

"Entertainment or Animaltainment?"

by Shannon Burton

The use of animals for entertainment purposes rubs a sore spot in my heart, because I love animals. I have 2 cats, and my mother and I have been foster parenting feral felines for more than 6 years. The thought of someone using felines - or any animal for that matter - for entertainment purposes - sickens and angers me. Animals were never meant to wear clothes, costumes or accessories. Perhaps that is fine in someone's private home, but it is inexcusable in the circus industry, television, the media in general and in movies. Nothing angers me more than to see a bear in a ballerina costume for instance, or dogs, monkeys, tigers or elephants in buffoonish, cartoonish garments. I imagine the animal used for entertainment purposes is conditioned and manipulated, perhaps forced to beg for a reward or a treat, just to "learn" a trick, perform a stunt or do something totally unnatural for the animal species. Teaching elephants to stand on their hind legs, for instance, must surely put an awful lot of weight (a couple of tons, I surmise) on the front legs, and vice versa. The hooked prod that animal trainers use to coax and frighten the elephants into performing should be outlawed and so should circuses and carnivals featuring performing animals. Research has proven time and again that animals are abused who are forced to be in the circus route. Lack of exercise, poor feeding and grooming, inadequate housing and the use of drugs to "anesthetize" or allow the animals to become lethargic is grossly underreported and grossly a common factor in this grisly field of entertainment. Is it any wonder that from time to time, you will read about an elephant who stampeded and ran away from the circus tent, accidentally injuring those in its way? If I was forced to perform in a circus, instead of living in freedom on the wide open savannas of Africa or Asia, I would run away, too! The inbreeding or cross breeding of wild animals is also a shameful sin. It isn't funny to me when a circus advertisement flaunts a whole new undiscovered creature, which turns out to be a liger (lion and tiger mix). I don't think lions and tigers would mate naturally. I should think they would be forced to copulate. Again, blatant abuse. Zoos are nice - if you aren't an animal. I don't care if it's the Washington D.C. Zoo or the Louisville (Kentucky) Zoo. It is not right to fence in those animals that are supposed to be wild and free. Cooping up orangutans and gorillas and watching them beat their chests and become defiant (and angry) is a common sight. It sickens me. My mother and I have vowed never to visit a zoo again. It has been many years since we paid to see animals in distress, that is, animals in the zoo. Would people like to be exploited and on display in small, inadequate cages? I hardly think so. Television commercials feature cats and dogs doing abnormal gestures and poses. Movies use animals all the time to achieve cinematic perfection. Even though the disclaimer, "No animals were hurt in the production of this film" is shown during the credits, I wonder how many were INJURED, ABUSED or were accidentally KILLED? Now that's a credit line you will never see following a movie. The bottom line is that people need to stand up and speak out for animals, for they have no voice of their own. We are their sole means of survival, protection and decency. We must put a stop to the

exploitation, mistreatment and abuse of animals in the entertainment industry. Animals were meant to be animals - not animals costumed as humans.