Civ. Action No. 06-930 (RMC)

EXHIBIT 10
AR-News: (NJ) Attack shines light on use of wild animals

WeArPetitions at aol.com  WeArPetitions at aol.com
Thu Oct 9 10:28:40 EDT 2003

- Previous message: AR-News: IF YOU'RE FELINE BAD, BLAME YOUR CAT
- Next message: AR-News: (LA) Animal shelter lucky for friends who care
- Messages sorted by: [date] [thread] [subject] [author]


Thursday, October 09, 2003
BY BRIAN T. MURRAY
Star-Ledger Staff
The audience stiffened, as if bracing for an impact, when the 600-pound white Bengal tiger stood up at the end of the stage to slobber milk from a baby bottle held by handlers Tony "I worried just a little bit, because of what happened in Las Vegas," she said.
Most of those watching the Fercos Brothers unleash their "Untamed Illusions" act were clearly aware of last Friday's onstage mauling in Las Vegas of Siegfried & Roy co-headliner Roy Horn by a white tiger. In fact, some in the Atlantic City audience admitted it brought a renewed thrill -- even a guilty pleasur -- to see the Fercos Brothers' extravagant magic and jungle animal show.
But as the Fercos Brothers launched another performance last night and Roy Horn fans prayed for his recovery outside a makeshift shrine in Las Vegas, a national debate continued over the private ownership of exotic animals, an argument fueled by the discovery over the weekend that a New York City man was bitten by a 425-pound tiger he was keeping in his apartment.
The controversy is not so much about safety as it is about the well-being of captive wild animals, even in the hands of well-paid performers.
"I've heard that the cats in these shows are well cared for," said Nina Austenberg, director of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office of the Humane Society of the United States. "But overall, privately owned wild animals do not fare well, and any good that anyone could possibly find in these performances is certainly outweighed by the terrible things happening everywhere else."
The larger picture involves roadside circuses, struggling zoos and private backyard shows where everything from wild wolves and cougars to lions, tigers and bears frequently are rescued from deplorable conditions by wildlife authorities. Though there is outright abuse, the problem more often is sheer neglect because the owners do not have the money, time or ability to properly care for the animals.
Licensing is haphazard. The United States Department of Agriculture requires permits for anyone who publicly exhibits exotic animals. But ownership regulations vary from state to state, with authorities in some areas only now
starting to tighten the regulations.
Volunteer groups such as the Shambala Preserve in California, headed by actress-turned-animal activist Tippi Hedren, have struggled to build sanctuaries for the animals that end up abandoned or seized by authorities. But it is a costly and difficult task.
New Jersey also has had its problems with big cats.
By next month, state wildlife authorities expect to end nearly four years of legal wrangling with Joan Byron-Marasek, who was blamed for a loose tiger that was shot and killed by police in Ocean County in 1999. Her Jackson Township compound has been declared substandard, and under court order, Byron-Marasek's 24 Bengal tigers are to be relocated to a Texas animal sanctuary.
"That's the type of thing that invariably happens when you continue to allow the private breeding and sale of exotic animals, and these Siegfried & Roy type shows only perpetuate the problem," said Nicole Paquette of the Animal Protection Institute, a national organization based in California. Hedren, for one, disagrees.
"Everything is not black and white," said Hedren, who has become renowned for efforts to save captive exotic animals since her famed performance nearly 40 years ago in the Alfred Hitchcock thriller, "The Birds."
"Yes, these shows are an accident waiting to happen. These are wild animals. But it would be obscene to take the animals from Siegfried & Roy, who are treated better than any, when we have all these animals across the United States that we cannot hope to find enough sanctuaries for," she said.
The Fercos Brothers insist the care they give to their cats is unequaled. They own nine big cats -- six tigers, two jaguars and a lion -- and when they are not traveling, they share a lavish Las Vegas home where the animals enjoy their own, in-ground swimming pool. The cats spend most of their time in 20-by-20-foot individual containments, with access to air-conditioning and lush bedding, all spread over nearly three acres of lush oasis.
The brothers also say they hand-feed and walk their cats daily to ensure a lasting bond.
"It's not a gimmick, because it costs so much money. We wouldn't spend the money on a gimmick," Ferdinand Forcero, 51, said, pacing through a temporary compound built for his cats next to the Ocean Life Center at Gardner's Basin. Located just a few blocks from the Taj Mahal, the compound cost $30,000.
"We have veterinarian bills, special food, special housing. It's expensive to do it right," said Tony Fercos, 47. "This guy in New York, keeping a tiger in his apartment, what could he have been thinking? Of course the tiger bit him. Of course. You would bite him, too, after being kept there like that."
The brothers, Czechoslovakia natives and sixth-generation circus performers, are contemporaries of Siegfried & Roy. But their are major differences, such as the fact the Fercos Brothers still travel around the world and do not maintain 63 big cats.
"That can be the difference. We use the same animals, only four on stage, and we are with them always. Roy and Siegfried, our good friends, they rotate about 40 of their 60 cats," Tony Fercos said.
Big cats can easily become alienated from handlers without regular, daily contact, he said as he hand-fed raw meat to one tiger about three hours before a show. Constant contact with the animals, to instill comfort as well as to reassert human dominance, is important, the brothers said.
"We are friend and general to them," Tony Fercos said. "It must be that way, and you have to remind them every day or they will take advantage."
and Ferdinand Fercos.
"I didn't know whether to clap or not. I didn't know whether I was supposed to move -- if that would bother the tiger," said Nancy Viveiros of Massachusetts, who was sitting just inches from the big cat Tuesday night at the Tru Mahal Xanadu Showroom in Atlantic City.
-------------- next part --------------
An HTML attachment was scrubbed...
URL: http://lists.envirolink.org/pipermail/ar-news/attachments/20031009/02acf440/att