing to talk about.

How I've always framed that is that it's kind of a positive and a negative with those security cameras. Because depending on your perception... And those security images are stoking fear and giving you this misconception of how wildlife are using urban areas and people think that all of a sudden all these animals are starting to move into the city and use the city differently. No, it's just that you now have a camera, and these animals were doing that this whole time and have been coexisting with us without incident, but just now you're seeing it.

And I hope people, most people that have that technology, which I've also witnessed, are taking it the other way and using it to connect with wildlife, and appreciate wildlife, and be inspired to conserve those same animals that are walking through their backyard or in front of their house on the street. And it's a privilege. I have a video of a friend of mine that's also a board member of Friends of Griffith Park, that was, during the lockdown period, she had not even a Nest or one of those Ring doorbell cameras, but one of those nanny cams that I use on my own kids, in their house pointed toward the French doors – just two glass doors, if you don't know what a French door... I just learned what a French door was – glass doors that open into their yard and it was right against the door, and she was working, typing away one night, and all of a sudden P-22 [*Alie gasps*] walked right against that door and passed by. [*“Good evening.”*]

Alie: Wow.

Miguel: And I mean, a lot of people, in some other cases would be like, “Oh my god, call the authorities, get this animal out of here, it's dangerous it's trying to attack me!” But instead, she was so proud of that moment, she shared the video with all her friends including myself, immediately. She did some slow-mo and animation in the video and was just so excited about it. And that's the sentiment that I'm excited about when people have these cameras; that they just feel more connected and that there is no boundary that these animals understand, they don't understand property boundaries or street signs, they just go where they feel like they need to go, for safety, for food.

Alie: When did you have an indication that maybe his health wasn't doing great?

Miguel: Yeah, that's a good question. So, I would say it's been at least a year, if not more. It's hard for me to think about that because sometimes I would get videos of him with a little bit of a limp or a cut on his hindquarters or something. And that's typical, that happens because they get injured killing the deer. Deer are much bigger than them and have antlers and hooves and that kind of stuff and so, you just monitor that and see that it heals.

But about a year ago, maybe a little bit earlier than that, I saw indications that his fur was looking a little thin, especially in the front of his face. That was really scary because I got some of those first images of him, I think it was 2014, when he did definitely get mange and we confirmed it was connected to rat poison exposure, and he nearly died from that situation. In that case, it was a really clear case of mange, he was... really bad spotty fur, lesions all over the place, no hairs, his tail looked like a pipe cleaner.

Aside: So, that was in 2014. But when they saw more recent images of P-22 with mange, Miguel wasn't as concerned.

But wait, isn't mange a mite infestation on the skin that causes those sores and crusting and hair loss? Yes, it is, in case you happen to know about mange. But the rat poison comes into play because rodenticides are anticoagulants. So, exposure to it can really tax the immune systems of wild animals and they can't fight those mites. And lately, P-22 did have signs of mange.

Miguel: But in this case, it wasn't as intense, it was just a little spottiness. I'd been studying animals in LA for a long time, so I know what it looks like. Bobcats that I used to help study would get it, so it's a really common thing, sadly. Anyway, when we got those signs, it was scary, and it seemed like there were moments where he seemed to be recovering a little bit. Even recently I thought, "Oh man, he's going to make it through, his fur looks a little bit better," his weight looked decent, there was evidence of him... he killed deer.

But yeah, I think yes, those first ventures that he had out into the Silver Lake neighborhood, really deep and further out than he'd ever gone before, that was alarming, but I thought when he did it the first time I was like, "Okay, maybe he really wanted to find a mate that particular night," or something. *[Alie laughs]* So, that's all that went through my head. But then when he kept doing it over and over again, and he still had that mangey look, that's when I was like, uh-oh this may go in a bad direction and may be the beginning of the end. But again, I was hoping that he'd recover from it. He was such a resilient animal that it was never clear that he was going totally downhill until, obviously, recently.

Aside: Biologists from the California Department of Wildlife and the National Park Service noticed that he was going into different neighborhoods and exhibiting un-P-22-like behavior. It was a little weird for him.

Miguel: Like going after chihuahuas that were on a leash. To some extent, that is still natural behavior, that's still not a sign of him being dangerous to people. But then that even escalated to the point where he was at least a little bit defensive of the chihuahua that he grabbed. So, that seemed like it was an act of desperation and it totally made sense for why the CDFW decided to do what they had to do and NPS as well, as they came together and made that really tough decision to capture him and do an evaluation.

