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Elephants in Our Midst

Part 2. Turmoil, Battlefield and Bondage

Ken Kawata



Controversies Erupt Everywhere

The pattern is similar almost everywhere. Alleged mistreatment of a zoo elephant reported by the media which attracts the society's attention. Or it could be the news of a zoo transferring elephants to a potentially controversial recipient. An animal advocate group or an activist joins the fray and keeps the fire going. As the story becomes a regular occurrence in living rooms, workplace and schools it soon becomes a full-fledged controversy. That prompts some politicians to step in, and all this consumes time and energy of the zoo staff; they are often trapped in the power game by conflicting entities. The outcome of the news story differs from one community to the other, but the root cause may not be resolved in a civil manner. The excitement wanes as time passes, and the news story no longer holds the spark. The populace soon loses interest---until another "hot off the press" event comes around.

A quick glance shows that during the four decades beginning 1980, at least eight cities in the U.S. and Canada have gone through such events, some of them more than once. They were, in chronological order: San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Evansville, Toronto, Detroit and Denver. They have kept news media quite busy in those communities, especially Toronto. The Globe and Mail followed up the stories, as follows:

"The future of Toronto's three elephants—Iringa, Toka and Thika---has been fraught with finger-pointing from both sides in the debate. No one disputes that the three aging females would be better off in a warmer climate, but just where to send them is the subject of a long and controversial debate. Last fall, city councilors took the unusual step of becoming directly involved in that decision, ordering staff to send the trio to the sanctuary run by the Performing Animal Welfare Society and over-riding a previous decision of the zoo board."

"The involvement of council in the elephants' future led last month to the loss of the zoo's accreditation with one of the sector's major governing bodies. Staff and the board recommended sending the elephants to a facility accredited by The Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the PAWS facility does not have that accreditation. Councilor Michelle Berardinetti, who put forward the motion at council to move the elephants, accused zoo staff Monday of unnecessary delaying the training and preparation of the animals for transfer in direct defiance of council's direction. 'It's complete insubordination,' said Ms. Berardinetti, who travelled to California to see first-hand the PAWS facilities."

It should be noted that the PAWS sanctuary had not handed over the medical records of other elephants in its care. John Tracogna, the zoo's chief executive, stated, following accusations from advocates of the move that zoo staff have willfully been standing in its way:

"Obviously, we are disappointed that the health information that we require is not being made available,' Mr. Tracogna said in the statement. 'We remain steadfast in our repeated requests for the medical records. It is entirely irresponsible to move members of our family to another home without proof of operations and medical history.'" Then he made a statement: "We are fully prepared to move the elephants under conditions that ensure the health of the elephants involved. However, our respect for the due diligence process—one that is legally de-

finied for all parties---requires that we act in specific ways. As directed by Toronto City Council, the Toronto Zoo must ensure that the transfer of the elephants is completed in accordance with all applicable legislation and the standard of our profession." (Church, 2012)

"North America's two zoo accreditation bodies have issued stern letters to the Toronto Zoo, warning staff and board members that shipping three African elephants to California could imperil the Scarborough attraction's accreditation status. In the three page missive, Donald Moore, chair of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Accreditation Commission, chastised city council for its decision to send the elephants to an 80-acre facility run by the Performing Animals Welfare Society [PAWS] and threatened to yank Toronto's certification." The PAWS, an unaccredited sanctuary, was "long touted by animal-rights activists such as former Price is Right host Bob Barker. The city of Toronto owns the zoo and can override the decisions of its board. But the elephant decision rankled a few veteran zoo board members.' 'I was thoroughly disgusted,' said Councilor Gloria Lindsay Luby. 'This motion usurped the board's decision-making process. If you're going to keep doing that, what's the point of a zoo board? It's sneaky, it's unprecedented and not worthy of council.'" (White, 2012)

It might be interesting to listen to voices from the professionals who are unaffiliated with this local zoo. Wayne Jackson, a retired elephant handler, wrote to the mayor and city councilors, in part: "Politicians are needed to run a City, but when it comes to such things as zoo animals, it should be the professionals at that particular institution that makes the decision on a particular animal, not someone who really knows nothing about the species of or particular animal. It shouldn't be the responsibility of politicians; there are far more important decisions they need to deal with to run the city! By giving in to these animal rights groups, you might as well give them the keys to the Zoo, just in their 'SPECIAL SANCTUARIES', where very few people are allowed to visit, but they can be viewed, 'that is what is allowed to be viewed' on the internet!" (9 November 2011)

Massimo Bergamini, Executive Director of Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums, stated: "It is important to note that Council's decision was made against the recommendation of Toronto Zoo staff that had wanted the animals moved to an alternative site, the National Elephant Centre in Florida. The 200-acre facility is disease-free and its relative proximity to Toronto would have reduced transport-related stress for the animals. How this decision unfolded raised questions about the appropriate role of political institutions in setting policies that affect animal welfare and whether appropriate checks and balances were in place. These questions remain." (17 October 2013)

Earlier in the U.S., elephant issues took up news headlines in 1980 and again 1988 at San Francisco Zoo. When the first controversy erupted, zoo director Kitchener wrote to a fellow zoo director, in part: "A few months ago the San Francisco Animal Control and Welfare Commission was given powers by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to investigate the San Francisco Zoo. This was a result of an article in New West magazine regarding the problems we had with one of our elephants. Unfortunately these people are a volunteer group originally set up to handle dog and cat problems; they supervise the San

Francisco SPCA for example. None of the people have ever had any experience whatsoever in a zoo or with exotic animals. They have admitted so publicly, yet they are acting as if their findings are the last word in animal management."

