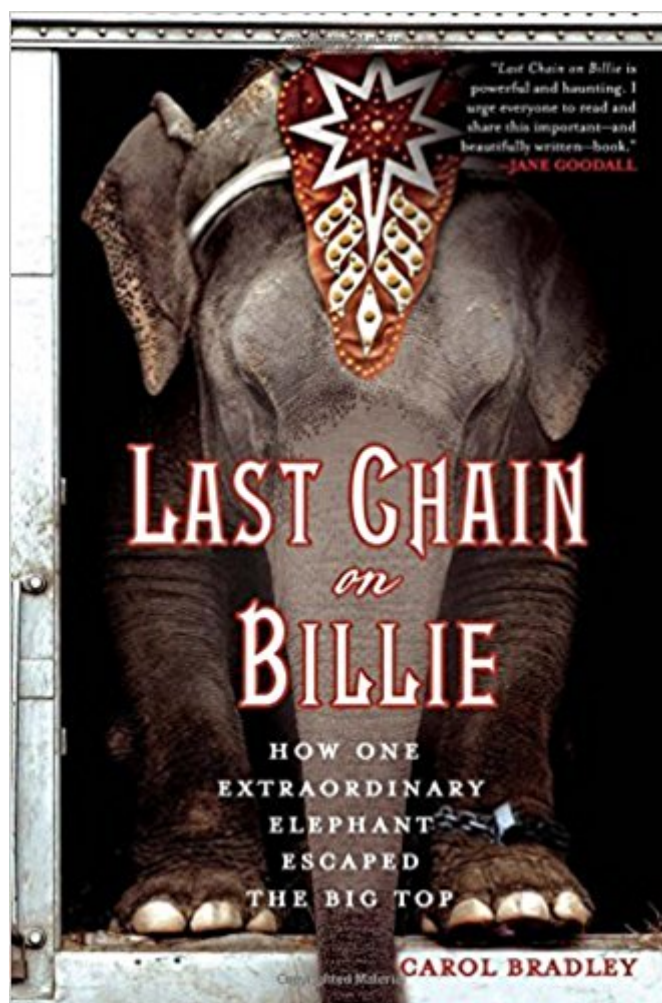


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# Last Chain On Billie: How One Extraordinary Elephant Escaped The Big Top



## Synopsis

Left in the wild, Billie the elephant would have spent her life surrounded by her family, free to wander the jungles of Asia. Instead, she was captured as a baby and shipped to America where she arrived in the mid 1950s, long before circus and zoo-goers worried about animal living conditions. Billie spent her first years confined in a tiny zoo yard giving rides to children. At 19, she was sold and groomed for life in the circus. Billie mastered difficult stunts: she could balance on her hind legs, walk on her front legs and perform one-foot handstands. For twenty-three years she dazzled audiences, but she lived a life of neglect and abuse. As years passed, Billie rebelled. When she attacked and injured her trainer, a federal inspector ordered her taken off the road. For a decade she languished in a dusty barn. Finally, fate intervened. The U.S. Department of Agriculture removed Billie and fifteen other elephants as part of the largest elephant rescue in American history. Billie wound up at a sanctuary for performing elephants in Tennessee at 45, but she thundered with anxiety in her new environment and refused to let anyone remove a chain still clamped around her leg. Last Chain on Billie charts the growing movement to rescue performing elephants from lives of misery, and tells the story of how one emotionally damaged elephant overcame her past and learned to trust humans again.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Like the majority of captive elephants, Billie was captured as a calf, surfacing in the U.S. in 1966 as a four-year-old. After several years in a private zoo, she joined the circus, where

she was trained to perform. Circuses are an extremely demanding environment for elephants, with constant travel from one town to another, multiple shows per week, and continuous noise. Although she learned difficult tricks and was a star, Billie rebelled and began to be known as a difficult elephant, gaining a reputation for attacking her trainers. Meanwhile, two former elephant trainers had grown disenchanted with circuses and the distorted lives that circus elephants lived, and they decided to found a sanctuary for former performing elephants in Tennessee. The story of how Billie got to the Elephant Sanctuary, and of how the sanctuary overcame the prejudices of both the circus and zoo communities, is both heartrending and uplifting. Full of details of the brutal life endured by performing elephants, of battles between Billie's owner and the U.S. Department of Agriculture over her ultimate fate, and of Billie's eventual adjustment to a life of freedom, Bradley's newest (after *Saving Gracie*, 2010) has produced a well-researched winner.