Aside: In November, a dog walker was out with two pooches in the early evening hours and P-22 pounced on the smaller of the two, without a sound, and killed it. And the dog's owner was interviewed and said at the time, "I don't want anything bad to happen to P-22. I just want

people to be safe out there so that nothing like this happens again.” The man’s chihuahua was killed and he still cared about P-22.

But it did happen again a few weeks later in a different neighborhood, and this time the owner required dozens of stitches for their wounds. So, wildlife officials tracked him last week to a backyard in Silver Lake, near the Shakespeare Bridge, if you’re familiar, and the resident answered a knock at the door and they introduced themselves as Wildlife people and the resident blew them off saying she was like on a work call and wasn’t interested in donating, and they had to tell her “No, we’re not fundraising door-to-door, you have a lion in your backyard. Can we come in?” She was like, “Yeah, you may.” So, they used a blow dart tranquilizer and then they took P-22 into the doctor on December 12th.

Miguel: Obviously, what’s also very tragic is that they weren’t able to capture him before he got hit by that car. The fact that he got hit as they were trying to capture him for an evaluation is sad because that’s always going to be a ‘what if’ in my head and in a lot of other people’s heads, is that if he did not get hit, was there some sort of path forward?

Aside: Yup, the day before his capture, an anonymous caller reported a late-night collision with a mountain lion on this busy Los Feliz Boulevard near Griffith Park at Rowena. So, who else could it have been but P-22? And yes, sure enough, data from his radio collar had pinged him right in that area on that night and the medical evaluation revealed that P-22 had recently suffered an injury to one eye and a fractured skull.

Miguel: But now that I think of it, look at all the data from the veterinarians, based on his kidney and I believe liver failure, it looked like his life was coming to an end either way. As far as the timeline, who knows, maybe he would have had a couple days, or a month, or a few months, but he was in serious decline despite that vehicular collision, but that definitely put him over the edge, which is really sad to think about. But I’m glad that he got the best care in the world by San Diego Zoo Safari Park. I believe so much in that institution, to the point where my wife and I got married there and we know what they do.

All these little coincidences make me emotional because the fact that he died right after they raised enough money for the wildlife crossing, and then them finding out that his final kind of place where he was getting world-class care was where my wife and I got married. And then now him eventually going to be coming to the institution that I work at and benefitting research and conservation for many, many years to come through the data of his remains. We’re already in talks of how to do that in the best way, the most equitable, and inclusive way. We’re going to start initial conversations with Indigenous community members that want to do it right.

Aside: So, P-22 will continue to be honored. Even in his life, he had his own festival every year in LA, held in Griffith Park in late October, drawing thousands of attendees.

Alie: Tell me a little bit about P-22 Day that would happen every year. I know that you are well known– If you Google Image search you, you will probably see a picture of Beth Pratt holding a cardboard cutout of P-22. *[both laugh]* Can you tell me a little bit about the visibility campaign that you wanted to launch in his honor while he was still with us?

Beth: Yeah, you know, like I said, I think he’s my true love, he’s definitely the longest serious relationship I’ve ever had and perhaps that we spent almost no time together *[both laugh]* is probably why that was successful. But to me, he was such a symbol. He was life-changing for me in that 2012 time when I was with Jeff Sikich in Griffith Park and he’s telling me about him, he was absolutely life changing to me, and I knew that was going to be the same for others. He

stood for something, and he caused me to change my mind, a 30-year conservationist and scientist. For me, it's the imagination that changes minds. I mean, how many endangered species have gone extinct despite reams of scientific research. You had to have peoples' imaginations and minds changed.

Aside: So, to add some sci-comm spice to the events, Beth will sometimes wear a radio collar just like mountain lions so people can see what it looks like. But she always has a P-22 portrait tattooed on her left bicep and a life-size, two-dimensional cutout for photo ops which has faked me out in so many people's pictures, I'm like [*startled gasp*] and then I realize it's the cardboard cutout.

Beth: So yeah, I started using him for our Save LA Cougars campaign, I got this cutout, the P-22 Day and it was... it was wondrous. Because what it also did is it connected all of us around our relationship to him and one of the most important things in using him as our poster cat and doing all this social outreach, which I took very seriously, it is not for me to tell people how to feel about P-22, it's for me to empower and uplift these different voices. We have a hip-hop artist from Watts who wrote a song about him, great we're going to use that! We have a muralist from LA, or two of them now, Corie Mattie, LA Hope Dealer, and then Jonathan Martinez, Art of the Endangered, we've been funding murals that they're doing. We connect kids who write plays about him. I mean, I could go on and on.

