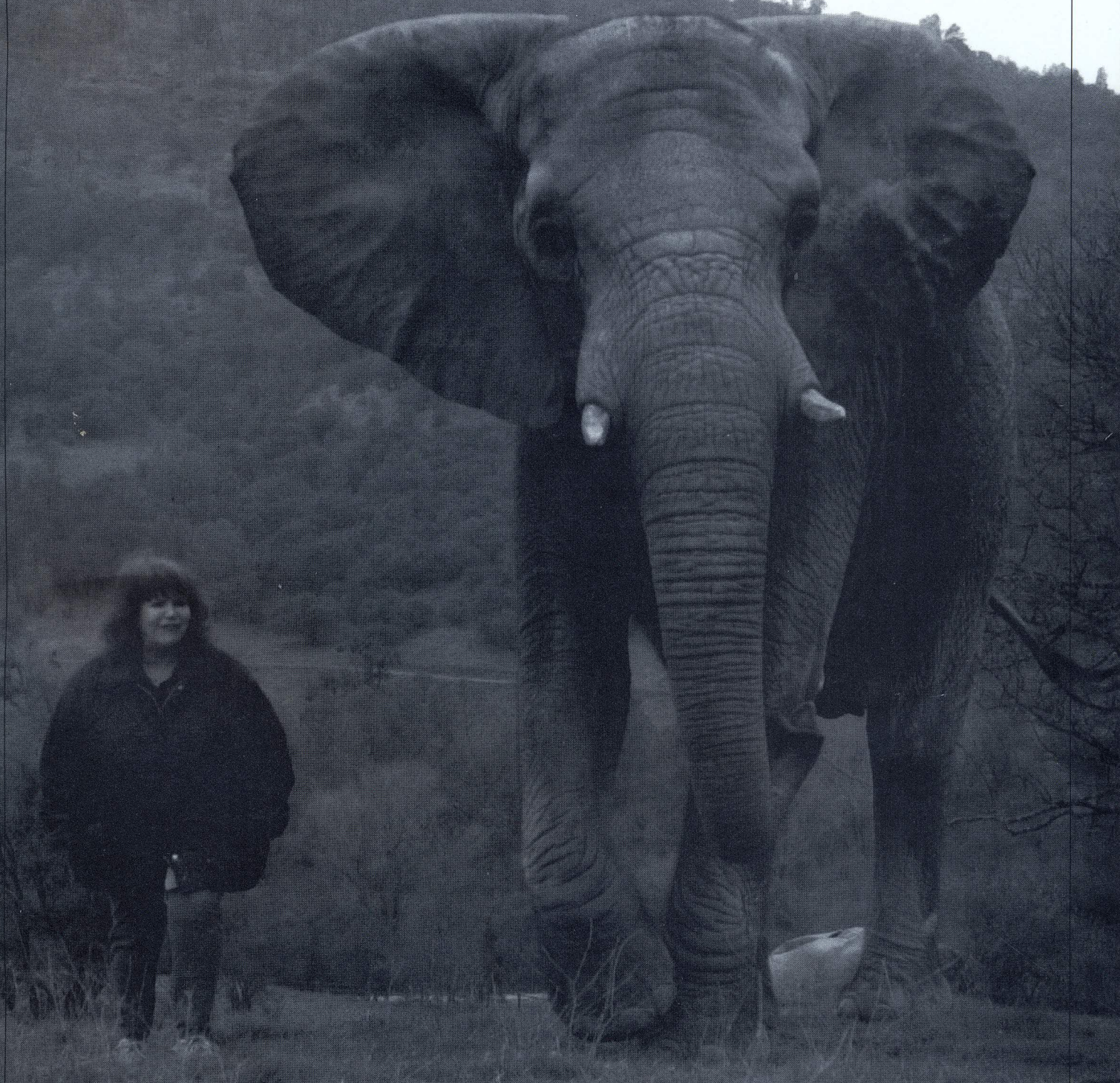