He continued: "They are the rankest of amateurs and I believe the way they have conducted the investigation and their posing as knowledgeable animal people is a direct slap at professional zoo management. I would like you to comment on the points they raise about elephant handling. I need ammunition when this report comes up before the Supervisors on January 22. Your response prior to that time will be greatly appreciated." (Saul Kitcher's letter to David Zucconi, 7 January 1980)

David Zucconi responded, in part: "For most zoos, the aspiration of 'three permanent animal keepers' (assigned to elephant care) is pie-in-the-sky thinking. As you and I well know, turnover is high amongst elephant care personnel. Many become afraid of their charges, while others will feign such fear in order to gain a transfer to other areas of the zoo. Elephant keepers seem to be highly opinionated about their operation, and as a result, do not always co-exist peacefully with one another---also resulting in high turnover. We have always attempted to maintain three personnel who were capable of caring for our elephants (the supervisor and two zookeepers). High turnover, personality conflicts and heavy absenteeism have made it extremely difficult to adhere to this program on a regular basis. Our philosophy, at this point, is simply that there must be at least one experienced person on duty on any given day, and that a qualified back-up person must be available to assist such direct-contact activities as chaining, unchaining and training sessions. This means that two zookeepers are assigned regularly to elephants, and a supervisor and another zookeeper who know enough to provide back-up are available."

"We are also of that school of thought that advocates daily training sessions for the elephants. I believe that such a regimen is important to maintain control over these animals, and that such activity provides healthy relief from their otherwise undisciplined existence. Because of their intelligence, they need direction of this sort; if you and I did not have to work, we probably wouldn't---and I doubt that we'd be better off for it! Training sessions also have the advantage of demonstrating to the public the broad scope of elephant intelligence and agility, assets which are essential to their daily existence in the wild. It's unfortunate that inexperienced groups will attempt to make a cut-and-dry situation out of something that is subject to so many variables." (15 January 1980)

I joined and wrote to Saul as follows, in part, beginning: "It has been said a number of times that a zoo is not complete without an elephant."

"However, should a zoo keep an elephant, there will be series of problems. Beyond its huge size, immense strength and extremely destructive nature, an elephant in captivity is basically a contact animal. The problem lies in the fact that very few zoos have adequate facility to shift elephants from one enclosure to the other without actually going in with the animals. Bears and cats, another popular group of animals, are maintained without any physical contact with animal care personnel. This is not the case with elephants although they are amongst the most dangerous of all zoo animals. One only has

to recall the year 1977, a 'bad year' for zoo elephants just to see how dangerous those seemingly 'docile' animals are. Series of accidents, including a fatal injury (New Orleans) occurred on the side of personnel."

"An elephant definitely has a physical edge on humans. This means that the personnel who must go in with him for necessary daily routine work, such as cleaning and feeding, should have a psychological edge on him in order to perform the duty. This leads to the next important steps. Needless to say it takes a group of skillful, dedicated handlers even to merely maintain elephants properly. It might be noted at this point that it is at most important that the assigned personnel be kept in the elephant area permanently. Frequent shuffling of personnel, coupled with larger number of personnel may invite serious consequences. Ideally, elephant care personnel should make personal commitment to the job, such as a minimum of two-year commitment. Without a good rapport with his charge one cannot do the job, and it is a time-consuming task to establish rapport with an elephant." There is now a need to let elephants do something on schedule.

"The best way to achieve this is to establish an 'elephant program' once or twice a day, five to fifteen minutes at a time. In a way it is a ritual to ensure that the handler is the boss, not the animal. The program does not have to be an elaborate, fancy 'show'. As a matter of fact it should be made clear that the program is not a circus act; rather, it is a necessary part of maintaining an elephant to keep him under control, to reassure good rapport between the animal and personnel. As far as showmanship a zoo cannot, and does not have to, compete with a circus, because a zoo is not a circus."

"An elephant program can be a series of simple behavioral patterns, conducted mainly by verbal commands, such as 'Trunk up', 'Move forward', 'Hold still', 'Sit down', 'Stretch out' and 'Lay down', organized into a ten-minute session. There is no carnival image in it. An elephant program should be carried out with or without the presence of the public, since it is a part of elephant management." (Kawata, letter to Saul Kitchener, 15 January 1980)

As if it were not enough, a similar case found its way to the zoo nearly a decade later. Micheal Knapp, San Francisco SPCA Field Officer Supervisor, and Kimberly Karr-Warner, the organization's Animal Protection Services Assistant Director, filed a 26-page report. The document appears thorough, covering wide-ranging areas and concludes:

"The San Francisco SPCA concludes that the San Francisco Zoo's Asian Elephant Management Program reflects institutional neglect which has resulted in the inadequate care and the mistreatment of Tinkerbelle." The fifteen-point recommendations point up the needs such as: Developing detailed written policies, protocols, procedures and guidelines for elephant management; a written safety program; maintain daily records; develop a long term, quality relationship between the keeper and the elephant; more training for keepers; greater support and resources of the elephant program; decrease the time elephants are on chain; senior zoo management be involved in immediate oversight of any discipline administered to the Asian elephants for aggressive behavior and that active, regular monitoring be required for elephants' discipline program; and that AAZPA set national standards for the humane care and handling of Asian elephants. (Knapp and Karr-War-