What's great is a lot of these people had never been interested in conservation or wildlife before and as we saw... [*voice trembles*] as we saw this week, he united us all who maybe never would have been united. We were at Mohawk Bend, a very popular LA bar, it's one of my favorites with great food and we were there after a little memorial service we'd done for him, and the manager comes over, "Shots on us, we're big P-22 fans." They put "Rest in Puma P-22" on their marquee outside.

Aside: So, Beth mentioned that inclusion and unity is a really important aspect of wildlife conservation, especially honoring Indigenous voices and knowledge.

Beth: I want to give a huge shoutout. So, the Chumash is the land where we're putting the crossing and Alan Salazar, we've been working with for years, he's an amazing human being, he's a Chumash storyteller, he has been at every P-22 Day for a while, he does blessings. We're talking about how to have him obviously at the memorial service, or the celebration of life that I'm calling it. He's written some books on wildlife. He's also on the wildlife crossing design team. So, just really embedding that native Indigenous wisdom into not just the storytelling but also how we make this wildlife crossing recognized.

[clip of Alan Salazar speaking:]

We use animals as teachers and it's very simple. If you watch long enough and you watch a deer, you watch the coyote, you watch mountain lions, if you're lucky enough to see one, you can learn many life lessons that are important. You can learn life lessons that will help you survive. It's something that I believe very strongly and that as a culture, we have gotten away from being observant. We have tunnel vision, we walk around looking at our cell phones, and we don't observe what's going on around us. And most tribal cultures believe that every one, every thing has its own power, its own gift, they're all teachers.

Aside: That was Alan Salazar, who has a huge role in the Wallis-Annenberg Wildlife Crossing in Agoura Hills, which already broke ground this year and should be completed in 2025.

Beth: And that's part of P-22's legacy, uniting us all, getting that wildlife crossing built. I mean, we would not have this wildlife crossing without him. You know, I wrote in the eulogy, "I don't

know if another mountain lion is going to walk down Sunset Boulevard, but he showed us one could, and I think for LA that's pretty magical." [laughs]

Aside: Beth says that that eulogy was, understandably, the hardest thing she's ever had to write. It was drafted in a hotel room at 2 AM right after sitting with him and she wrote:

I'm so grateful I was given the opportunity to say goodbye to P-22. Although I have advocated for his protection for a decade, we had never met before. I sat near him, looking into his eyes for a few minutes, and told him he was a good boy. I told him how much I loved him, how much the world loved him, and I told him I was so sorry that we did not make the world a safer place for him. I apologized that despite all I and others who cared for him did, we failed him.

I don't have any illusion that my presence or words comforted him, and I left with a great sadness I will carry for the rest of my days.

Before I said goodbye, I sat in a conference room with team members from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and a team of doctors at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, and they showed me a video of P-22's CT scans, images of the results, and my despair grew as they outlined the list of serious health issues they had uncovered from all their testing: stage two kidney failure, a weight of 90 pounds (he normally weighs about 125), head and eye trauma, a hernia causing abdominal organs to fill his chest cavity, an extensive case of parasitic skin infection, heart disease, and more. The most severe injuries resulted from him being hit by a car last week and I thought of how terrible it was that this cat, who had managed to evade cars for a decade in his weakened and desperate condition, could not avoid the vehicle strike that sealed his fate.

As the agency folks and veterinarians relayed these sobering facts to me, tissue boxes were passed around the table and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. This team cares just as much for this cat as we all do. They did everything they could for P-22 and deserve our gratitude.

So, if you're misty out there, you're not alone.

Beth: I mean when Chuck Bonham, I've never seen him even get a little emotional, is crying as he makes this announcement. If you think of any wildlife official across the country that would cry on camera when he's announcing that he has to compassionately euthanize a mountain lion? I mean...

[clip of Chuck Bonham's announcement:]

I saw a reference yesterday in the Times about the city considering P-22 to be Los Angeles' king... I know this morning that you feel you've lost your king but he's never, ever going to be forgotten. So, I would encourage anyone that's listening and when they receive this news, find a way to honor and then rise up in the movement. Let's make a difference so the rest of the large animals out there have a future that's brighter.

Aside: I asked Beth about that goodbye.

