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Obituary

Elephant Editors

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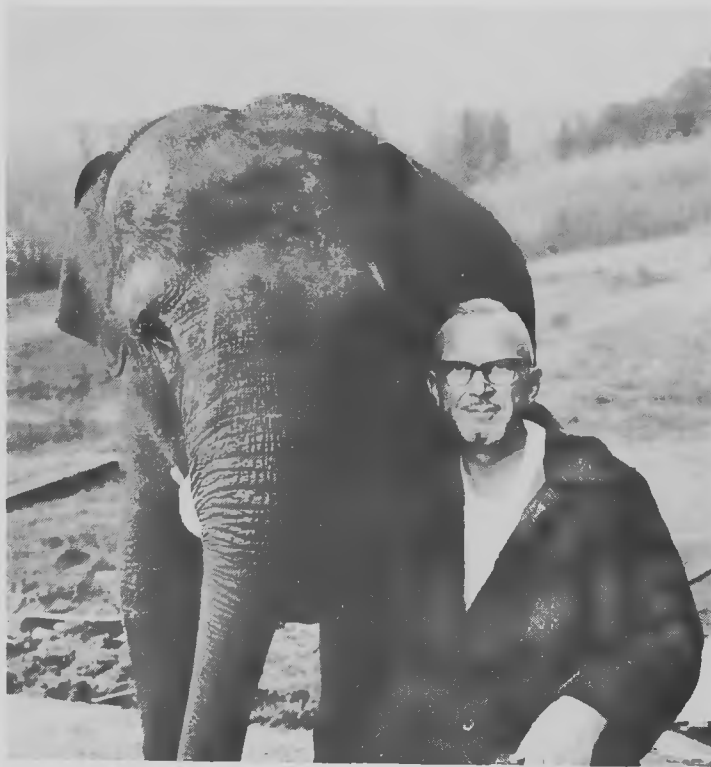
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OBITUARY

H. MORGAN BERRY (July 30, 1911 - June 26, 1979)

On June 26, 1979, H. Morgan Berry died on his farm at Woodland, Washington. The circumstances of his death are not clearly known. Berry had been a Seattle zookeeper and an importer of wild animals. Recently he acted as consultant to the Washington Park Zoo, Portland, Oregon, and to Woodland Park Zoological Gardens, Seattle, Washington. He lived alone on an 80-acre mountaintop farm called Elephant Mountain, between Seattle and Portland, and in the last year he cared for nine elephants and other animals by himself. (See Table at the end of this obituary for the whereabouts of these elephants.)

Many newspapers and magazines throughout North America carried articles on Berry's death as well as obituaries. In March 1980, Life Magazine published an introspective account written by his friend Shana Alexander (see Reference No. 1268). Warren J. Iliff, Director of the Washington Park Zoo, wrote and sent us the following brief commentary as an obituary for Morgan Berry.



H. Morgan Berry - 1911-1979
H. Morgan Berry with "Mei-Tai", an Asian female at Woodland, Washington, 1978 or early 1979.

THE GURU OF THE ELEPHANTSby **Warren J. Iliff**

Like many admirers of the species, I made trips to visit the guru of elephants; to sit by his side, so to speak, and ask him questions about them and listen to him tell his 50 years of stories.

And like a guru, he lived on a mountaintop, alone, save his nine elephants, which were his reason for living, and ironically, in the end, his reason for dying. He spent most of his life with elephants and in his later years, with funds running out, he alone would tend to his animals' every need. Rising before dawn and working to well past dusk, he would feed, water, clean, train, exercise, and just be around them. He wouldn't even leave the farm to go shopping downtown or visit the zoo for fear he would not be on hand when the elephants needed him.

As one would, in the company of a guru, I asked him that eternal question about "musth."

"In the Orient, musth is something that usually comes in work elephants during what they call the 'rest period,' when they are not worked as hard. In most work camps this was in January or February. In Burma, they would even try to induce musth since they believed it was for the health of the animal and should occur at least once a year."

"Why do you think these particular animals have such a process? Why is it necessary or what purpose does it serve?"

He answered quickly, "I can best explain it by telling you how it was between me and Thonglaw when he was in musth. I call it their 'fight' and I had to break his. I was the herd boss because I controlled the females. They worked for me and responded to my commands. So what he had to do was overcome me to become the herd boss. In the wild, the young males, as they grow closer to maturity and come into musth, have the courage to fight the top man. One day he'll win and the older male, whose musth has become less strong and shorter-lived, will wander off alone for the rest of his life. To me, musth has nothing to do with sex but does have something to do with becoming mature in the herd."

"Did you ever come close to the wrong end of an elephant in musth?"

"Oh, I suppose I did, but nothing serious. Nothing like the time that my son Kenny almost got it from Thonglaw. I was in the hospital at the time and his older brother was taking care of the elephants, which were being housed in the bear grottos at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle."

"Kenny was about 10, maybe 12, and realized that his brother wasn't going to get home from fishing in time to care for the animals. He decided to do it on his own and after arriving, started cleaning. The two males and the two females were tied in a row. The floor was wet and all of a sudden, he slipped and the pitchfork slid across the floor. He was lying on his back and Thonglaw

came down over him, tusks on each side. He grabbed the tusks and was hanging on as the elephant rose and tried to get Kenny into a corner. Kenny then reached up and stuck his thumb into Thonglaw's eye and hung on for dear life. This is his story. I didn't see it."

"Then all of the elephants started howling at once. You know how much noise an elephant can make and there were four of them! As it happened, the zoo foreman heard all this noise and decided to check it out. He opened the door. All of the elephants turned immediately to face the door. As Thonglaw swung around, Kenny was thrown across the floor."

"He ended up in the hospital, in the bed next to me, with a broken arm."

"You don't mess with a male elephant because when he wants to kill, he can do it so easy. You just got to think faster and move faster, and as I get older my mind is slowing down; my body is slowing down and I can't keep up with them. As long as Kenny's mind is fast and he is there I will take the chance, but I could never do it alone."

On June 26, 1979, Morgan Berry was alone at his farm in Woodland, Washington. After a long day of caring for his animals, he was chaining two of them to trees in a pasture so they could spend the summer night there. Buddha was in musth. The next morning his body was found beneath the big male elephant. One paper said that the cause of death was possibly a heart attack. Another spoke of Buddha being in an "agitated condition" while yet another stated that it was maybe a case of a "sex-starved animal in the mating season."

Morgan Berry was dead at the age of 68. A chapter in the history of elephants had closed. The "guru" was no longer in his place among his elephants at the top of the hill.

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The whereabouts of Morgan Berry's elephants as
provided to us by Louise C. Berry as of June 8, 1980

Animal	Transaction	Location
<u>Elephas maximus</u>		
"Raunchi" or "Raunchy"	loan	Manizales, Colombia (private zoo), South America
"Tai"	sold	Houston Zoo, Houston, Texas, U.S.A.
"Mei-Tai" or "Me-Thai"	loan	Manizales, Colombia (private zoo), South America
"Tunga"	sold	Washington Park Zoo, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.
"Sahib"	sold	Clarke ("Bones") Craig
<u>Loxodonta africana</u>		
"Tschombai"	sold	ABC Corporation, cared for by Randy Moore and crew*
"Durga"	sold	ABC Corporation, cared for by Randy Moore and crew*
"Owalla"	sold	ABC Corporation, cared for by Randy Moore and crew*
"Buddha"		

*See item entitled "Durga, Owalla and Tschombai returned to East Africa.", in
ELEPHANT NEWS AND INFORMATION.

The editor wishes to thank Louise C. Berry for sending the photograph and the
above information.