Photos of Tommy, Asian elephant male

Top left: Walking through a parking lot, Tommy on his way to the arena, Tulsa, 1978. Ken Kawata

Top right: Big Tommy, later renamed King Tusk, on the road in Tulsa, 1978. Ken Kawata

Bottom: Tommy preparing for an act while semingly in musth. Tulsa, 1978. Ken Kawata



ner, 1988)

"An SPCA report released yesterday accused the San Francisco Zoo of 'institutional neglect' in the care of the zoo's Asian elephants. The report also blamed lax supervision for an attack last month in which Tinkerbelle, a 7,000 pound elephant, seriously injured a veterinarian's assistant. 'The San Francisco Zoo has been derelict in its responsibility to provide an appropriately supervised, sufficiently staffed, adequately guided, properly supported, humane Asian elephant program,' the report concluded. Investigators found no evidence of physical abuse of the elephant."

"Saul Kitchener, Zoo director, labeled part of the report 'inaccurate.' 'I can't agree there was neglect of the animal,' he said yesterday. Kitchener also responded to several recommendations made in the SPCA report and in a preliminary report of a panel of elephant specialists, which cited a lack of well-trained elephant keepers and short staffing as crucial factors in the attack. 'We have already initiated changes in the zoo's elephant-management program that address the report's recommendations,' Kitchener said yesterday. 'We will have a written management plan, including handling and safety protocols, in place by January.'"

"SPCA President Richard Avenzino described the report as a 'measured response' that holds the zoo up to standard animal management practices at other zoos. 'We submitted our report as a document to elicit constructive change at the San Francisco Zoo,' Avenzino said. 'We are not trying to be outrageous in our analysis.' Investigators prepared the report by interviewing 15 current and former San Francisco Zoo keepers and eight elephant experts from around the country." (Gordon, 1988)

California gives an impression of an epicenter of new trends. Some 614 km south of San Francisco you'll find Los Angeles, whose zoo was plagued with elephant issues. What do children really gain from seeing the world's largest mammals suffer in confinement? A senior lecturer in neuroscience and behavioral biology at Emory University, executive director and founder of the Kerulos Center, a nonprofit organization that studies animal psychology and trauma recovery and a professor of English at Georgia State University, asked, continuing: "Tobar protests the possibility that Billy, a 23-year-old Malaysian elephant held captive at the Los Angeles Zoo for nearly two decades, might go to a sanctuary and the zoo's exhibit might be closed forever."

"Billy's two remaining elephant companions recently died. Thirteen elephants, according to In Defense of Animals, have died at the L.A. Zoo, many of them before they reached the age of 20; the natural life span of elephants is 65-70 years. Given these statistics, Billy's age is a concern. In light of the mountain of evidence that has accumulated over the three decades showing the extensive and profoundly adverse effects of animals' emotions on the physical health, this is not at all surprising."

"Despite his youth, Billy already shows signs of aging and hardship. Beyond suffering from tail abscesses and other infections, he has developed a stereotypy---a repetitive head tic that is indicative of severe duress commonly found in confined animals and humans. Again, this is unsurprising. Elephants share common brain structure and function with us. They recognize themselves in mirrors and thus have a sense of self

similar to humans. Elephants also suffer from the stress of forced incarceration, physical deprivation, social isolation and other trauma. Consequently, when children see Billy, they are looking at someone not too much different from the children they see on the news who are victims of war and genocide--sentenced to live without family and friends under harsh conditions that resembles a prison."

"Tobar is aware of the evidence for trauma and suffering on the part of this animal, which makes his response nothing short of stunningly callous. He seems to think that people have a right to see and do whatever they want, even if it means great harm to another individual, in this case, an elephant. We are sure Tobar would not concede that this is his viewpoint, but he appears to be oblivious to his own insensitivity. His argument is a chilling example of how our institutions of captivity (zoos and marine parks) have been successful at 'breaking us in,' this is, conditioning us to think in ways that culminate in such attitudes."

"Tobar claims he is concerned about the impact that losing the elephant exhibit would have on children. In doing so he, attempts to frame the issue as elephants versus children. He knows better than that. He knows there are many things that his and other children will never experience. Most children do not grow up to pet a dinosaur (indeed, none do), climb Mt. Everest or dance in the American Ballet Theater. Tobar knows that no child suffers because of lack of these experiences. They will grow up to lead happy, meaningful lives without these experiences. The same is true of seeing elephants in zoos."

