

30 May 1997

RHINOS DON'T LOAD EASILY!

By Frank Thompson

Ford Bros. Circus had the itch for a White Rhino baby to be trained by their then employee, Mike Cecere, a few years ago. Since I was at that time in the business of supplying wild animals, I just happened to know of one which might fill the bill. I hadn't seen the animal, but it was offered by a man whom I respected and I quoted a price to the show for a baby White Rhino which was, as reported to me, "tame and will eat out of your hand".

Ford Bros. was difficult to reach by telephone and it was perhaps a week or two before I got an answer. They wanted the Rhino and Mike Cecere would come to Florida personally and pick it up. I arranged for a crate which would fit the animal and waited. Mike showed up, driving a nice pickup and we arranged to meet at the place offering the Rhino, which was in Florida.

When we got there, The baby had been separated from its mother already and it was in a round stone building maybe 50 ft. in diameter. A loading chute was attached to the building and on the opposite side there was a doorway. Our crate didn't quite fill the loading chute and there was a space of about 2 feet between the crate and the side of the chute. This didn't seem to be a problem however, as the people there said they would rope him both around the neck and around one hind leg so that the rope on

the back leg could be slowly released by two men on the opposite side of the building as we slowly guided him into the crate.

We started and I took my position on top of the crate, to work the sliding door. (At this point, honesty forces me to admit that I have always found the top of a crate to be one of the safest places to stand during such operations I've been in this business a long, long time!) Mike and several other men were in the chute itself behind the crate, pulling on the rope around the young Rhino's neck.

Unfortunately, we hadn't checked on the intelligence of the two men slowly releasing the rope on the back leg. They released it slowly OK, but when it proved too short they never told us at the other side of the building; they simply let go.

Things happened rather swiftly after that. The Rhino, which wasn't quite as small as we had been told, charged forward. Unfortunately he missed the open door of the crate and suddenly was inside the chute rapidly moving alongside the crate in the narrow space which led to the back side of the crate where the men were pulling on the now useless rope. The boss of the park's crew made a jump for the side of the chute as the Rhino passed underneath his legs. The man helping Mike with the rope was suddenly down with the Rhino trying to ram his horn into the man's belly. He was saved by his (Continued on page 9)

(Continued from previous page)

BACK YARD GOSSIP ...

Frank Murray is reported to be booked at the **Catskill Game Farm** in Catskill NY for the summer months with his elephant act. He'll be joining the bear act of **Johnny & Monica Welde**, who have been booked there every summer for umpteen years.

Jelly Bean, the clown, who started the season with **Robert Bros. Circus** has been forced to take a layoff at home. His wife has back problems, it is reported, and the Dr. suggested that they spend some time at home where she can rest properly. After some 50 years in the business this comes as a blow to **Jelly Bean**, we're sure.

A very nice TV story about the **Ringling Show** this past week. **Tim Holst** came in for some nice PR, together with the show's **Skating act**, their **Hippo**, and a sympathetic story about **Walfer Guerrero**, the high wire performer who fell earlier this year. **Guerrero** came across as a very dedicated young man.

OLD SHOWMAN'S TALES

Save a child from the possibility of making mistakes and you save him from the possibility of being right.

(Continued from page 7)

RHINOS DON'T LOAD ...

boss who now dropped onto the Rhinos back and bulldogged his head up away from the man's stomach long enough so that the man could get up and climb the fence. The boss then again climbed the fence, getting away from the Rhino which had suddenly appeared around the back of the crate to cause all of this.

Where was Mike? Well, as I said, I had wisely offered to work the drop door from the top of the crate. I found that I was suddenly being crowded on top of that crate by none other than Mike, who had obviously set some sort of record for the standing high jump! Like Superman, Mike had, in a single bound, jumped from the ground to the top of the crate which was, I would estimate, at least four and a half feet tall!

(For those readers who don't know Mike, let me suggest that he is a well-fed person.)

The Rhino was still in the building, so we all took a few minutes to regroup. During this time I got Mike to one side and told him that if he wanted to change his mind about training this Rhino, now was the time to do so. Mike didn't hesitate, even for a moment. He decided instantly that he had no desire to train that Rhino and we agreed that it would not only "eat from your hand", It would eat all your hand and the arm attached to it! **Ford Bros.** didn't get their trained Rhino.

BY