

# ANIMAL CIRCUSES ARE ANIMAL TORTURE

by Teresa Hele

**"But for the use of physical punishment by their oppressors, animals would never be part of a circus." - Richard Pryor**

**I**T'S CIRCUS TIME AGAIN! TIME FOR CLOWNS AND COTTON CANDY, FOR lights and laughter, for degradation and death. That's right, Ladies and Gentlemen, Girls and Boys, the 'greatest show on earth' would not be possible without whips and muzzles, bullhooks and beatings, chains and cages, electric shocks and starvation. As we look toward the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus coming to Fresno this July, we must also look at what that means to the animals that are forced to perform with the show. We must recognize what our patronage to animal acts means to those kidnapped from their natural environment, held against their will, broken, and often killed as a result of this unnatural and uncaring form of "entertainment".

For several months running we have attempted to demonstrate that the basis of corporate capitalism is violent expropriation of nature. The animal circus is no exception. Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus is a subsidiary of Feld Entertainment, which bills itself as "the largest live action family entertainment company in the world." According to their website, Feld shows operate in 47 countries on six continents with an estimated 25 million customers a year. Feld has up to 30 different shows operating on any given day including Ringling, Disney on Ice, and Siegfried and Roy (no stranger to animal related violence). It boasts worldwide offices and production facilities and over 2,500 employees. Feld's estimated yearly operating revenue is \$776 million.

Feld/Ringling claims that it provides the highest standards of animal care to its 200 animals, animals that include endangered Asian elephants, African elephants, lions, tigers, horses, zebras, camels, and llamas. In fact, Ringling Bros. claims that it "loves animals as much as you do." This is a scary thought. According to PETA's Animal Times magazine, Ringling Bros. has been cited on numerous occasions for violating the minimal standards required under the Animal Welfare Act. (In one two-year period, they were cited 65 times.) In worse, but not uncommon cases, animals including Clyde the lion, baby elephants, a tiger, horses, and a sea lion have died while under Feld/Ringling's watch in just the past few years. Moreover, Feld/Ringling supported Las Vegas' animal "entertainer" Bobby Berosini who beat orangutans with a metal bar before on-stage performances and, when he was exposed, urged Berosini to sue PETA with Feld financial backing.

Circus animals, including lions, tigers, bears, elephants, sea lions, horses, and camels, are complex creatures who form social structures, develop family bonds, and, when threatened, fight for their freedom and their lives. If you think that a bear riding a tricycle, an elephant standing on its head, a tiger dancing on hind legs, a chimpanzee wearing a dress, or a seal balancing a ball on the end of its nose is natural or even acceptable, please consider the amount of force used to "train"

these otherwise wild animals. While nature would lend a lifetime of foraging for food, roaming in packs, and nurturing a family, these animals are robbed of any sense of natural life and imprisoned within a cycle of pain and abuse. Many of the animals forced into the performance world, including many on the Endangered Species list, have been illegally stolen from the wild. Of the 60 elephants being worked under Ringling, 44 are from the wild. In 2000, poachers killed 60 free-roaming endangered female Asian elephants so that their babies could be collected and sold to the entertainment industry. 18 of Ringling's elephants have died since 1992. In order to break the spirits (or "tame") these majestic animals, tools of torture are necessary. Bears often have their noses broken and their paws burned to force them into an upright position. Elephants have their skin torn and gouged by sharp bullhooks to scare them into compliance. Tigers and lions are drugged and choaked by chains or ropes around their necks to placate them. Chimpanzees are caged in solitary confinement and beaten with clubs to make them more willing to perform in front of a crowd. Seals are starved to urge them to complete tricks for food. And a "unicorn" was even created by mutilating a baby goat--surgically moving his horns to the center of his forehead. All animals are caged and chained for roughly 98 percent of their lives, while they are not on stage. All are denied a natural life.

George "Slim" Lewis, elephant trainer and author of *I Loved Rogues*, reflected on one memorable occasion of elephant "training". "One day...we began to punish (Sadie the elephant) for being so stupid. We stopped suddenly...unable to speak. Sadie was crying like a human being. She lay there on her side, the tears streaming down her face and sobs racking her huge body." Sylvia K. Sikes, author of *The Natural History of the African Elephant*, says that it is unusual to see wild elephants cry but that it's common among captive elephants. One Ringling Bros. employee told the Elephant Alliance how the circus treated one animal: "She was a sweet little...brown bear...but sometimes she had trouble balancing on the high wire. She was then beaten with long metal rods until she was screaming and bloody. She became so neurotic that she would beat her head against her small cage. She finally died." A reporter who travelled with Ringling Bros. reported about one chimpanzee: "Repeatedly, he was struck with a study club. The thumps could be heard outside the arena building, and the screams further than that." According to former animal trainer Pat Derby, "After 25 years of observing and documenting circuses, I know there are no kind animal trainers." No matter what Ringling may claim, they obviously do not "love" animals.

Despite their self-pronounced animal-lover facade, Feld/Ringling has been known to take aggressive action against animal rights activists. In an effort to discredit those who

have been critical of animal abuse at Ringling, Feld hired former CIA operative Clair E. George, once head of CIA covert operations worldwide, to engineer a dirty tricks campaign against AR activists. George disclosed his services for Feld in an affidavit in the federal civil suit *Smith v. Feld*. According to George, Feld paid for illegal spying, wiretapping, videotaping, harassment, and theft of private documents. George also oversaw an effort to undermine efforts by biographer Jan Pottker to write a book on Ringling's history of animal cruelty.