"We argue, in fact, that seeing suffering animals at zoos has a negative impact on children. Children come to learn that other animals are commodities to be controlled and exploited. They come to learn that we need not be concerned about suffering as long as we are entertained---yet we expect these children to become ethical, caring adults. This is irrational. We agree with Tobar on one point: Zoos without elephants would indeed have an impact on children. It would be a lesson in compassion." (Marino et al., 2008)

The above is a skillfully woven, bias-driven rage machine, using parallels with human world loosely and unconvincingly. It sounds as if they expect a perfect world surrounding zoo elephants which does not exist in reality, although we all strive for it. Readers might also notice incomplete data: 13 elephants died at the zoo without mentioning the total number kept, and also, the duration; for how many years? Since its opening in 1966? Thus it lacks objectivity, as the broadest of rational was employed to stretch the point. Their questionable statements have already been brought up in the public forum, such as elephants' life span (Ben, 7:32 AM PST, 16 December 2008) and captive care: "The zookeepers worked with him and actually reduced the head bobbing, but could not eradicate it completely. And what is the alternative?" (Meg Ellison, 11:33 PM PST, 15 December 2008)

You may also notice that anthropomorphic terms are peppered throughout the account such as "forced incarceration", "sentenced to life", and the same old comparisons of zoos with prison (although they carefully inserted the term "resemble") as if animals in zoos are being punished. Moreover, sensational and inflammatory terms are liberally employed, such as "chilling" and "suffering" (refer back to the previous discussion on suffering). It does not take long to realize that the authors had

a preconceived conclusion about zoos. Scornful and contemptuous attitudes can reduce the potential impact of the essay other than raising cheers from anti-captivity activists.

In all this, have we heard a statement from the zoo management itself? How would all these occurrences appear in the eye of a seasoned circus/zoo historian? Richard Reynolds's observations:

"Zoos are becoming schizoid. On the one hand you have the Kagan-Kleiman types who want the public to come away grim and depressed over the plight of the world's wildlife and ashamed of the way animals are commercialized and exploited for public amusement (including exhibition at the very zoo where they work). On the other hand are the business and promoter types who have to meet the zoo budget by keeping the turnstiles spinning. They advertise family fun at the zoo like an amusement park or circus, i.e., an entertainment venue. Terry [Maple]'s promotions here [Atlanta] are full of slogans like 'Go Wild At the Zoo.' Then, the docents tell folks they are not exploiting animals like at a circus. Atlanta's elephant shows are called behavioral enrichment with the lectures flatly stating they are not performing. Good grief the bulls do the same stunts you see in the circus. You tell me! I'm here to say that large and enthusiastic crowds gather at show time whereas they otherwise just stroll by the enclosure giving the elephants hardly a glance." (Email 16 June 2001)

"Zoos just duck and pray. There is a real leadership problem with zoos. All too many defer to AZA and have not backbone as individual institutions. Moreover, an increasing part of their leadership is more or less sympathetic to the PETA position. They are now led by businessmen/women and the staffs are largely academicians who are very easily influenced by political correctness and this or that popular shibboleth vis-à-vis animals. Make no mistake PETA has zoos squarely in its sights. One of PETA's leaders, when asked what their hidden agenda was, replied that we have no hidden agenda, we are very open. We want to see an end to zoos. They are passe and abuse animals under the guise of education and conservation."

"Many zoos refer to their pasts as wrong, claiming to have corrected the sins of the past. That gives away half the argument at the start. Further they try to deflect criticism by joining PETA's campaign against circus animals, bragging about how much better we are. They deny that when one sees, for example, a zoo elephant going through paces in an 'enrichment' exercise that it is the same as performing in a circus ring. They make distinctions without substance." (Email to Nick Gould, 15 May 2006) His voice deserves to be heard, whether or not you agree with him.

Back to elephant controversies. Some of them result in a more disturbing and unsettling consequences.

"STOP BEATING ELEPHANTS", "FREE CISSY," "CISSY DESERVES TO RETIRE," screamed the placards surrounding a man with dark glasses, dressed in black shirt and pants, clinging on the zoo fence, surrounded by followers. Certainly it is an eye catcher. The man is Steven Best, an animal rights spokesman. The photo, four-columns across, accompanied an article. "More than two dozen loud and angry El Paso animal advocates rallied Saturday outside the El Paso Zoo, asking for the release of an elephant whose beating with ax handles was captured on videotape. ... The main protesters were People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and El Paso's Voice for All

Animals. Besides criminal charges, they want Zoo Director to resign." (Jauregul, 1999) Thus began another controversy, this time in Texas.

"City Council formerly approved Tuesday a transfer for an animal at the El Paso zoo. Cissy, an elephant that has been the center of much controversy lately, will soon be moved to an animal sanctuary in Tennessee. The reaction to city council's decision to move has been overwhelmingly favorable, this after the elephant received a well-publicized beating. However, one veterinarian who has looked after Cissy over the past six months urged council to reconsider moving the elephant." (The elephant's name was spelled Cissy and also, Sissy.)

"I think her care has been excellent. I don't think that she has been abused. I do think the video is extremely horrible but I was not there [and can't comment]. I don't think moving her solves the problem by any means. I think it uproots her when I think she's been well cared for," she said. Zoo director David Zucconi has also come under fire after Cissy was videotaped being beaten by zookeepers." (KVIA TV 7 El Paso, Las Cruces, Juarez-News, 8 December 1999) For his part, Zucconi wrote a six-columns-across opinion for the local newspaper. In part, he stated:

"Yes, Sissy was firmly disciplined, a year ago when she arrived at the zoo. That was done because the safety of our zookeepers is as important to us as the welfare of our animals. No one likes to physically discipline an animal but in this case it was a choice that had to be made. I would rather face the wrath of 100 animal enthusiasts than the agonized grief of someone whose spouse has just been paralyzed or killed by an elephant. ... We don't know all of Sissy's background, but we do know that she had killed one of her attendants before her arrival here and that her reputation was not good. Because we wanted to help by providing a better home for her, we agreed to accept her. Upon arrival in El Paso, Sissy's behavior lived up to her reputation. A decision had been made, prior to her arrival, that, should she demonstrate negative behavior, she would be disciplined each time until her behavior was rewarded and praise. ... Had they failed to discipline Sissy, I would have been compelled to discipline them for endangering their own lives or the lives of other handlers. Since that time now a year ago, Sissy has been a well-behaved elephant." (Zucconi, 1999)

