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## WITNESS LIST

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME

### LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON

H.R. 2929, THE "CAPTIVE ELEPHANT ACCIDENT PREVENTION ACT OF 1999"

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2000

2237 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

9:30 A.M.

## WITNESSES

Bob Barker, Hollywood, California

Dr. Joel Parrott, Office of the Director, Oakland Zoo, Oakland, California

Mr. Tom Rider, formerly of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus  
West Boxford, Massachusetts

Mr. Blayne Doyle, Palm Bay Police Department, Palm Bay, Florida

Ms. Pat Derby, President, Performing Animal Welfare Society, Galt, California

Ms. Debbie Olson, Director of Conservation and Science Programs, Indianapolis Zoo  
Azle, Texas

Dennis Schmitt DVM, PhD, Associate Professor, Agriculture Department  
Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri

Mr. David Blasko, Elephant Encounter Supervisor, Six Flags, Marine World,  
Vallejo, California

Ms. Kari Johnson, Have Trunk Will Travel, Perris, California

Mr. David Rawls, President, Kelly Miller Circus, Hugo, Oklahoma

Testimony of Tom Rider  
600 East Holland  
Washington, IL. 61571

Good morning Mr.. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Tom Rider, a former circus employee. I worked with Clyde Beatty Cole Brothers Circus in 1997 as an elephant keeper and I loaded the children for the elephant ride. The elephant which we used, Pete or Petunia, was considered to be a dangerous animal and we were cautioned not to go near her. Despite this, she was used for rides before the show and during intermission carrying as many as ten children at a time on her back. She was surrounded by people waiting to ride. The only barrier between her and the public was a plastic net fence.

Typically during elephant rides, the handler walks in front of the elephant as she carries the riders on her back. If the elephant decides to wander off, it would take at least a few minutes for any handler to regain control. Since the elephant is surrounded by people, literally, there would be no way to prevent serious injuries if she decided to take off like the elephant in Florida. It never ceased to amaze me that the circus would tell people to put their children on an elephant's back when they knew how dangerous the elephant was.

I left Beatty Cole because in White Plains New York, when Pete did not perform her act properly, she was taken to the tent, laid down and five trainers beat her with bullhooks. Pete is now dead.

After I left Beatty Cole, I went to work for Ringling Brothers Circus in Austin, Texas. I was hired as a barn man's assistant and two months later, I became the afternoon barn man. In that capacity, I was present during the majority of the performances.

During my two and a half year's employment with the circus, I was slammed between two elephants while I was working in the stock cars. Even though the chained, they were capable of doing incredible damage and most of the staff had similar incidents. It was very common to be stepped on, hit by the tail or injured in other ways just because of the sheer size and power of the elephant. My experiences have left me with a considerable respect for the damage that elephants can do even unintentionally.

We had an elephant named Karen who was labeled "killer" yet she was kept on the road performing because she was a good performing elephant. Although she was the most dangerous elephant in the group, she is the one they used in the three ring adventure where the public is allowed to stand around the elephant with no safety net or other protection around her. Karen had a habit of knocking anyone who came into range, slamming them into the ground yet they allowed her to have contact with the audience.

While I worked for Ringling Brothers, I heard stories all the time about dangerous elephants and how they could kill you if you got too close. One of the top trainers for the circus had been killed by one of his elephants and a lot of the handlers were hit while they were working around them.

I was injured in the eye when an elephant slammed me with her tail and I have been slammed a few times while working around them.

After my three years working with elephants in the circus, I can tell you that they live in confinement, they are beaten all the time when they don't perform properly. That makes them dangerous and they want to get away.

My first experience with an elephant running was in Tupelo, Mississippi when we were on the elephant walk returning to the train and a cattle truck stopped to let us pass. Karen, who was in the front, was startled by the cattle and she, Minnie and Mysore took off running straight down the road. Luckily, it was at night and there were some police cars in their path which stopped them and the trainer was able to catch them. If this had occurred during the day, with a lot of public around, it would have caused a lot of injury to innocent people.

Another time, in Ottawa, Canada, in the afternoon, I was alone and the elephants were contained behind their electric fence. I was approximately 75 yards away cleaning when I heard an elephant scream. When I turned around, I saw three elephants fighting and two others were heading for the horse tent, having broken through the fence. Since I was alone, I was unable to control the situation. It took about five minutes before I could get help and another five minutes before we could begin to regain control. During this time, if the elephants had run in a different direction and had not moved toward the horses, they would have been right in the middle of the public.

My experiences with the circus convince me that, because of the way they live and are trained, elephants are extremely dangerous and should not be around the public. I also know first hand that the circus keeps the danger and the public exposure well hidden and we were cautioned never to let the public know if anything goes wrong. We could have lost our jobs if we had ever reported to the USDA or others any incidents that put the public at risk.

When I became disturbed about the treatment of the elephants, the continual beatings, including the baby Benjamin, I was told "that's discipline". On another occasion, I was confronted by my supervisor that I was overheard on the train saying I was going to report the beatings of the baby Benjamin to the USDA. It was common knowledge that I was the one who complained about the treatment of the elephants.

Whenever the USDA inspected the circus, the circus always knew in advance that they were coming. We were always told to clean up, don't hit the elephants when they come around. I know for a fact that any attempt by the USDA to regulate the circus or to enforce laws is a joke. I was present at many inspections where the inspectors never saw the marks on the elephants from the bull hooks and the beatings. Obviously, they would not be able to regulate a situation that they see two or three times a year.

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Thank you for your