

## CHAPTER 4

### ***Carnival or Carnage: Animals in Entertainment***

*“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be measured by the way its animals are treated.”*

—Mahatma Gandhi

In my years of animal welfare work, I’ve tried to help many a terrified and mistreated creature. For me, there is always an anger that wells up at the thought of people being cruel to innocent animals. It’s simply not something I can understand. And I find it particularly hard to grasp why some people find the mistreatment of animals amusing, funny, or diverting.

But they certainly do. In circuses, in rodeos, in bullfights. In trained animal acts everywhere. In dog racing and horse racing.

At Peace Plantation, we have had the good fortune to be able to rescue several horses from severe mistreatment. One of them, Lollipop, a beautiful chestnut mare, had been what was known as a Tennessee walking horse, trained to walk in a strange, unnatural gait that could only have been stressful and painful to the animal. Gradually, Lollipop realized that she would never have to perform this way for us, and I know she was glad. I puzzled often over this question: When the animal’s own way of moving is so beautiful, so graceful, why in the world would anybody want to pervert it in this way, to fit their own strange idea of attractiveness?

Of course, I’ve never figured out an answer to that question—or to the question of why cruelty is called entertainment in the case of a shameful spectacle known as a bullfight.

#### ***“Corrida de Toros”: Torture as National Sport***

We humans have used animals to amuse and entertain us for centuries. Most of these creatures have been unwilling participants in our games. Many have paid dearly with their lives or through extreme suffering. How did this begin? Bullfighting, circuses, rodeos, animal races, and other so-called games, many of them pitting man against animal, had their origins in early Greek, Roman, and Spanish civilizations.

Though all of these “entertainments” subject animals to unspeakable mistreatment, the bullfight, in which many other animal-based entertainments had their start, is perhaps the most chilling—simply because it has been so thoroughly glamorized, and even elevated to the status of an art form in some people’s eyes.

How did this deadly game begin? Sadly, it is an ancient tradition. “Corrida de toros,” meaning to run the bulls, has been the national sport of Spain for hundreds of years. As far back as 228 B.C., there were tales of games using bulls in the Spanish province of Andalusia, where men showed their dexterity and bravery, then dealt the blow of death to “the savage horned beast” with an ax or lance. Although many people think we have become much more civilized and enlightened during the past few centuries, the sad plight of the bull hasn’t changed.

Julius Caesar brought this new form of spectacle with bulls to Rome. Previously, Romans had used a more domesticated cattle in their entertainment. The Iberian stock was wilder, more spirited. Iberians would use skins or cloaks to avoid the bulls’ attacks, then kill them. The first Roman amphitheater, “Statilus Taurus,” was built for the Roman nobles and other Roman citizens to enjoy this “heroic” display of man and beast. Spectators watching this

“entertainment” could be sure of a kill—of either the bull or the man sentenced to meet the bull, usually criminals or those who didn’t profess the religion of the state.

Bullfighting evolved through the years. In Spain, bull-lancing tournaments were the favorite sport of aristocracy. Picadors, peons on horseback, were used. Bull breeding became financially profitable by the 1700s. The royal houses in Spain, France, Portugal, and Italy and even the Catholic Church in Spain had representatives coming in the ring. Short barbed darts and dogs of prey were used to worry the bull and make him more spirited. The dogs were specially bred so that their nostrils and protruding underjaw permitted them to breathe while hanging on to the bull.

Papal threats of excommunication brought a radical change to the “bull joust.” The nobles were forced to give up their roles in the ring to professional subordinates of a lower social class. These replacements traded the lance for the sword which is still used to kill the bull in bullfights today.

Bullfighting became a very popular “sport.” Today, Spain has over 250 “plazas de toros” (bull rings) of all sizes, accommodating crowds from one thousand to many thousands. Mexico City has a huge “plaza de toros” and there are numbers of them throughout Latin America.

Six bulls are usually killed during one bullfight. Just imagine six times 250. That would be at least 1,500 bulls killed if each bull ring in Spain held just one bullfight. Think of the magnitude of the slaughter worldwide and over a period of time. And think, too, of the unnecessary suffering and torment the bulls are subjected to, all in the name of entertainment.

The bulls used for bullfighting are of a pedigreed lineage bred on special ranches. Soon after the yearling males are weaned, vaccinated, and branded, they are tested in the open field to see if they are spirited enough to fight. Those of outstanding pedigree, true coloration, and very fine physical build are separated from the others. At three years of age, these chosen animals are put through stud tests to prove they have the proper spirit. If they pass these tests, they are kept to be used exclusively at stud for about 15 years. If they fail, they are sent to the slaughterhouse.

Heifers are tested at two to three years of age in a small ring on the ranch through all phases of the “corrida.” Those who pass will be used for breeding. Those who don’t are slaughtered.

Bulls are never used the second time in a bullfight. Their memories are quite good. They must be totally innocent of the bull ring in order to be appropriate opponents—or victims—for the matador.