At this point a citizen voiced his opinion: "Zoo director's version factual. There is always more than one side to a disagreement. The media's sensationalism of the Sissy incident at the zoo is an example of our society being led by the media to possible wrong conclusion on an incident. Zoo director David Zucconi's guest column in the Times---of the history of Sissy and her behavioral problems, the mandated safety of zoo employees, and the ensuing disciplining of the elephant---brought what I believe to be the correct fact to light."

"As a breeder of Appaloosa horses I am sure that there would be those unknowing individuals that would consider some act they may see me commit could be misconstrued as being abusive to my horses. I love my animals but they must respect my space and dominance since that is the mentality among a herd of horses. Perhaps the media, print and TV should present both sides together and allow the public to make its own intelligent decision as to what really has and should happen. This would be better than some of the sensa-



Photos:
Top: Thonglaw entering the off-show night building, Portland Zoo, 1971. Ken Kawata
Bottom: Legendary Asian breeder male, Thonglaw, with his cows, Portland Zoo, 1971. Ken Kawata



tionalistic pictures and stories of the same incident that have been presented, such as the picture and story about the protesters on the lead page of the Borderland section of the same paper." (Rodney H. Fender, Northeast El Paso, undated letter to a newspaper)

While this drama, or a zoological soap opera, was unfolding I was the zoo's general curator of Staten Island, New York, Zucconi's hometown. Zoo director Vin Gattullo and I were intrigued by the El Paso incident, and contacted Richard Lattis, then the president of AZA, on behalf of Zucconi for AZA's support. To our dismay, our plea was ignored by Lattis. Soon Zucconi was forced out, an act to sack him to save mayor Carlos Ramirez's skin.

"Ramirez said he demanded Zucconi's resignation because 'It's time to put an end to the turmoil at the zoo.' He said he is exploring ways to give more control of the zoo to the El Paso Zoological Society. ... The mayor is wrong if he thinks those announcement solves the problems at the zoo or stop the public pressure and controversy, said Socorro 'Sukie' Sargent, founder of local group Voice for All Animals. 'What about the people who were the ones who beat Sissy, those workers and the elephant supervisor who told them to do it? They're still at the zoo,' Sargent said." (McDonnell, 2000)

"Mayor Carlos Ramirez went on record Thursday to say Zucconi hadn't resigned, Ramirez would have fired him. Ramirez said he would have sought to terminate because Zucconi would never condemn the treatment of the elephant. The animal was beaten at length by zoo handlers, who swung ax handles at her flanks and legs. Ramirez also said he was uncomfortable that City Hall has absorbed the bulk of bad publicity that has surrounded the case. Ramirez said bad notices have come from outside El Paso in the form of phone calls, faxes, mail and e-mail. Ramirez says he believes the city's image and its tourism could suffer irreparable harm if this change was not made." (KVIA TV 7 El Paso, Las Cruces, Juarez-News, 13 January 2000)

In clear contrast, the 1982 Detroit case stands out, which involved another popular zoo animal species that generated a sea of emotionalism and nationwide press coverage.

Three aging tigers at the zoo had serious health problems from periodontal disease, gum deterioration and a hip dysplasia to the worst case of hip dysplasia imaginable. The zoo received complaints from visitors that a tiger was "dragging himself around". The Medical Advisory Council to the Detroit Zoo, consisting of veterinarians, medical doctors, dentists and biologists, unanimously supported the zoo's plan for euthanasia. That was postponed as the incident became a running front-page story. Protest calls were received at City Hall. Then came the flood of letters. The zoo director and the city were sued by one Krescentia M. Dopplesberger for one million dollars in damages for "breach of trust, intentional inflicting of emotional stress and negligence."

At the final court hearing that lasted for five hours, both sides presented their arguments. The judge's decision: The zoo had not acted in an arbitrary, capricious, or malicious manner. The decision made by the zoo was ruled to have been made in a reasonable manner and the court had no right to set the decision aside. The three tigers were euthanized; the necropsy report revealed that the animals were in worse condition than had been expected. The organized opposition remained un-

convinced, and sniping continued in letter to the editor pages. The mayor's position during all this? "It was the city's contention that citizens do not have the right to enter a legal challenge to a department head's decision when that decision is within the scope of his normal responsibilities." (Applebaum, 1982; Graham, 1983)

Detroit mayor Coleman Young could have taken a solution by sacrificing Steve Graham, the zoo director. His position, however, was that he hired the city's department heads (Graham being one of them) to run their business. Thus, he completely eliminated politics from the zoo operation. Coleman Young, who survived institutionalized racism in earlier years, was a tough, seasoned politician, in no way comparable to Carlos Ramirez, the rankest of amateurs.

