

# The Spirit of the Elephant

By Miriam Seiden

It is not so easy for me to explain my affinity for elephants and what has driven me to spend time with them, photograph them, write about them, talk about them and advocate for them. While their bodies may be so very different from our human forms, we share some emotions, behaviors, personality traits and quirks and intelligence.

There is so much about these amazing creatures that we don't understand.

Here are a few things I've learned:

Elephants are affectionate, emotional, loyal and caring. They wrap their trunks around one another and comfort each other when sad or happy. They communicate with one another over long distances using infrasound and a broad vocabulary, often sending warnings of impending danger. If a baby elephant becomes stuck in mud, the entire group will rally together to rescue him. They play readily, splashing and enjoying the water. Mothers keep watchful eyes on the children as they wallow in mud. Elephants shed tears. They live in family structures and help each other. They experience moods, grief, agitation, frustration, anger, love and joy.

Elephants are meant to travel great distances daily and yet we keep these family oriented creatures chained up in circuses standing on concrete for days with no contact with other elephants. We keep them in small spaces in zoos with no elephant companionship. We humans beat them cruelly into submission in order to train them to perform for us. The scale of our abuse is enormous and unwarranted. The poaching for ivory and the culling continue, creating orphaned babies who grow up with severe emotional problems because they are left to fend for themselves and deal with the trauma of loss. And how dare we take fully -grown mature elephants out of their natural habitat, transport them out of their familiar settings and expect them to adapt and thrive?

Elephants all over the world today need our voices, our monetary support and our efforts to save them from cruelty and extinction. My visit to the Elephant Nature Park in Thailand taught and convinced me that I cannot keep silent. Please raise your voices with me, reach into your pockets and join the effort to keep these noble, magnificent beings alive for their sake and for ours. This is our responsibility.