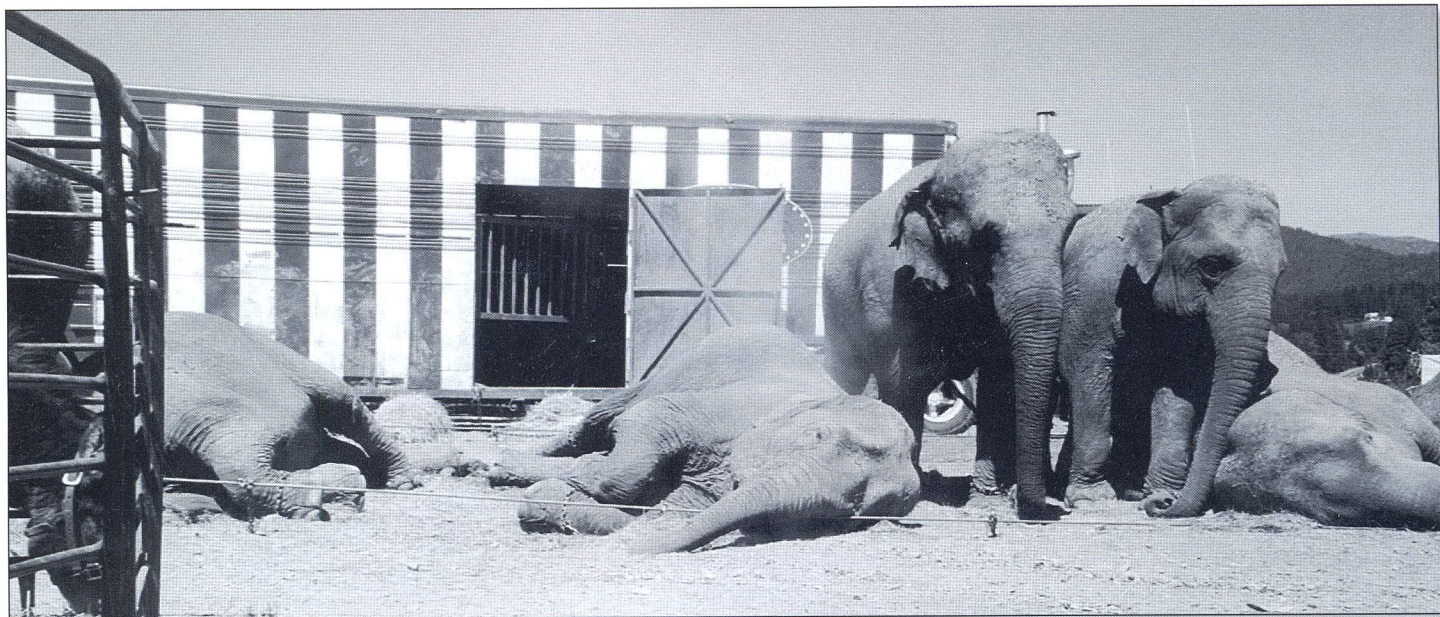


EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW

# About Elephants







## Elephants In Captivity

The elephants to which the general public have been exposed in zoos, circuses or traveling shows, obviously experience radically different lifestyles than their wild counterparts. Since the number of elephants in natural habitats is rapidly decreasing, much effort has been spent to successfully breed elephants in captivity. Unfortunately, captive-bred elephants cannot be returned to their natural habitat and many live their lives in small enclosures, chained and disciplined.

Elephants are very intelligent and are easily bored with the synthesized environments provided by their captors. Given the fact that they are inherently social, it is crucial that they be allowed to interact with others of their species. Single elephants in captivity often develop severe mental disorders.

African elephants are the largest living land animals and can weigh up to 16,500 pounds;

Asian elephants weigh up to 11,000 pounds. For such mammoth animals, the greatest health threat is in their feet which are susceptible to life-threatening infections. In the wild, elephants walk many miles a day.

"Free-living elephants are on the move at least 20 out of every 24 hours, actively engaged in foraging, socializing and searching for conspecifics...Walking to stay well applies to more than just an elephant's physical health. Elephants in small spaces with little mental and physical stimulation also exhibit stereotypic behavior, rocking and swaying." (Joyce Poole)

Captive elephants spend much of their time chained in one place without sufficient leg motion to help circulation, which can lead to degenerative joint disease and other problems.

"Many of the degenerative joint disease problems encountered in captive elephants may be attributable to chaining and, consequently,

restricted activity for most of the day." (Dr. Murray E. Fowler)

In addition, "both the uniform surface of hard, cold floors as well as the fact that many elephants are chained in positions that restrict movement are responsible for the joint lesions seen often in captive elephants." (Dr. Michael Schmidt)

Keepers must perform pachyderm pedicures to keep dirt out of any cracks and crevices, and trim foot pads which would have been worn away naturally in the wild.

"Asian elephants have the habit of sharpening their tusks on trees, especially teak trees. They show an intense dislike of having blunt tusks, and in a few days they sharpen them up again. In captivity, where the elephants usually have no trees to sharpen them on, the tusks often grow to grotesque lengths and shapes never seen in freedom." (Dr. H. Hediger)





Elephants in the wild frequently bathe in mud and water. Such a habit is necessary to maintain healthy skin; it is also a very enjoyable experience which entire elephant families share. Bathing is a necessary part of elephant hygiene.

Since wild elephant habitat is usually in warm, sunny climates, elephants must protect themselves from the sun's harmful rays. Wild elephants are often seen seeking shelter under trees and in thickets during the heat of the day. Because of an elephant's susceptibility to sunburn, the act of mud bathing and dusting covers the skin, thus protecting it from the sun.

Although elephants are native to warm climates, a common misconception maintains it is therefore acceptable to chain elephants in the sun. However, as documented by many experts, "elephants can get sunburned if exposed to direct sunlight for several hours." (Schmidt, 1986)

"Providing shade for elephants and protecting the head from direct sunlight will prevent sunburn." (Dr. Ursula Bechert)

Allowing natural dusting and bathing behavior protects the skin and mud bathing allows elephants "to lose heat through evaporative cooling, with the mud performing the function of sweat, which the elephant does not seem to produce." (Dr. S. K. Eltringham)

"Bathing by elephants is concerned with skin care as it prevents the horny layers from becoming too dry and brittle. Elephants appear to lack sebaceous glands as well as sweat glands and so produce no sebum, which, in other mammals, serves to keep the skin soft and flexible." (R.I.C. Spearman)

As well as bathing in mud, elephants periodically dust themselves with dry earth which protects them from the sun and insect bites. "The dust usually contains sand and gravel, these particles act as abrasives and promote the shedding of the hard keratinized flakes in the skin." (Spearman)

It is obvious that the need to bathe and dust is an important mental and physical requisite in the life of an elephant. Elephants who travel with circuses and shows are not provided with necessary daily mud and water

baths. The traveling vehicles, especially during the summer months, are extremely hot, lack air-conditioning and are poorly ventilated. It is here that the traveling elephants are forced to spend most of their time. Without mud or water readily available to them, the elephants have only the flapping of their ears to keep themselves cool.

Current laws concede that washing an elephant daily with water from a hose is enough to provide for their needs, and this is all that could ever be possible for a traveling elephant. However, bathing in pools or lakes provides the necessary skin care mentioned above that hoses cannot.