Money, power, influence, covert operations--can this really be a part of "The Greatest Show on Earth?" Consider the origin of today's circuses. The use of wild animals including elephants in entertainment dates to ancient Roman times. The Romans trained elephants to do many tricks similar to those displayed in today's circuses and some even more bizarre like walking tight ropes and dining from couches. They also used elephants and other wild animals in gladiatorial bloodbaths. Exotic animals were considered a part of the triumph of the Empire over far-flung places. Ours is, of course, a kinder gentler empire. Thankfully, gladiatorial contests have gone the way of human slavery. But animal slavery for profit continues. It is a vestige of the same spirit that animated the worst cruelties of the Roman empire and the worst cruelties of the corporate empire--hierarchy, greed, and power.

In the end, the most difficult words for the oppressor to face are these: "you are no better and no worse than those you oppress." Facing up to this truth is difficult because it threatens the very identity of the oppressor which is founded in the subservience of the dominated. Perhaps this is why the historical record is replete with wars of liberation necessary to finally bring these words home to tyrants, slave-holders, and kings. No one knows whether such a war will be necessary to free animals from their human oppressors. For now, only you can answer the question in your own heart: will you will be a party to arrogance and oppression or to honesty and liberation? Do you actually love animals or are you a part of a system that abuses animals for profit? Nothing less than your conscience and character are at stake.

- In remembrance of Clyde the Lion, Jasmine the endangered Bengal tiger, Arnie the endangered Bengal tiger, Gypsy the wild-caught sea lion, Kenny the endangered baby Asian elephant, Riccardo the baby elephant, Benjamin the baby elephant, Heather the African elephant, Tyke the elephant, Janet the elephant, Queen the elephant, the following endangered Asian elephants: King Tusk, Birka, Teetchie, Dolly, Seetna, Cita, Ranni, Karnaudi, Rhani, Jenny, Petely, Nelly, Mia, and all the others who have died in confinement and continue to suffer in silence.

## RINGLING BROS. CIRCUS PROTEST 2004/2005: A REVIEW & A RESOLVE

by Fresno Voices  
for Animals

**"We speak for them because they cannot speak for themselves. We speak for them because their cries and their deaths go unheard and unnoticed. We speak for them because we are compassionate toward all species -- not just our own. WE CHOOSE BECAUSE THEY CAN'T!"**

**-Fresno Voices for Animals**

**WEDNESDAY  
JULY 13 AT 6:30PM.**

**THURSDAY  
JULY 14 AT 6:30PM.**

**FRIDAY  
JULY 15 AT 10:00AM AND 6:30PM.**

**SATURDAY  
JULY 16 AT 10:30AM, 2:30PM, AND 6:30PM.**

**SUNDAY  
JULY 17 AT 2:30PM AND 4:30PM.**

**FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROTEST, PLEASE  
CONTACT:**

**FRESNOVOICESFORANIMALS@YAHOO.COM**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE REALITIES  
OF ANIMAL ACTS, PLEASE VISIT:**

**WWW.CIRCUSES.COM  
OR WWW.PETA.ORG**

As families crowded into the line for the Ringling Bros. Circus at the Selland Arena last July in Fresno, a small group of local activists walked up and down, handing out informational fliers to patrons and engaging them in conversations on the realities of captive life for circus performing animals. The weather was hot and the reception was not altogether friendly, but the subject remained important to the members of Fresno Voices for Animals -- a group that had formed in response to issues like Measure "C" and travelling animal acts.

The five days of scheduled performances moved along, and so did FVA, gaining support each day from other local activists, animal rights groups, and concerned citizens. Two days into the protest, we learned that Clyde, a two-year-old lion with the Ringling Bros. Circus, had died in a sweltering boxcar while moving across the Mojave Desert on his way to the Fresno show. The heartbreaking news sealed our resolve, increased our support, and finally earned us media attention from mainstream sources that had previously ignored our efforts.

FVA remained active for the length of the Fresno shows, joined by activists from Modesto, Bakersfield, and numerous local community members. Some people dressed as clowns and handed out balloons and stickers with animal-friendly messages; some held posters with quotes from celebrities that have spoken out against the injustice of forced animal "entertainment"; some donned animal masks and wore chains to symbolize the captives inside the Selland Arena; some drummed on buckets and chanted or passed out fliers and specific information on Clyde, the dead lion; some fought for our legal rights to speak out and voice our support for animals. Everyone mobilized in the recognition of the inhumanity of animal circuses and the resolve to stop the violence and exploitation.

Unfortunately, despite worldwide recognition of the wrongs of captive animal "entertainment" and the growing opposition to these shows, Ringling Bros. Circus will be back in Fresno this month. Please join Fresno Voices for Animals and all compassionate people by protesting this circus. Please, never patronize cruel and unnatural captive animal acts. Support instead forms of entertainment that do not rely on animal exploitation for human enjoyment. Write a letter to local papers and other media about the horrors and hazards of forced animal acts. Educate your family and friends on this issue. And meet us in front of the Selland Arena to make a stand for animals.