Beth: I think two things and it was... It probably was the hardest moment of my life although I have had to put down so many of my animals when it was time. And you know, he was still P-22. He was in extreme pain, and I couldn't look at his body, he was so underweight. But his face was him and his eyes were him and... we did have a few moments of just quietly looking at each other where I know he saw me and I don't know if he was like, "Oh, you're that girl who's been running around with a cutout [both laugh] and selling merchandise of me without giving me a

cut," I don't know what he was thinking, obviously, but it was good to have at least a moment of genuine communication with him. As a scientist, I don't know if I even believe in this, but I hope I was able to channel [*voice trembles as she continues*] enough love to him from not just me but the world to let him know we were sorry and wishing him, wherever the next place is, the paradise he didn't have here, a safe world with lots of deer.

Aside: Miguel couldn't bid his friend farewell in person, but he was able to hang out with him over his lifetime.

Miguel: Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do that. I was at his first capture and so I got to meet him then, before he became a celebrity. [*Alie laughs*] It was just a magical moment to see him in my neighborhood park. I just cherish those memories, I was able to touch his fur, I still remember how coarse it was, and how soft his underfur was, and how massive his paws are, another thing I'll never forget.

And in those moments where I was out in the field collecting camera images of him and then looking back at it knowing that he was at that camera just seconds or minutes from when I was there and knowing that he was likely so close, looking at me that whole time. I know I don't have a relationship, this is definitely a one-way relationship here, but it's fun to think that he knew what I look like. I would go on probably some of his favorite canyons and probably some of those times he was there, watching me. And to know that, hopefully, he may have known who I was, or recognized what I look like, is something that is always going to be something that I'll wonder about and think about and has left a lasting impression on me.

Alie: Yeah. Were you ever allowed to, like, leave him a chicken or anything?

Miguel: [*laughs*] No, I mean, I was able to go on a few checks on his kills, on his leftover meals of deer. That was fun, to see what he ate. I remember one time I was at a kill where he killed a deer and then what happens when they do that because they're such huge meals, they have to come and repeat that location usually about three to five nights in a row until coyotes take it away, or it doesn't seem like a safe situation and he abandons it. So, that's another way these mountain lions benefit the ecosystem, they leave a lot of leftovers, usually. But anyway, back to this story.

He killed his deer and when I went down to look at the deer, there was an owl, a dead owl on top of it. So, one of those nights when he's going back for seconds, there was an owl feeding on it and he ate that owl or killed that owl. So, those memories are pretty fun, incredible. Think about how stealthy he must have been, knowing how aware owls are of their surroundings. Those are the types of memories that I'll remember. While we were trying to capture, I remember, the smell of that, it's strong, [*both laugh*] so those memories won't go away either. And I cherished every photo and video.

But now, I'm just trying to do my best to soak them in and remember them even more, all the photos, all the conversations, the young kids that heard me talk about P-22 that weren't considering a career in conservation before, now majoring in that in college because of what I talked to them about, about P-22. They didn't think that they had a connection to nature, that they didn't have a role in this field because they lived in LA and that's how I felt as a little boy. So, that sense of pride in local nature was hard for me to get until I was a biologist, and I had this privileged knowledge of my surroundings. And so, I think it shouldn't be a privilege, it should be everybody's right.

Hopefully, that's what our P-22 exhibit tells people now when they come to the museum and what this story tells people, that nature is for everybody. And this conservation work needs everybody for it to be successful so that we can not just support wildlife, but also the people

that live amongst them, that are also sometimes marginalized, voiceless, persecuted, just like some of these wildlife species. So yeah, as a person of color, and as a minority within this field, I take that really personally, and that's one aspect of his legacy that I hope continues to be a bridge between this traditionally exclusive field and a lot of people that look like me. And especially now, I mean, his death is very sad, but I mean, as I process that, I get... It feels like a kick in the butt basically and some motivation to work even harder on behalf of him and all the other wildlife species that should have been treated better for a long time. It's hopefully their time now.

Aside: So, this dodger and ghost cat continues on with a legacy connecting people to wildlife and connecting wildlife to wilderness via an actual corridor.

Miguel: I just feel grateful that I overlapped with that in my life and hopefully contributed to that story in a significant way.

Alie: One thing I really learned was that grief is just evidence of love and that that love doesn't go away. Lucky to have loved something so much and to keep loving it, you know?

Miguel: Yeah.

Alie: Thank you for everything you do. Our hearts are with you, and I can't wait to see you all to honor him after the new year when his celebration of life happens, I'll be there... with a hanky.

Miguel: Oh, thank you so much.

So, ask hardworking people heartfelt questions because their stories are definitely worth sharing. And I'll link to the social media accounts for Beth and Miguel, and of course for P-22, whose account will continue to give updates on his upcoming celebration of life. So, look for those in the show notes, as well as a link to SaveLACougars.org where you can sign up for email updates too. And we'll have more links up on my site at AlieWard.com/Ologies/P22.

