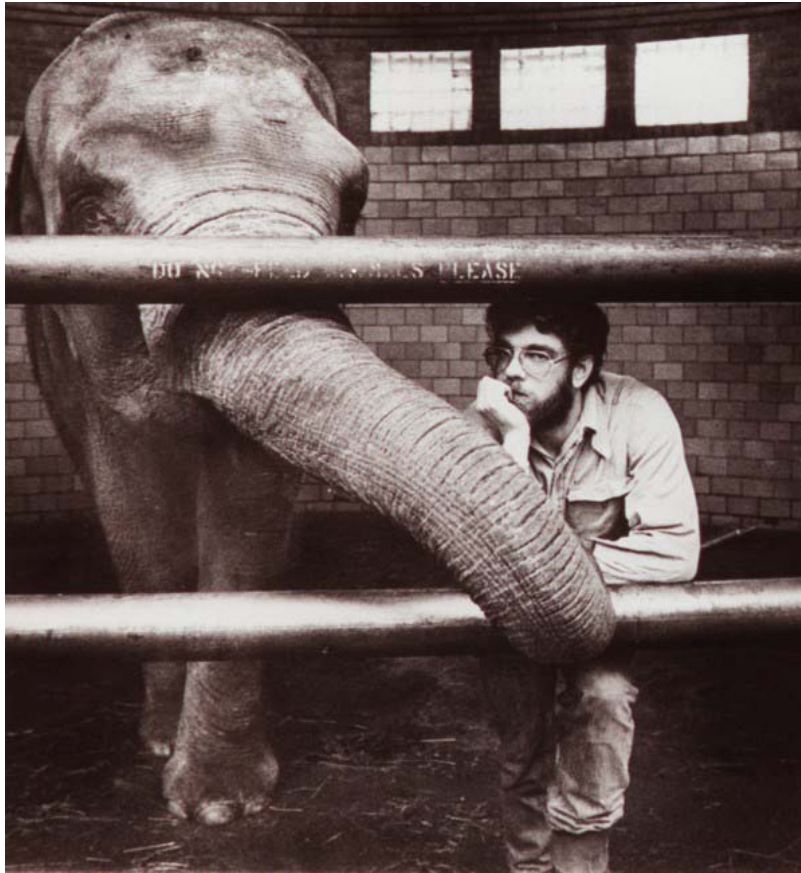


Throwback Thursday: Syracuse zoo's elephant moved to Buffalo, joined by her handler

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Siri and Chuck Doyle at the Burnet Park Zoo in 1980. *(Photo courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association)*

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In Sept. 1982, when asked to describe the relationship between an elephant and an elephant handler, [Burnet Park Zoo](#) Director Dave Raboy put it this way:

"It is almost like the love between a man and woman. There has to be an almost magnetic attraction between them."

The relationship between the Syracuse zoo's most famous resident, [Siri](#), the fourteen-year-old Asian elephant, and her handler, Chuck Doyle, 32, was threatened in 1982 when it was decided that Siri would spend a couple of years in Buffalo while the zoo was being modernized.

[Syracuse's beloved Asian elephant Siri turns 50, enjoys yoga, painting](#)

Doyle was given the choice: remain in Syracuse or join Siri in Buffalo.

"Let me put it like this," Doyle told the Post-Standard. "Siri's going to Buffalo. My wife is staying in Syracuse. I had my choice. I'm going to Buffalo."

Reporter James Ehmann described the affection between Siri and her handler:

"When he toots at her, she toots at him. She returns his purrs. When he scratches behind her ear, she hugs with her trunk."

And she listened to him, responding to over 30 direct commands.

Director Raboy said Siri obeyed Doyle because she wanted to, which is important, because "you can't manhandle an elephant."

The relationship is so important that there was really no choice in the matter in whether Doyle would join Siri in Buffalo.

"If we remove Doyle from the relationship, the effect on Siri would be like the effect on a person who wakes up and finds their spouse is gone," said Raboy

The elephant's "emotional stability" might be destroyed to the point where the zoo would not want her back. (She was so gentle that she gave between 8,000 to 9,000 rides a year to children.)

"When I'm with her, as far as Siri's concerned, I'm another elephant," Doyle said.

It was a win-win situation.

Doyle got to remain with Siri, and the Buffalo Zoo would gain his knowledge for their own elephant, Lulu.

Siri and Chuck Doyle, who had been named director of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo, in 2006. Buffalo's elephant had a keeper but no handler and nothing like the training Siri had.

Buffalo Zoo Director Minot Ortolani said, "We feel that with a handler here, our elephant will learn a lot."

Ortolani and others were so pleased with Doyle's arrival they decided to subsidize his stay, with Erie County paying 75 percent of the rent on his apartment there.

The move did have one opponent. Onondaga County Legislator James Tormey complained loudly that the county planned to pay Doyle to "baby-sit" for up to two years while Burnet was being modernized.

"We're talking about terminating 100, 200 positions in Onondaga County. Yet you guys don't mind paying someone to baby-sit an elephant in Erie County for a few years. Nuts!" he said.

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Tormey would later say no one from the Parks and Recreation Department was on hand to explain the "dollars and cents of the Siri/Doyle arrangement with the Buffalo Zoo."

He said keeping Doyle on the county payroll isn't nearly as difficult to swallow" considering that Buffalo planned to charge nothing for Siri's stay, about \$21,000 a year.

Doyle and Siri arrived in Buffalo on Sept. 29, 1982 and she was the center of attention at a press conference announcing her arrival.

She performed tricks for the television cameras and after a slow start got along with her new roommate, Lulu. (Lulu was said to be a bit jealous of the attention Siri was getting.)

Crowds of people came out to see her the first weekend.

"There were just reams of people going into the zoo today. I'm sure that half of them were there to see that elephant," said Sandy Berg, president of the Buffalo Zoological Society.

The couple returned to Syracuse on May 31, 1985, and a few months later moved into the zoo's new "state of the art elephant management" facility.

She was joined by three other elephants, Romani, Indy and Babe.

Siri turned 50 years old this past summer and is a published artist, while Doyle retired as the Rosamond Gifford Zoo's Director in 2011.