It's a War Out There! Be an Armchair Warrior

Elephants need our help. Those of us oceans away from their native home can join the fight for their wild populations. We can, of course, support elephants in zoos and circuses in a number of ways. It does not necessarily require street demonstration or a trip to an elected official's office to deliver a petition. And there are things we can do at home. At times, critical issues concerning zoos and circuses find their way in the legislative arena on the municipal and state level. Officials may solicit citizens' input. An example:

The Winston-Salem City Council, North Carolina, was to discuss a ban on the use of exotic or wild animals in traveling shows of a circus. "Council member are seeking public comments on the issue and will then decide which course of action they may take." (Mary Lou Kelly, email 2016) That opens the door for citizens to express their thoughts, such as these: "Greensboro resident Martha Cecil came to the city's public safety committee to advocate a ban on wild animals performing in circuses, saying that the practice is cruel to animals and poses danger to people attending such performances. ... Jim Davis, the director of booking and routing for the Garden Brothers Circus in Sarasota, Fla., said there are bad apples in any business, but that the government shouldn't get involved in regulating what people enjoy at a circus. Garden Brothers has elephants, camels and ponies, and offers children rides on the animals at show." (Young, 2016)

I have sent comments to state representatives, assemblies, councils and committees across the country on ten occasions between 2012 and 2017, thus becoming an armchair warrior of sorts. Here follow some of the examples, beginning with the ankus issue. There is a source of heated debates surrounding a simple, short metal stick called ankus (often called bull hook). Please see below, an introduction from a manual by Thai experts for mahouts and elephant camp managers. (We must be reminded, however, that even a testimony by world's experts gets blown away when the alleged suffering, inseparable from this metal stick, takes the driver's seat in the public's mind.)

"The hook [ankus, bull hook] is the mahout's most important tool. It should be with him at all times when he is with the elephant, and he should know how to use it in such a way as to not injure the elephant. Beginning mahouts should be repeatedly told that the real purpose of the hook is not to cause pain but rather to apply strong, clear pressure to very particular control points that the elephant has been trained to react to (stop, turn left, turn right, kneel, stand still, etc.). The hook

also extends the mahout's reach---like doubling the length of his arm." (Preecha Phuangkum et al., 2005)

When I heard that Hallandale Beach, Florida, would consider a ban restricting elephant management procedures, I sent a letter to the mayor, vice mayor and three commissioners on 13 December 2012. In essence, as a retired zoo man I stated: "During my experience spanning over four decades, I was made aware of the public's misconceptions and naivete concerning wild animals in general, and practical handling of wild animals. Specifically, the public has no idea about the enormous strength of elephants; a blow by a trunk can wipe out a grown-up man. Also, managing those animals takes special skills and tools; having admiration and affection for those giants simply does not do the job. In the public's eye, an ankus, the so-called bull hook, may appear to be a weapon and that is the beginning of the misconception. An ankus is a tool, not a weapon; a metal stick will in no way stop a charging elephant!"

On a broader scope, here follows my memo on 17 May 2017 regarding Illinois Senate Bill 1342, sent to the Governor of Illinois Bruce Rauner:

"I gather that the above Bill passed a House vote on 15 May and is heading to you for signature. If enacted, the Bill will prohibit the use of elephants in traveling shows. I believe that the issue has come to the forefront due to the campaign by some animal activists. As a concerned individual I would like to comment on this. I spent a lifetime in the zoo field, now retired, and watched wild animal performances over the decades. The essence of this issue cuts into the core of American democracy, as I examine thusly:

Circuses have been an American tradition and heritage for centuries, and elephants are an essential part of this tradition. However, more recently a vocal and news-media savvy minority group has been appealing to legislators and the public, claiming that traveling shows, such as circuses, mistreat animals including elephants. The alleged cruelty to animals is a myth with no factual basis. But, well-meaning and yet ill-informed populace becomes convinced by this emotionally inflammable plot. Many (if not all) persons making such accusations have not even seen animal acts. This represents a typical example that when emotionalism takes the driver's seat, intellect, reason and logic become the victims.

For those who make a living using wild animals, they are a valuable asset. A reasonably-minded show operator does not mistreat such an asset. Circuses are, of course, human endeavors. Just as there are excellent schools and poorly-managed ones, there can be substandard show people. They should be dealt with individually. Thus a sweeping generalization to accuse all traveling act groups makes no sense.

I might point out that there already exist mechanisms for issuances of animal facility standards and to regulate public safety requirements. Globally there is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an agreement to ensure that trades of wildlife between nations do not threaten their survival. As for federal laws there are Endangered Species Act (ESA), and Animal Welfare Act (AWA) which requires that standards of care be given to animals maintained for purposes including exhibition for the public.

Unavoidably, a ban on traveling animal acts affects the fabric of our democratic society. It is the citizens' right to appreciate

wild animal exhibits in captivity, be it in a traveling show or a zoo. A ban will encourage the vocal minority to gain control over animal-related issues. They succeeded in closing down the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Baily Circus. Once an activist group acquires entry into the legislative arena, they will expand their basis to ban not only wild animal facilities but also practices in livestock industry and use of lab animals in the necessary medical research. I would like to urge you to please VETO SB 1342 when it reaches your desk. A ban will signal a step to chip away at the foundation of American democracy. Back to elephants, let us turn our eye to Africa. Elephants are being slaughtered for illegal trade of ivories, estimated as one elephant killed every 15 minutes, to satisfy the Chinese market. Yet we never hear animal rights groups taking any strong measure to fight such slaughters. While elephants are being killed into extinction in Africa, in America we are arguing about elephants in public display!