"The elephant skin has a velvet kind of quality which even bleeds if a horsefly stings it. With its funny hairs, the elephant feels what it doesn't see. The skin is also very important for thermo-regulation. It is highly sensitive, so it needs a lot of care, not only a bath. They use leaves, sand or earth to cool the body and retain the moisture of the skin. But when you see circus elephants they always have to stand there clean, naked, whereas you never see a clean, naked wild elephant, they're always covered with water, mud, leaves, sand, earth or something to protect the skin. This may add to the unhappiness these elephants must feel in

the circus." (Dr. Fred Kurt)

Because the physical, social and psychological aspects of the life of an elephant in the wild are so complex and not yet completely understood, providing for all of their needs in captivity is never possible. It is important that caretakers of captive elephants, "to prevent stress, provide a physical and social environment that approximates the normal habitat as closely as possible." (Fowler)

"Behavioral knowledge can be used in attempts to provide the animal with facility for the output of the behavior needed in its self-maintenance." (A. F. Fraser)

Knowledge of elephant behavior is ignored in circuses, and performing elephants become shadows of their wild counterparts. Natural habitats obviously cannot be simulated in a circus environment and are often inadequate in zoo facilities, as well.

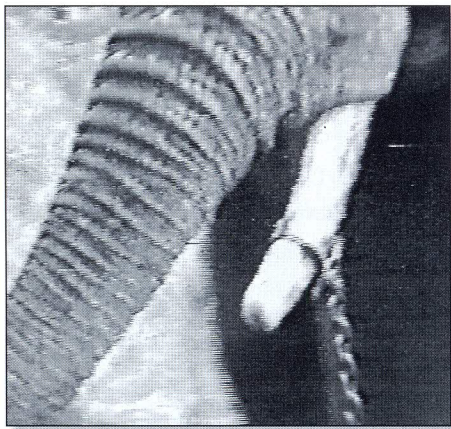
"While elephants may become habituated to, or tamed by, human beings, they are still wild animals with the same inherent physical, behavioral, social and emotional interests as wild elephants. The interests of captive elephants anywhere should clearly be based on conclusions from studies of elephants in their natural habitat." (Joyce Poole)

#### **ARK 2000 Sanctuary — elephants enjoying their time at the lake.**

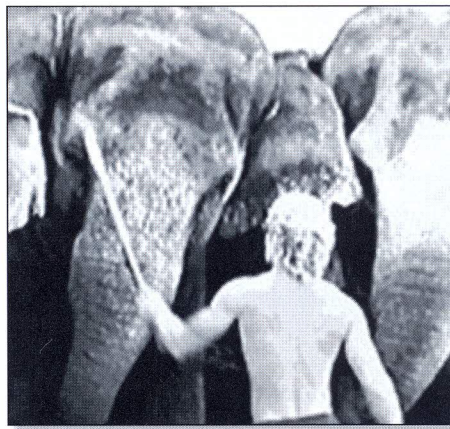


PHOTO BY JANICE CLARK





**Martingales**



**The ankus, or elephant hook**



**Chaining**

### Discipline

The captive elephant's massive size and comparatively small living quarters, coupled with stressful long periods of chaining, do not allow the expenditure of natural energy. This pent-up energy creates a considerable potential for keeper injury. An average of one elephant keeper every year is killed by a captive elephant.

Such occurrences lead to the misconception that elephants must be handled brutally to maintain control. In truth, if more institutions made a commitment to improving their housing for elephants, the need for discipline would be minimized, the mental health and stability of the elephants would greatly improve, and headlines such as "Circus Elephant Goes on Rampage: A Trainer Killed" would, in all probability, no longer be commonplace.

Unfortunately, many elephant management programs are based on archaic, sadistic procedures that are furtively conducted and carefully protected by zoo directors and circus owners.

"Elephant handlers all over the country concede that they regularly discipline the animals with electric shock, by beating them with axe handles and shackling their legs with chains."

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Some popular tools of "discipline" which are utilized in many elephant management programs and circuses are:

**The ankus or elephant hook:** a sharp, pointed hook used for prodding and to discourage undesired behavior. This is embedded into the most sensitive areas of an elephant; around the feet, behind the ears, under the chin, inside the mouth, and other sensitive areas around the face.

**Martingales:** metal rings clamped around the elephant's tusks to which chains are fas-

tened and then attached to chains around the front feet. Their purpose is to restrict head movement. Martingales are illegal in California.