--Nancy Bent --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Last Chain on Billie is powerful and haunting. I urge everyone to read and share this important and beautifully written book." Jane Goodall

"Last Chain on Billie deserves a standing ovation! It is a heart-rending and, unfortunately, deadly accurate description of elephant suffering in circuses and zoos. Please read Last Chain on Billie. It will help you understand why the animal rights movement is sweeping the country." Bob Barker, legendary game-show host and ardent animal-welfare activist

"Last Chain on Billie brings the reader on an insightful, behind-the-scenes journey to witness Elephant experience in circuses and zoos. Not only do we learn about the realities of captive life, but also about the culture in which we live that has brought such anguish to the gentle Elephant. Billie's story compels us to reconcile how it is that our species, humans, do things to Elephants, that despite, their might and comparability in mind, they never do to us. This book represents a critical step on the path toward reconciliation with animal kin and human salvation." G.A. Bradshaw Ph.D Ph,D, Founder and Director, The Kerulos Center, and author of *Elephants on the Edge: What Animals Teach Us About Humanity*

"Heartbreaking though it is, Last Chain on Billie will lift your spirits. You can't help but root for this feisty, determined elephant who refuses to yield to her human tormentors, and ultimately discovers that people can be kind, too." Virginia Morell, author of *Animal Wise*

"Readers will want to stand up and cheer for Billie as she struggles to remain true to herself in the face of great odds, and they'll applaud the Elephant Sanctuary for offering this vulnerable but resilient elephant a chance at a new life. This ground-breaking book about the

enduring strength of one of our most majestic creatures will capture hearts everywhere.~\*~

~\*~ Elizabeth Letts, New York Times bestselling author of *The Eighty-Dollar Champion*~\*~ “After reading this heartfelt, poignant and deeply moving book, you will never look at an elephant the same way again. The narrative is at once brutal, uplifting and gripping. It is almost impossible to grasp the unspeakable cruelty these magnificent, intelligent beings have endured for so many years, all in the name of "family entertainment." But as Carol Bradley writes with exquisite detail and painstaking research, there is hope yet for these captive animals, and for the human race that has made them suffer so needlessly.~\*~ ~\*~ David Kirby, New York Times bestselling author of *Animal Factory* and *Death at SeaWorld*~\*~ “Last Chain on Billie is a fact-filled page-turning biography of a magnificent circus elephant’s long, painful, and unpredictable journey from reprehensible confinement to freedom. It is at once riveting, haunting, and inspirational. Billie’s story kept me up at night - tearful and joyful - as she entered and then wouldn’t leave my heart. I also was deeply moved by the selfless work of the wonderful people who ultimately were able to free her once and for all so she could live out her life in safety and peace and with the dignity she so deserves. This outstanding and groundbreaking book will make a difference for other circus elephants and other ‘entertainment animals’ who find themselves living horrific and hopeless lives filled with fear, stress, and uncertainty. It gave me hope.~\*~ ~\*~ Marc Bekoff, author of *Why Dogs Hump and Bees Get Depressed*, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, and *Rewilding Our Hearts*~\*~ “Today, Billie must celebrate every day, for she enjoys a more normal life, thanks to caring humans who spoke up for her and her like. Although the dream of returning to her homeland and her family can never be fulfilled, at least she has other elephant friends and caring humans who treat her kindly. Her story will go a long way towards helping others and saving them from a cruel life of bondage and servitude. Her story will educate people around the world about the nature of her iconic species, sparing many other young elephants miserable captivity.~\*~ ~\*~ Dr. Dame Daphne Sheldrick DBE, David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Nairobi, Kenya, and author of *Love, Life, and Elephants*~\*~ “...both heartrending and uplifting...a well-researched winner.~\*~ ~\*~ Booklist (starred review)~\*~ “Vivid...A moving and informative account of the plight of trained elephants in the U.S.~\*~ ~\*~ Kirkus Reviews~\*~ “Last Chain on Billie is a wonderful book. It is well-written, well-researched, and well thought out. You cannot read it without realizing how extraordinary elephants are and how extraordinarily bad humans, until only very recently, have treated them. To understand what has happened to change our attitude, I can think of no better book than this. It is a labor of love, and I know many people will respond in kind. Anyone who loves elephants will love this book.~\*~ ~\*~

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Ph.D., author of *Dogs Never Lie About Love and Beasts: What Animals Can Teach Us About the Origins of Good and Evil*

I could not put this book down. Carol did an amazing job of explaining the history of elephants in captivity and Billie's journey through it all. I heard of this book through The Elephant Sanctuary, as I love to visit their website and watch the Ele-Cams. This book made me laugh and cry and feel outrage over the injustice these beautiful creatures have to endure. I am thoroughly disgusted by the lack of punishment against Cuneo and circuses in general that abuse their elephants and cannot fathom why they are allowed to get away with such cruelty. Thank God for The Elephant Sanctuary and the amazing work that they do in providing a safe place for these elephants to spend the rest of their lives at. Highly recommend this book to any elephant lovers or those who wish to learn about the "training" practices that circuses use.