By the veto of SB 1342 your fine state Illinois will set a model of state legislation to the entire nation, that you have not only ensured the citizen's fundamental right, but also helped to secure the future for other legitimate animal-related activities and industries. I appreciate your time in listening to my concern."

Letter-writing is a tedious and non-glamorous task. Yet how else can you effectively let your thoughts known? As the English author Edward Bulwer-Lytton noted in 1839, "The pen is mightier than the sword." If nothing else, I found it a good way to pound out frustration into the public arena. It's catharsis, a form of therapy.

A Sensitive and Delicate Being

No other experience would replace the sensation that jolts a rookie keeper when he first steps into the space, especially indoor, occupied by an elephant. It is not just the enormous size one would never have realized before; the pungent smell overwhelms him. It was an old-style practice that introduced newcomers to zoo elephants. As the huge gray wall approaches, their eyes, initially appeared so small, stare down. The skin appears surprisingly soft; ears flap like brewing thunderheads. Now he realizes that he is slowly being pushed against the concrete wall. "Hold!" he orders as he has been instructed to, swinging the ankus, hits, jabs and sticks it into the huge, warm body with all the strength, which produces no effect at all. Suddenly the gray beast freezes when a senior man orders, "Hold". The new guy senses a stream of perspiration under the arms.

Elephant work is not for everyone. Some new keepers cannot tolerate the intimidation and get transferred to other areas. A few take up keen interest and stay in the elephant house. As a keeper I was a generalist, caring for a wide variety of animals, being assigned to the elephant area only part-time. The trail as a generalist continued when I took up a curatorial position. Yet over the decades, elephants kept coming back to me and eventually crystalized as something very special in my consciousness.

The pursuit of elephant care is often characterized with anxiety and occasional pain and at the same time, tenderness and disappointments. Elephants represent fragility and innocence. Some may argue: in zoos and circuses globally, there is no shortage of accidents and injuries including fatal, caused by elephants. How can they be fragile? Others, noticing rapidly

diminishing in-situ populations due to human encroachment and poaching, would agree that elephants have become fragile. No, that is not what I meant. Just cut out those external elements and isolate an elephant, Asian or African, sex and age, in your mind. They are also delicate and sensitive, a symbol of purity worth saving (let me remind you that I have no intention to bestow sainthood on elephants).

Emotional. There is no other word to outline any elephant, from a solitary, aging male in the African savanna to a ten-day old Asian neonate in a zoo. Emotionality and fragility are the building blocks of this beast. Elephants live in a social group characterized by a complex structure, which requires each member to be delicate and sensitive to be able to relate to each other, intimately. As they come to a captive life, some humans take up the role of herd members (a point that should not be interpreted in an anthropomorphic or anthropocentric sense). A rapport can be established when a man's wavelength matches with that of a beast; their relationship can last for decades.

Once you open your heart elephants make an entry and stay there. There have been joy and sorrow, affection as well as separations. Once that happens, elephants remain in your blood for life. In the end, it is all worthwhile. So fortunate are those who get to know elephants, the unique member of fellow mammals who share the Planet with us.

