



LOS ANGELES
ALLIANCE FOR
ELEPHANTS

April 28, 2010

Ms. Elizabeth Gabler, President
"Water for Elephants"
c/o Fox 2000
10201 W Pico Blvd
Bldg. 78
Los Angeles, CA 90035

Dear Ms. Gabler,

We are writing to you as concerned citizens and world-recognized experts on wild and captive elephants to express our viewpoint regarding your upcoming production, *Water for Elephants*. In this story, an elephant named Rosie features prominently. Traditionally, Hollywood would use trained wild animals in this role. Without wishing to presume that this is your plan, we would like to offer important information and perspectives for your consideration regarding the possible use of a live elephant in the film's production. In today's climate we believe that animatronics and high-tech visual effects techniques would show far greater compassion and respect for animals while offering the best result.

Signatories to this letter include Pat Derby, director and founder of the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), who spent fifteen years working a variety of animals in film and television and is the author of the best-selling book, "The Lady and Her Tiger," which exposed the cruel training, neglect and abuse often hidden on film productions. Joyce Poole, PhD, is recognized as one of the world's foremost authorities on elephants, having studied their behavior and communication for more than 30 years. She is the founder of ElephantVoices and a trustee with the Amboseli Trust for Elephants.

Many leading authorities on elephants, including scientists, conservationists, welfare experts and veterinarians, agree that elephants have no place in entertainment. Elephants are socially complex, keenly intelligent and vigorous animals who, by their very size and nature, are ill-suited to life in captivity. In the wild, they are on the move for 20 hours a day, exploring their environment, foraging, socializing, caring for their young, and searching for mates and distant friends and relations. Elephants live in an extensive social network that radiates out from the mother-offspring bond to include family, extended family, bond groups, clans, the entire population, including adult males, and even beyond to strangers. At the core of this network is the family in which females remain for life.

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The conditions forced upon elephants used in entertainment are inherently detrimental to individual welfare, since physical and social needs are always secondary to performance. Calves are torn from their mothers to be broken and intensively trained. By long tradition and often by necessity elephants are held in small pens or on chains and transported around in semi-trucks. On location they are often even further restricted. These conditions bear no semblance to an elephant's natural lifestyle. Lack of space and companions, and physical and mental inactivity all have enormous consequences for the individual's health and well-being over the course of a lifetime.

Training is a violent affair that begins when elephants are still babies; it is life-long and unrelenting, meant to break them and force them to be compliant and obedient. In the performance industry there can be no room for error with an animal as powerful and as intelligent as an elephant. To ensure that elephants perform consistently they are kept under the constant control of a handler. At the core of this control is the bullhook, a steel-tipped device similar to a fireplace poker that is used to prod, hook, jab (so-called "guiding") and strike elephants. Even when not in use, the bullhook is a constant reminder of the pain and punishment that can be meted out at any time, for any reason. So powerful is the negative association with the bullhook that an elephant who has not even seen the device in years will respond immediately to its mere presence.

The *Washington Post* published a shocking story (and even more shocking photos) last year about the training of baby elephants at the Ringling Brothers breeding center, as revealed by former handler Sammy Haddock. He described screaming babies (still at an age when they would be suckling) being forcibly taken from their mothers and the months of trauma they endured as they struggled to free themselves from ropes and chains. The postures of the babies in the photographs illustrate the fear that these calves experienced as they strained against their fetters. Only when the babies had given in to the constraints did the next phase of training begin, using more ropes, prodding with bullhooks and electric shock devices. Training sessions could last for three to four hours a day (see article attached).

The training employed by Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus is no different than that used by those who force elephants to perform for movies or to give rides. (In fact, some Hollywood trainers provide elephants for both these uses, such as Have Trunk Will Travel, based in Southern California.) This training is always secretive, performed at animal training compounds away from the main production to assure the total control and consistent performance that the handler needs once on the set. This also circumvents on-set monitoring by humane inspectors and scrutiny by actors and crew who might object to training practices.

The depth of knowledge we have as a society about elephants and their natural lives and needs, in concert with what we know about their suffering in captivity, should compel anyone in the film industry to use alternatives to live animals on the set. Surely, in this time of advanced film and computer-based technologies, including animatronics and VFX, there is no reason to do otherwise. The amazing strides made in this area allow films to be realized without the cruelty or harm that exists, though it may not be seen on the set.

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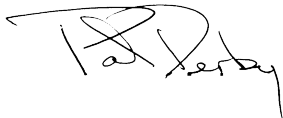
The use of elephants in circuses, zoos and entertainment is a highly controversial issue that draws major media attention, and public sentiment about their welfare is growing steadfastly. We, therefore, believe that production teams should be concerned about the public relations fallout from using live elephants.

As readers and fans of *Water for Elephants*, we believe that the computer-based creation of elephants and other wild animals in the film's production would be consistent with one of the central messages of the book, which exposes the callous exploitation and abuse of both humans and animals in the circus. By using computer technology the studio would not perpetuate the real-life exploitation and abuse of these intelligent wild animals. Rather, the production would send a very strong message to the public that would confirm Hollywood's position at the forefront of an ethically conscious society.

Most elephants in zoos, circuses and entertainment were forcibly taken from their families in the wild and endured capture, horrific breaking techniques, intense confinement and training. In fact, their sad stories are not very different from that of Rosie, the elephant in *Water for Elephants*. What better way to celebrate the spirit of her character and the book than to make the most compassionate choice possible and refrain from using wild animals who also have suffered in the name of entertainment.

We look forward to being able to see and enjoy an animal-free *Water for Elephants* in the not so distant future, and we are happy to discuss any elephant issues further with you if you so wish. We would appreciate hearing from you on this important issue.

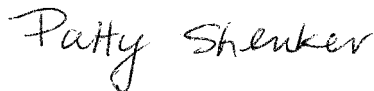
Respectfully,



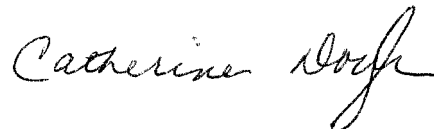
Pat Derby
Director and Founder
Performing Animal Welfare Society
www.pawsweb.org
209-747-4886, patderby@sbcglobal.net



Joyce H. Poole, PhD
Director, ElephantVoices
Trustee, Amboseli Trust for Elephants
www.elephantvoices.org
jpoole@elephantvoices.org



Board Member, ElephantVoices
Patty@pattysenker.com



Founder, Los Angeles Alliance for Elephants
davidkca@earthlink.net

cc: Ms. Carla Hacken
Mr. Erwin Stoff