**Long chaining periods:** a widespread method of severely restraining elephants to establish dominance and exhibit control. Chains are attached to one or both front and back legs, and sometimes around the neck.

**Electric shock treatment:** a disciplinary measure in which the elephant is jolted with currents from an electric prod to discourage undesirable behavior.

**Hitting and beating:** practices which are widely used and accepted among many elephant handlers. Axe handles and metal pipes are common implements.

**Whipping:** the whip is an especially brutal tool, due to the extreme sensitivity of an elephant's skin. The sting of a whip is excruciatingly painful to an elephant.

A common example of elephant discipline is the following:

In February, 1988, an African elephant, M'Dunda, was transferred from her zoo home to a wild animal park for breeding purposes. Terrified by her new surroundings, she struck out at strangers. To discipline her, all four of her legs were chained and pulled apart, and she was brought down with block and tackle. Five keepers beat her with axe handles above the trunk and between the eyes. Beatings went on in sessions for two days. When she finally accepted an apple from a keeper, it was considered a triumph that she became obedient. Critics say she obeyed as a result of a broken spirit.



**The ankus or elephant hook:** a sharp, pointed hook, used for prodding to discourage undesired behavior. It is embedded into the most sensitive areas of an elephant; around the feet, behind the ears, under the chin, inside the mouth and other sensitive areas around the face.



Investigations into this incident elicited new legislation in California to protect elephants from cruel training methods. During hearings on this elephant bill, abusive treatment was exposed and justified by zoo officials.

"Elephant handlers all over the country concede that they regularly discipline the animals with electric shocks, by beating them with axe handles and shackling their legs with chains. One side deplores the treatment as needless cruelty while the other says that the thick-skinned elephants do not suffer unduly and that there is no alternative." (San Francisco Chronicle)

Case histories resembling M'Dunda's are widespread. As a result of these hearings, SB 892, a California bill outlawing the use of electricity, the deprivation of food, water or rest, and punishment which results in scarring or breaking of an elephant's skin, was passed in October of 1989.

In the words of California Senator Dan McCorquodale, "It continues to shock me that anyone would try to justify pulling an elephant to the ground and beating it repeatedly with hickory axe handles. It is even more appalling

that anyone would call such cruelty discipline. It bothers me that there is even a need for this bill."

In a letter dated July 13, 1989, the California Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), in opposition to the bill, expressed concern over many aspects of SB 892.

In a letter the CAZA stated: "We would like to make sure that the language contained in the bill would not prohibit use of: martingales and block and tackle for training and moving elephants; electrical fences and hand-held, battery-operated, low-voltage, electrical devices used for directing the movement of elephants; the ankus (standard elephant keeper tool) which on occasion can cause superficial cuts or bruises when the elephant being moved, or parted from another fighting animal, shifts directions suddenly; and training which is a form of discipline, as long as the procedures employed are not done maliciously, with the intent to abuse or harm the elephant. . . We, the members of the California Association of Zoos and Aquariums, are committed to the safekeeping of the animals that have been put into our trust. We would never condone or

accept abusive or cruel treatment of animals in captivity."