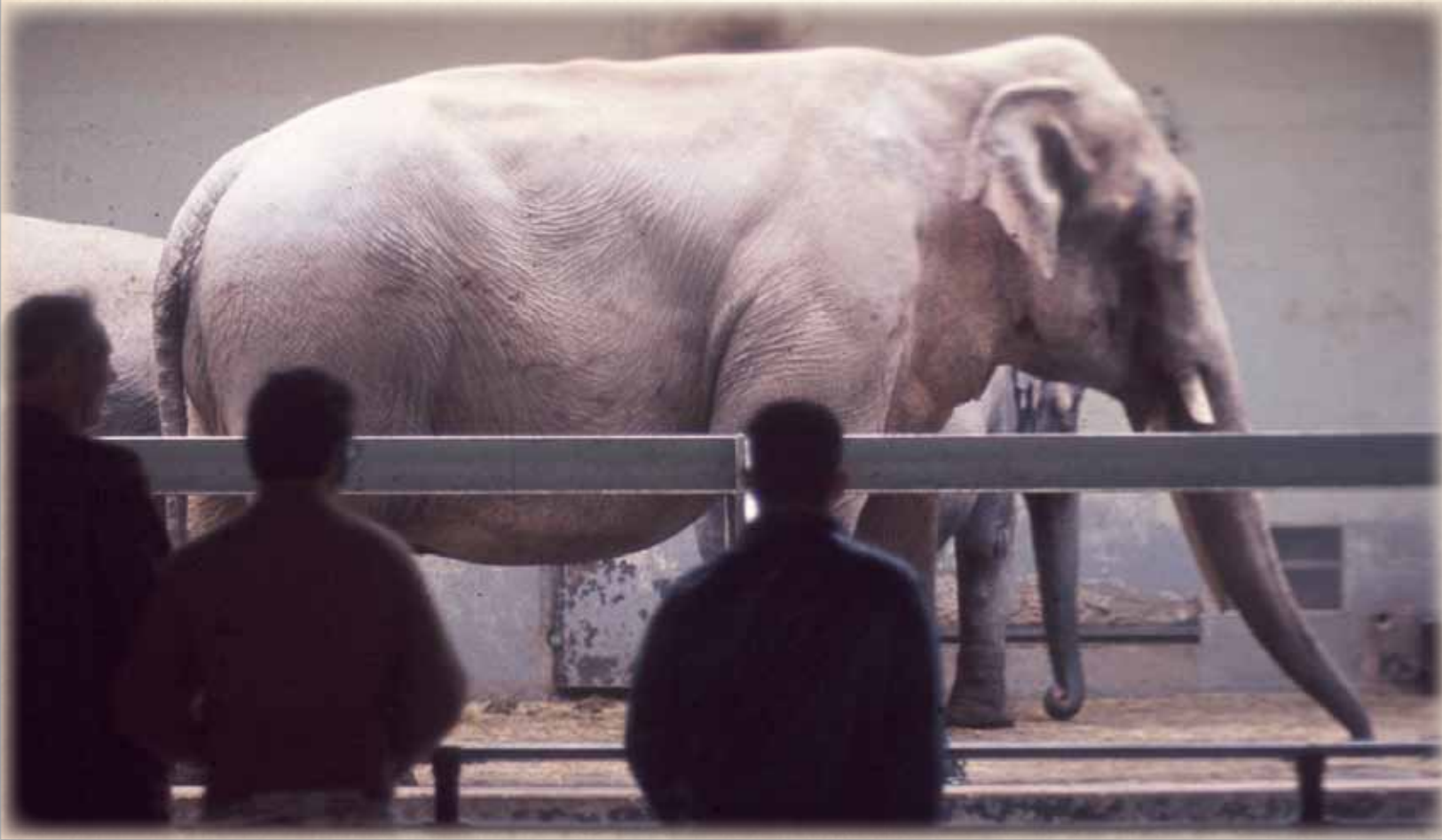
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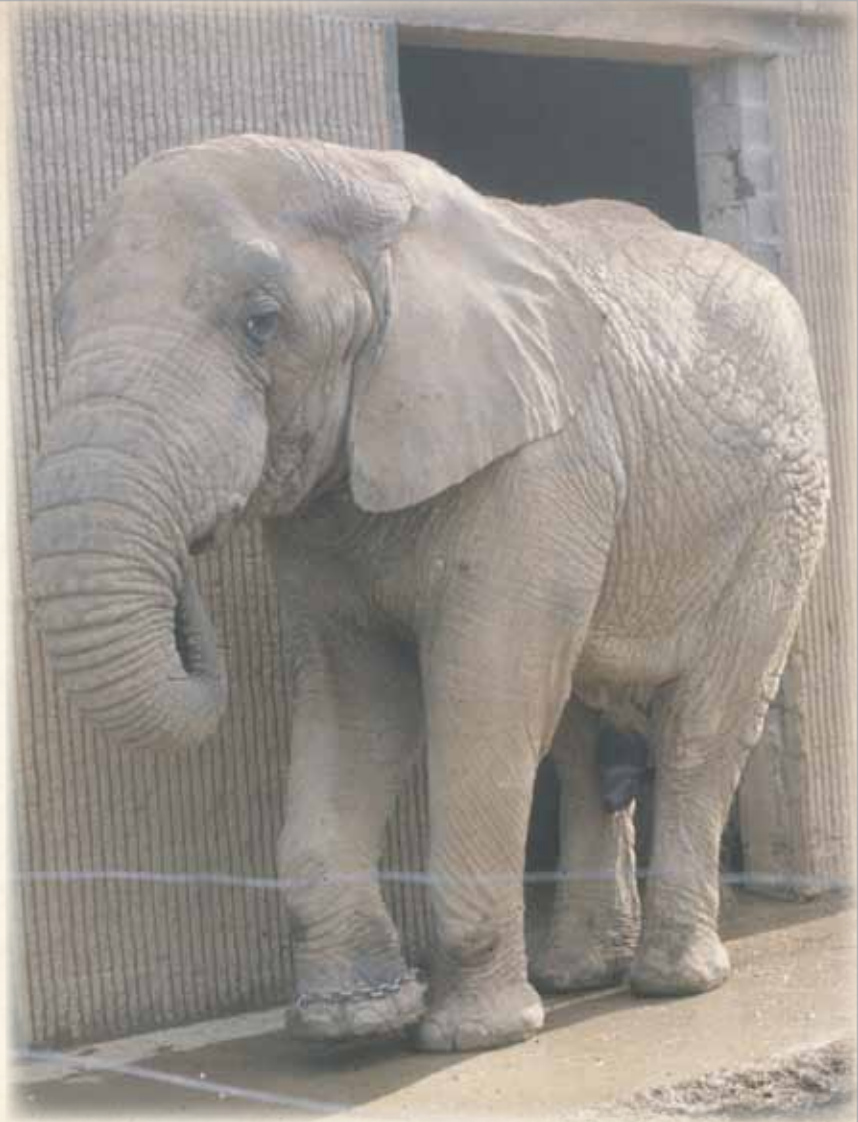
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Should there be an Elephant Who's Who, Ziggy, an Asian male, would be in it, Brookfield Zoo, 1974. Ken Kawata





Photos:
Top left: An iconic member of San Francisco Zoo, a female Asian elephant, 1971. Ken Kawata
Top right: Diamond, an African elephant, made history as the first successful breeder of his species in the country. Knoxville Zoo, 1975. Ken Kawata
Bottom: Universal popularity attract crowds. An Asian elephant at Leyendas, a zoo in Lima, Peru, 1979. Ken Kawata