The color red was chosen for the work cape used by the matador and his assistants to minimize the sight of blood and other stains. Also, the red cap helps stage a more colorful production. The red cape means nothing to the bull: Bulls are color blind, as are all cattle.

The professional bull fighters are: the matadors, the main performers; their assistants, the banderillos, who also work on foot, use a cape and pierce the bull with short, barbed darts called banderillas; and the picadors, who ride on horses using pike-poles.

Each bullfight begins with a grand procession into the ring of the matadors’ troupes with the mule teams, used to drag out the carcasses of the bulls, bringing up the rear. Typically, after the procession, the town’s mayor throws down the key to the bull pens. The door is opened. As the bull passes through, an attendant situated above attaches a silken rosette of the bull’s ranch’s colors into the shoulder muscles of the bull.

The banderillos attract the bull’s attention and draw his attack with the cape to allow the matador time to judge whether the bull shows a preference of charging with one horn or both. A bugle call is sounded within ten seconds and the matador begins his performance with the silken

work cape. The picadors enter at a second bugle call. When the bull sees the horses, he charges them and the picadors must fend off the bull's attack with their pike-poles, planting the point right between the neck and shoulder blades.

The horses, too, are victims in the bullfight, vulnerable to horrible disembowelment by the charging bull. A protective armor of compressed cotton encased in leather and canvas is now used to shield the horse's belly. This has helped to alleviate much of the harm to the horses, but the armor is not impenetrable. The matadors then perform. Another bugle call is sounded as the banderillos precisely plant two to four pairs of the short barbed darts; these make the bull lose preference for attack with either horn so he may attack equally, making it a well-rounded performance.

Now the "Hour of Truth" dawns. The matador is alone. His assistants are present only in an emergency or when requested.

The matador takes his place below the mayor's box and asks permission to dedicate the bull to someone to whom he tosses his hat. He gracefully performs and proves his mastery over the bull. At no time is the matador allowed to touch the bull except for the kill.

When that dreadful time comes, the matador thrusts his cape forward with one hand, causing the bull to lower his head for attack. With the other hand, the matador sinks the sword into the bull's shoulder blades at the junction of the neck. The blade of the sword should cut through diagonally, severing the aorta and causing almost instant death. If done well, there should be no blood. If blood appears, it is usually because the lungs were pierced, which is not considered good form. More than one thrust of the sword is allowed if the proper procedures are followed.

After the kill, the matador and his assistants circle the arena in victory. The matador returns for his hat which is usually returned to him with money or gifts.

If the performance has been excellent, the matador receives one ear of the bull. If it has been exceptional, he receives two ears. If it has been highly superior, he receives both ears and the tail.

What sickening trophies. I wonder what kind of person could possibly want these sad reminders of a once-majestic animal, bullied, tortured, and trapped, then brutally killed? For such an act of ignominy, severed body parts are too good a reward.

While the matador is receiving acclaim, an attendant with a short blade severs the bull's spinal cord at the base of his skull and the bull's carcass, quartered and dressed, is dragged from the arena.

Thus concludes the so-called pageantry of the bullfight, a travesty created not of art or skill but of cruelty and violence.

On an encouraging note, attendance at bullfights has been declining since 1987. Recent Spanish newspaper polls show that 50 percent of citizens polled no longer have an interest in bullfighting. [As of 2007, that figure has risen to 72 percent and only 7 to 8 percent of Spaniards consider themselves bullfighting fans.] Members of the British and West German Parliaments have put forward a proposal to ban bullfighting in the European community. The proposal would also ban other events involving animals, such as dog- and cock-fighting and fox-hunting. Spanish animal rights groups are supporting this proposal. [As of 2007, a few Spanish cities have banned bullfighting, including Barcelona. A ban on bullfighting was introduced to the European Union; it failed to pass. Portugal, France, and Spain continue to hold bullfights along with several countries in Latin America.] Traditions die slowly, but perhaps this is the beginning

of the end of the cruel “sport” of bullfighting. Maybe one day, horses and bulls will no longer have to be the unwilling victims in bullfights—one of man’s most vicious entertainments.

And perhaps in America we’ll ban our own cruel games, like the rodeo, our very own, home-grown form of the bullfight.

### ***Rodeos, Circuses, and Races: They’re not Fun for the Animals!***

Rodeos are a series of cowboy contests. Usually, they consist of events such as saddle bronco riding, bareback riding, calf roping, bull riding, steer wrestling, and team roping.

These events grew out of contests between men working in the early cattle industry. Often, these men would be forced to spend months, and even years, on the range in the southwestern part of the United States. These contests were a way to entertain themselves. Today, the rodeo has grown into big-business entertainment around the world.

Rodeo animals are quite valuable. The horses and steers are good, strong stock. Good bucking horses are not from wild herds but are usually gentle until mounted and halter-broken. These horses are encouraged to dislike being mounted. A flank strap placed around the hindquarters makes them have a tendency to buck, as any foreign object on the rear of a horse will do.

