

Jodey Eliseo

March 2, 2006

The Honorable Mary Ann Smith
City Hall Office
121 N. LaSalle St., Rm. 300
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Alderman Smith,

As a former employee of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, I would like to express my strong support for the elephant-protection ordinance that would ban the use of bullhooks, electric prods, and chaining.

As a professional dancer and someone who has always loved elephants, I auditioned for Ringling in 1981 and was soon hired as a dancer. I toured with the Blue Unit and worked for the circus for two years. Although I realize that my experiences are dated, some things never change: Elephants suffered in the circus then, and they still do today.

Of all the animals used in the circus, the elephants received the worst treatment. The people who handled the elephants were uneducated, typically transients hired off the street. In fact, one had just gotten out of prison. The elephants were beaten every single day. I complained internally, even to Kenneth Feld. I complained to the USDA and the humane society, but nothing was ever done. These are some of the incidents that haunt me to this day:

- One elephant had a huge infected boil that covered half her leg. Even though the veterinarian recommended that she not perform, they made her perform anyway.
- During one show, an elephant was beaten with bullhooks because she stumbled and tripped, falling to the floor.
- Sophie was one of the younger elephants, a teenager at the time. The wounds covering her body from constant beatings were horrible.
- One baby elephant ran amok and smashed through a wall at a civic center. She was confused and terrified. She was severely beaten.
- Circus workers used a gray powder to hide the bloody wounds on the elephants that had been caused by the bullhook's sharp point.

The elephants were chained constantly when not performing and kept rocking back and forth. Because they were chained so close together, they would have to take turns lying down to sleep because they could not all lie down at the same time.

Handlers always carried bullhooks, and you could see the fear and rage in the elephants' eyes. When I complained about the cruelty, the handlers made a point of hitting and hooking the elephants whenever I walked by to taunt me.

Today, I am still a dancer. I taught ballet at the University of Idaho and will soon be taking over as artistic director at the Allegro School of Dance in Charlestown, W.V. During my dancing career, I have performed in Chicago several times and have fond memories of the city. I hope that the city of Chicago will be the one to finally put an end to the abuse that I witnessed day in and day out for two years but was helpless to stop. I left the circus because I could not take it any more, but the elephants cannot leave. They need caring legislators to relegate the circus's reign of terror for elephants to history books covering less enlightened times.

Sincerely,



Jodey Eliseo