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Elephants and Ethics at the Circus

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While the April 3 Metro article "On the Other Tightrope" framed the debate about circuses' treatment of animals in general terms and mentioned a pending federal lawsuit, it failed to point out what the evidence against Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus is. This information is central to any parent's decision about the ethics surrounding treatment of circus animals.

Ringling Bros. employees have repeatedly been documented hitting elephants with bull hooks, which are heavy, pointed pokers with a sharp hook at the end. One employee saw "an elephant dripping blood all over the arena floor during the show from being hooked." Ringling Bros. elephants are kept chained all the time except when performing; in one documented case, elephants were chained for 77 consecutive hours.

This is just the tip of the iceberg of information presented in the lawsuit, and no matter how upsetting, it should be shared with the public so that parents can make informed decisions about what is acceptable treatment of wild and endangered animals. Abusing elephants with bull hooks and chains, which is standard industry practice, is simply

unacceptable.

NICOLE G. PAQUETTE

Senior Vice President and General Counsel

Born Free USA-Animal Protection Institute

Sacramento

The writer's organization is a plaintiff in the case against

Ringling Bros.

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