For the most part, the animals are well cared for to ensure the best performance and competition in the arena. However, as amateur and professional rodeos proliferate around the world, animal care standards are deteriorating. Equipment is placed on the horses and they are goaded to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily do unless aggravated. Poorly trained performers and caretakers can accidentally injure the animals as well as themselves.

And once again, animals are the unwilling participants, forced to go against their own instincts to give us something we call entertainment.

In circuses, too, animals have suffered and still do today. Wild animal acts have always been popular. People thrill at watching exotic jungle beasts jump through hoops or rings of fire at the crack of a whip. Spectators are in awe at the demonstrated power of man over beast. But the spirit of these magnificent animals has been broken forever. And often the care and treatment of the animals is far from humane. Are they treated well in training? What kind of everyday care do they receive? Dogs, horses, elephants, lions, tigers, and others are all on the move constantly in small, makeshift quarters. How are they cared for during transportation from place to place?

Dog racing is another big animal entertainment business. The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported in its magazine, *Animals*, that “Massachusetts dog tracks held 10,596 dog races with 2,630,092 people attending” in 1986. The state collected a whopping \$29,315,298 in total revenue—big business indeed. The greyhound is the sleek racing machine that provides entertainment on the dog tracks. Known for their lithe shape, graceful stride, and fine performance, greyhounds are carefully screened before they have a chance to show their speed and grace on the tracks. Each greyhound is put through training and a series of qualifying races. At any stage in these tryouts, if the dog fails to do well, he or she is killed, sold, turned over to be used in biomedical research, or, occasionally, adopted as a pet.

The greyhound that makes it through the qualifying races and has a full career on the race track usually can count on a life span of about three-and-a-half years. Then the dog’s racing days are considered over and the owners dispose of the animal.

Estimates place the number of greyhounds killed each year at up to 50,000. What a tragic waste of life.

[On a positive note, greyhound racing is on the decline. In Massachusetts, there has been a 64 percent drop in revenues since the industry's peak in the 1980s. Massachusetts residents will get to vote whether to entirely ban greyhound racing in a November 2008 ballot initiative.]

Sadly, again we see people using animals for their own pleasure at a very high cost to animal life. When will human beings stop to remember that animals are God's creatures too—not just disposable byproducts to be used at man's will?

I thought I had heard just about everything there was to hear about animal abuse in entertainment. But recently I learned of another bizarre and terrible amusement. A new type of rodeo has caught on in the quiet waters of the Gulf of Mexico. It's called the "Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo." After hearing the details about this, I think you might question along with me whether it might be more accurately referred to as a "kill tournament," deep-sea fishing taken to an unimaginable new low.

At one three-day tournament, around 2,400 sport fishermen caught 100,000 fish. Of these, most are dead when they reach the shore and the spectators don't see the fight for life that is waged or realize that fish, too, feel pain when bladders rupture and hooks pierce them.

The fishing boat came in with a prize—not one shark but three sharks—on board. Nothing brings as much excitement to a deep sea fishing rodeo or tournament as a shark hanging. The jubilant crew forces the hook of a giant crane into the lifeless shark's jaws. It is raised from the deck and suspended hanging in the air for ten minutes or more to the delight of the cheering crowd.

This scene is repeated twice. The shark corpses are left to hang and be admired by the crowd. As night settles in and the people begin to leave for home, the sharks are cut down, taken back to sea, and dumped—of no more use to man.

I'm relieved to tell you that at last some progress is being made in one area of the animal entertainment business, television and motion pictures. Yes, even though I'm sure most of us have enjoyed watching tales of the Old West with beautiful horses riding by carrying the hero, or Flipper, the lovable dolphin, or many other animal-related comedies or dramas, there is a darker side to what we see on the screen. Did you ever wonder how those animals were treated during the filming of the movie?

Sadly, severe mistreatment of animals has occurred on film locations. For example, in a dramatic escape scene calling for a stunt man to ride his horse off a cliff, the rider survived, but the horse fell 70 feet onto rapids below and broke his back. Many other incidences of cruel treatment have been reported, involving all kinds of animals.

Rallied by these tragedies, members of the entertainment community are calling for strict reforms. The American Humane Association also tries to monitor the use of animals in film production. A 24-hour-a-day hotline allows anyone who sees mistreatment of an animal on a movie set to call confidentially and report the abuse.

But these animals, as well as all animals involved in any form of so-called entertainment, will be safe only when market forces protect them—that is, when people no longer rush to pay to see degrading, dangerous animal acts, to participate in such horrors as the Deep Sea Rodeo, and to cheer on the bloodthirsty matador. We must abstain from these deadly pastimes, and we must sustain a public outcry against all such abuses.

At The National Humane Education Society, we need your help to educate and encourage people to open their eyes and see these activities for what they really are.

Legislation must be passed to protect these animals from slaughter, from injury, and pain. If God has entrusted to us the care of His creatures, we must exercise our duties with love and

kindness. Let us be entertained by the carnival of nature in its natural state, not by the unnatural carnage of animals sacrificed for the momentary pleasure of man.