

http://www.circusfa ns.org/res_det.php?res_id=348

<snip>

PAWS. The California based Performing Animal Welfare Society has been active in anti-circus efforts since its founding. An argument might be made that PAWS is less a true liberationist group or welfare society and more of personal fiefdom for founder and former Hollywood animal trainer Pat Derby. Like PeTA, PAWS has enjoyed significant success with direct mail fund raising. In fact donations have allowed PAWS to become significant property owners both around their original "sanctuary" in Galt, CA and the Sierra foothills where they have acquired more 2000 acres for a larger animal compound. PAWS was among the first AR/AL organizations to posit that elephants are simply too dangerous for circuses (and more recently, neglected in zoos.) Too dangerous for the circus ring. Too dangerous for rides. Interestingly neither the insurance companies that write bonds for circuses, nor emergency room physicians who presumably treat elephant accident victims, nor elephant managers have lined up to support this PAWS contention. . On any given weekend in America more riders are injured in equestrian events than in all of the elephant accidents in this decade. The National Farm Medicine Center studied one typical rural medical center over a two year period in 1994 and 1995 and reported 74 cases of horse related injuries requiring in-patient treatment in a single community with a population of fewer than 59,000 people. In contrast in the two hundred years since the first elephant was exhibited in America even the Performing Animal Welfare Society, reports only 120 approximate injuries directly or indirectly linked to elephant accidents -- with fewer than half of these accidents involving spectators at the circus. Sixty elephant related circus spectator injuries in 200 years in all of the United States versus 74 horse related injuries in 24 months in one rural area with less than 59,000 people -- it's amazing that PAWS isn't suggesting the closure of every stable in the United States . Moreover while PAWS reminds us that OSHA deems working with elephants to be a "dangerous occupation," they suggest that elephants will thrive in shelters, operations frequently staffed by volunteers with no professional experience and little training. If elephants are so dangerous in the circus by virtue of the fact that they are wild animals, then why aren't they equally dangerous when housed at the PAWS "sanctuary?"

"Because elephants are uniformly mistreated in circus training and they're forced to perform," they tell us. And where's the evidence to support that? Elephant related accidents are relatively rare, and when they do occur those accidents are as likely to happen in a zoo (where the animals don't perform) as they are in a circus. Even PAWS acknowledges that a video they provide purporting to secretly document abusive training was more than ten years old and involved not a circus but a zoo

So it's not really about safety, it's about performing. The activists are outraged by the traditional role of animals under the bigtop because they find it demeaning. Not a "sexy"

issue when your groups is pushing a legislative agenda.. PAWS founder Ms. Derby is quite up front on her internet site. Her desire isn't to protect human visitors to the circus, she wants to eliminate the traditional role of circus elephants. A PAWS celebrity appeal from actress Kim Basinger is particularly disingenuous. Ms Basinger may dislike the use of elephants in US circuses -- but she was perfectly comfortable working with circus elephants in South Africa during the shooting of a film there several years ago. Ms Derby would prefer to see elephants in the wild. Wouldn't we all. PAWS likes to trumpet violations of USDA Animal Welfare Act standards by circuses traveling with elephants, but a look at the actual violations cited reveals that most of these violations were minor, not unlike the several violations racked up by Pat Derby's own sanctuary in Galt.

And then there's TAOS , the association of "sanctuaries" founded by PAWS guru Pat Derby. The pro-activist magazine Animal People's article base includes stories noting that several highly respected exotic animal shelters want nothing to do with TAOS and its autocratic dictates. And other award winning exotics programs are excluded from potential TAOS membership because they participate in American Zoo Association reproduction programs aimed at species survival. We can only infer that Derby 's TAOS would rather see an animal become extinct than see it bred in captivity in an accredited shelter. Animal People further reminds us in their archives that PAWS Executive Director Derby lost a multi-million dollar libel judgement in August 1990 in a Nevada lawsuit brought by orangutan trainer Bobby Berosini. Derby was named in that suit along with PETA and others. Although the verdict was overturned upon appeal, apparently the 1990 jury decided that Derby and other activists weren't credible sources for information.

In recent years PAWS and Ms Derby have enjoyed some successes in "acquiring" elephants from Ringling Bros, in settlement for an ill-conceived espionage effort against the animal rights group, and from the San Francisco Zoo, which bowed to pressure for liberationist group and city council to give up its animals. How will the elephants do under Derby 's care? One zoo elephant has already been euthenized, according to Derby from the long term effects of captivity. Given her record one can't be sure that that "bull" will be the only casualty. Derby rarely mentions how in her days as a trainer and operator of a roadside zoo in Buellton , CA another elephant in her care died in a barn fire.

PAWS would probably say, "at least it wasn't the circus."