I have to confess, I'm a sucker for punishment and I read a lot of books on animal welfare and I particularly love stories about elephants. Most of my reading has been with African based tales, but I thought I would enjoy this story as well. I did enjoy it very much, it is loaded with the history of circuses, loaded with so much reference to abusive treatment that these poor magnificent creatures have had to suffer at the hands of man....it is truly heartbreaking and disgusting. I would say 60% of the book is devoted to the discussion of circus life, lawsuits, charges against offenders etc. and the remainder dedicated to those people who dared to take a stand against so many odds in order to rescue and provide a safe haven for these helpless animals. I enjoyed the book, but I must admit it was very very difficult for me personally to read. I am hyper-sensitive to animal abuse and welfare and I actually had to skip some detailed parts that described heartbreaking abuse, mistreatment, and death. All in all a very well researched, detailed and written book with about 16 photos for readers to enjoy. Kudos to the people in a position to provide the dedication, devotion, compassion and a voice for all the animals that are ripped from their natural environments, hunted, exploited, abused and forced to suffer in captivity all their remaining lives.

Earlier this year at a circus protest I was participating in, a woman who stopped for a traffic light in front of me looked out her window at my "The Circus: No Fun for Animals" poster I was holding and asked me "Why are you protesting this circus and why is it no fun for animals?". At the time, my response was pointed and specific to the plight of the circus elephant, explaining how these intelligent and sentient beings are essentially living their lives in slavery, being beaten into

submission to perform tricks and stunts that they would not normally do for any reason as an elephant in the wild. The next time I am asked that question, my response will be to simply read this book. It is factual, accurate, and completely encapsulates what these poor animals must endure throughout their lives in circuses and zoos. Billie now lives the life of relative freedom at The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee (of which I am an ongoing supporter), but she is one of the few lucky ones who escaped the disgusting and disturbing life she was forced into, even though she will forever live with the post traumatic stress disorder that permeates her existence. Carol Bradley does an excellent job of not only telling Billie's story (and the other Hawthorn elephants who suffered along with her) but she also goes into great details regarding the history of elephants in circuses and zoos in this country, how elephant trainers and groomers feel about their methods of training and their treatment of these unfortunate souls, detailed explanations of those training and dominating methods used to break the elephant's spirit, and the many historical stories about specific pachyderm encounters throughout history, many of which are truly heart wrenching to read. Going to a zoo or a circus does not give the public an accurate depiction of the life an elephant leads in captivity in the 21st century. But this book does. Buy it. Read it. And pass it on. It is that important.

After reading "Last Chain on Billie" I was saddened by the conditions the elephants endured in their lives with circuses and in zoos. Things may have improved in the past decade or so, but I never want to see another circus, zoo or petting zoo, knowing what they have done to the elephants to keep them docile and in line. It was heartbreaking to read and uplifting to know that at least a few of these magnificent and highly intelligent animals have found homes and families with whom to spend their last days.

More than an elephant 'biography' Journalist Carol Bradley has used a reporter's crisp, fact-oriented style to detail the life of one abused circus performer, an Indian elephant named Billie, captured at the age of 4. But the story is not really a tear-jerker about one case ... Bradley outlines the history of performing elephants in America, delineates the painful "training" used to subdue such powerful creatures and analyzes the failure of government (in particular) to protect these highly intelligent, social creatures. If horses were submitted to such inhumane treatment, there would be a public outcry. Because most of the treatment of circus elephants takes place out of sight, in dirty barns and back lots, it has largely escaped attention until the recent upsurge in elephant "sanctuaries" where rescued animals ... including, now, Billie ... are allowed to roam freely and heal. Bradley's

economical writing style gives the story power.

This book gives the history of how elephants first arrived in America to be used for "entertainment" purposes. These elephants were captured and shipped by boat and the writer gives a clear explanation of how this was done. Learning the history of the elephant business was disturbing, but necessary. Even though I am a vegan, I can't imagine anyone finding elephant training acceptable. This book was very informative and I highly recommend it.

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