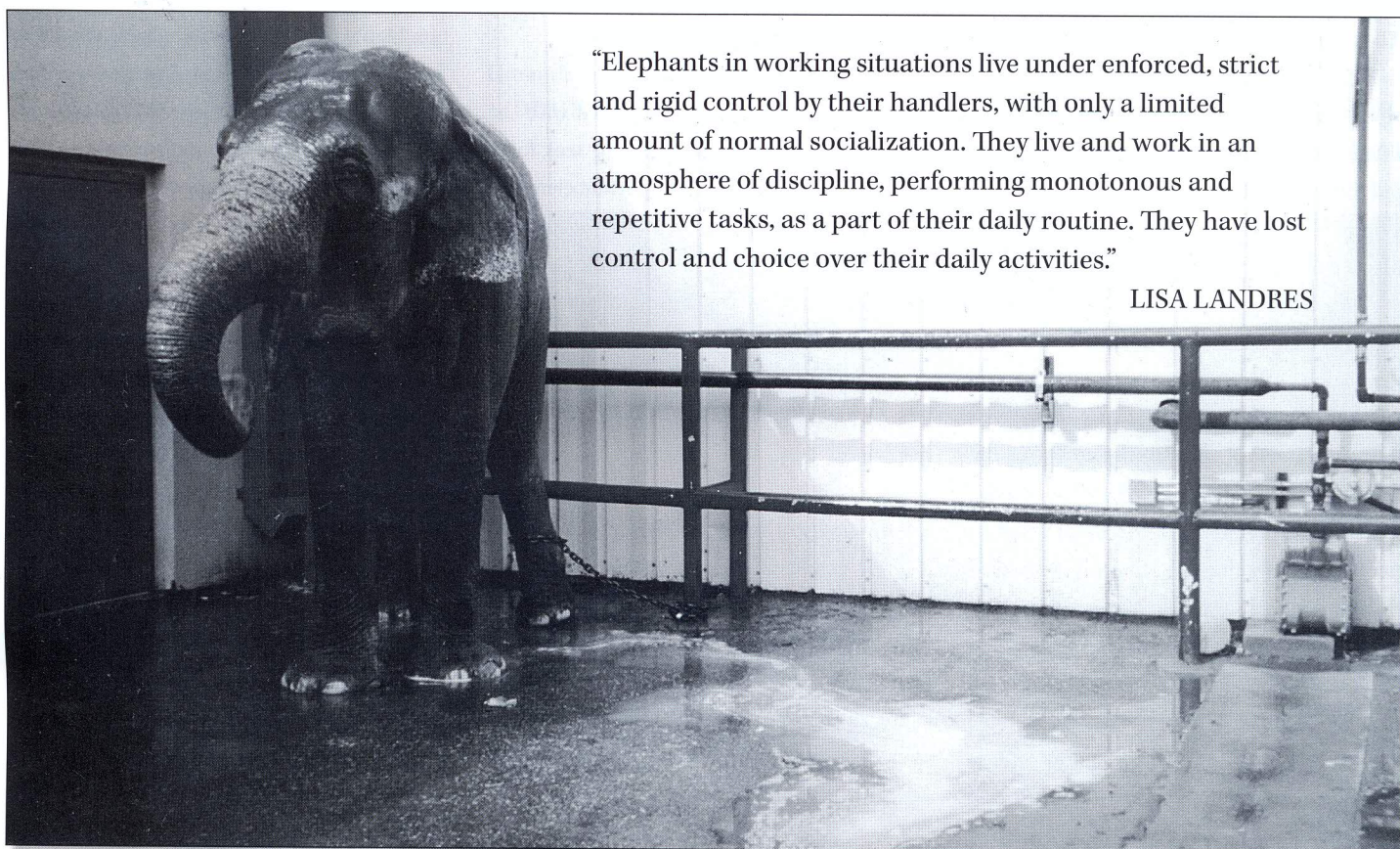
It is ironic that in one sentence CAZA states that they would never accept cruel or abusive treatment of animals, and in another they are pleading for the continued allowance of such disciplinary tools as block and tackle, electric shock, and bull hooks which cause cuts and bruises.

Thankfully, SB 892 has outlawed many such devices in California; however, these instruments are still legal in other states and continue to be used regularly in many elephant management programs.

It is shocking to realize that so many institutions are opposed to adopting less brutal handling techniques.

**"The elephant skin has a velvet kind of quality which even bleeds if a horsefly stings it. With its funny hairs, the elephant feels what it doesn't see."**

DR. FRED KURT



"Elephants in working situations live under enforced, strict and rigid control by their handlers, with only a limited amount of normal socialization. They live and work in an atmosphere of discipline, performing monotonous and repetitive tasks, as a part of their daily routine. They have lost control and choice over their daily activities."

LISA LANDRES