And I'm @AlieWard on Twitter and Instagram and we're @Ologies on both as well as starting a little bit to TikTok @Alie_Ologies, so please say hi there. Thank you to all the patrons who make this show possible at Patreon.com/Ologies, you can join for a dollar a month or more and thank you to everyone getting merch at OlogiesMerch.com. And to everyone who leaves a review, I read them all and I usually read them up top in the intro, but this episode I just wanted to get right into it. But thank you Ally Ward, who left the review:

Making all the Alie Wards proud. As a fellow Ally Ward, I had to start listening to support the name, I kept listening because this podcast is amazing. It's currently the only podcast I listen to. Signed, Ally Ward.

So, I Alie Ward, thank you Ally Ward. And to all the other Alie Wards out there: Hey, we're in this together.

Oh, and if you ever do see a mountain lion and you're inspired to go pet its cute little head... don't, don't ever do that. Just because we love them, does not mean we should approach them and especially avoid mamas with babies, don't even think about it, or ones that are eating. So, if you see one coming toward you, you can make yourself bigger and louder, just get more obnoxious, but back away slowly. Don't crouch down and don't run. You want to give the cougar a way to escape because they're pretty shy, they prefer to flee rather than fight, much like myself. So, just keep that in mind. Also, if you ever spotted P-22, leave me a comment on TikTok or Instagram, please and thanks, because I want to hear about it.

Also, one thing, new information to celebrate is that an uncollared mountain lion male has made it into the area of Coldwater Canyon in Los Angeles, which means he made it over the 405. Will he make it over the 101 to Griffith Park? We'll see. He definitely would if there was a wildlife crossing though.

Also, thank you to Erin Talbert for adminning the *Ologies* Podcast Facebook group with assists from Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch. Thank you, Emily White from The Wordary, for making professional transcripts available and Caleb Patton for bleeping them, those are up for free at AlieWard.com/Ologies-Extras. Kelly Dwyer tweaks our website, and she can design yours, she's linked in the show notes. Susan Hale and Noel Dilworth handle so much *Ologies* business from merch, to scheduling, to operations, thank you both so much.

Mercedes Maitland of Maitland Audio worked long and hard with us to do some amazing editing and I had to take Mindjam Media's Jarrett Sleeper out of retirement because this was a biggie. I started the interviews on Sunday and then tossed in a bunch of person-on-the-street interviews that we didn't even end up using because it was too cold, and no one wanted to talk to me. So, it was a lot of moving pieces and we've been working late nights to get this us up, so I hope you share it and spread the story of P-22 and remember him with love.

And if you stick around to the end of the episode, you know I tell you a secret and this week the secret is that sometimes, P-22 would be observed via camera traps exhibiting marking behavior and by that, I mean he pissed on the camera, he pissed on it. Which, we have yet to see any celebrity do to a TMZ reporter, so another reason why this puma was the greatest of all time, the GOAT. Okay, happy holidays, please enjoy your nog of choice and hug everyone except for mountain lions. Okay, berbye.

Transcribed by Aveline Malek at TheWordary.com

Links to things we discussed:

Visit Beth Pratt's [website](#) and follow her on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

Follow Miguel Ordeñana on [Instagram](#)

Follow P-22 on [Instagram](#)

A donation went to the National Wildlife Federation [#SaveLACougars](#)

[When Mountain Lions Are Neighbors: People and Wildlife Working It Out in California](#)

[How a Lonely Cougar in Los Angeles Inspired the World | Beth Pratt | TEDxYosemite](#)

[P-22 does not change his name for Hollywood](#)

[Announcement of his passing](#)

[In-depth news conference about his injuries and illnesses](#)

[Footage of P-22 via the Natural History Museum](#)

[Mountain lion under a house](#)

[More on P-22 under a house end of video, loose all the time...](#)

[Why we say "the" before freeways](#)

[Steve Winter's photography work](#)

[Christine Wetherill Stevenson](#)

[Creme Puff the Cat](#)

[Beth Pratt's eulogy for P-22](#)

[P-22 Day](#)

[The Cat That Changed America documentary](#)

[The mysteries of Griffith Park](#)

[Griffith J. Griffith's donation of the land](#)

[A Tale of Two Lions: P-41 and P-22 Underscore Challenges for Non-Human Urban Dwellers](#)

[P-22 Presents...Indigenous Voices with Alan Salazar](#)

[Alan Salazar's blessing of the Wildlife overpass](#)

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