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BUILT ON THE SHOULDERS OF VETERINARY GIANTS

THE GREATEST ELEPHANT

BY: DR. STEVE JOSEPH, KCVMA HISTORIAN

In his book *Modoc*, Ralph Helfer says she was "...the greatest elephant that ever lived".

Helfer says his work is a "true story", But some are not so sure. Dates, names and places traveled are hard to verify. Nonetheless, true or not, or simply embellished, this is a wonderful read about Modoc (a.k.a Mosie) and his friend and trainer Bram Gunterstein.

The book tells a story about a German boy and an elephant and their fight to stay together for a lifetime as they cross three continents.

According to the author the two are born on the same day and in the same hour. Bram's father, a circus elephant trainer, wishes for a boy and a girl. He considers his dream fulfilled with Bram and Mosie. Bram is brought up to treat elephants with praise and respect of the highest regard, not with intimidation and the threat of punishment for tasks not performed to perfection.

As Modoc matures she performs in European circuses. Circumstances intervene and the circus is sold to an American company. Now older, Bram cannot bear being parted from Mosie and becomes a stowaway as the circus crosses the ocean to New York City.

The ship encounters a formidable storm and is destroyed. Survivors stay afloat on Modoc's back until they are rescued and not a minute to soon.

Modoc and Bram recuperate in India where Bram learns a great deal about elephants. Afraid the circus owner will find them, they escape into the teak forests. It is in this section of the book where Bram meets his first love.

The story turns to a rebellion and the two come close to death. It is at this point they are captured by the owner and transported to America where they become stars of the big top. Modoc survives a poisoning attempt, a fire and a hook wielding drunk before the circus owner sells her without Bram's knowledge.

Many years pass and Modoc's life deteriorates as she is chained, abused and starved. The author, Helfer, who is an animal trainer, discovers and acquires her. He quickly finds she can perform many acts easily. Bram, who never gave up searching for Modoc, finds her years later at Helfer's ranch near Hollywood.

Modoc and Bram live out their lives in constant contact and nurse each other through old age. Bram is the first to die, saying he will show Modoc the way to a new life where they will share eternity. Read this book. You'll like it!

